

What's So Great About Ushas?

The Urth list — 321 messages, 35 voices, 05 Jun 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5044>

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b sharp — 05 Jun 2008, 16:41

In the "Sev the Murderer" thread Dave Tallman notes that Severian is a flawed hero, not a villain as almost everyone would agree. As Thalassocrat points out, almost all humans would have been evacuated if Urth went to Ragnarok. Far more people were killed in the creation of Ushas. True genocide. So why is Severian a hero and what is so great about Ushas? I think the answer is the disguised subtext of the series.

For me, it is clear that Wolfe means to depict Urth as populated by a flawed race of people. For the universes to have a better future, this flawed race needs to be wiped out, starting over from scratch. I interpret that these flaws were based on human issues that were troubling Wolfe at the time of writing this series. Stuff like a propensity for empire building, toleration of torture, the potential abuse of genetic engineering and the potential for loss of personal identity associated with communism, cloning and artificial intelligence. Human carnivory also seems to bother Wolfe.

But why does Wolfe find genocide necessary to cure these ills? The sailors from the ship were used to re-populate Ushas, I think.. They seem like pretty normal people with human faults. And there are lots of pretty good people on Urth. Why were the sailors considered so superior to the human beings on Urth? I think the answer lies in quirks of Wolfe's religious philosophy.

The pre-Christian religious competitors to Judaism were populated with some pretty unpleasant characters: gods and monsters with superhuman powers but usually governed by the worst of human character flaws: domination, pride, anger, jealousy and lust. These gods often appeared as a family pantheon, mating incestuously with each other. Commonly they were shape shifters and some used this ability to take human form, mating and reproducing with humans beings creating lesser-powered demi-gods and monsters.

The Judeo-Christian God is certainly superior, by our standards. He had some early anger and jealousy issues but He seemed to evolve past that. Being monotheistic he didn't have the incest problem and His only human reproductive interaction was for the purpose of human salvation not personal lust. But in the Judaic tradition, some of God's angels fell and became demons and reproduced with humans creating the Nephilim giants. Also, Lilith was said to mate with Adam, spawning various demons, lamia, vampires, etc. The Biblical Flood might have served the purpose of eliminating the nephilim, at the least.

I see the genetic corruption of the human race on Urth by shape-shifting aliens as one of the deepest underlying currents of BOTNS, the evidence mostly to be found in the dreams, stories and myths of the narrative. Eschatology and Genesis, with Nod and Jahi and demons are the most explicit reference. Severian/Thecla's post-battle vision of a bull father and being born under the swan seem direct Zeus-human mating references. Melito's and Foila's stories, Dorcas' veiled memories and many other story elements add contributing evidence.

"Father" Inire, a bent, highly creative, Hephaestus-like personage, takes many forms (I think)

and has a suspicious interest in young girls. The Cumaeen also takes numerous forms, like Lilith and Hecate is associated with snakes and witchcraft, and wants to usurp the Increateic power of resurrection from death. I think Wolfe sees these two characters as part of the problem on Urth, thus they are swept away from Ushas as are the other cacogens, megatherians, etc. (Why Juturna remains is an interesting question).

I think Severian's incest problem goes significantly further than just with Dorcas. As in certain ancient Greek legends, including Oedipus, he belongs to a cursed family and is a reflection of how the alien (pre-Christian gods) influence on humanity has irreversibly corrupted even the best of humanity which remains on Urth. Like 5HOC, the central mystery here is one of origin/identity. And the answer, for Severian, is a bit different but as spooky as for Number 5 and VRT.

The sailors from the ship apparently left earth before these corrupting influences invaded Urth and that is what makes them good breeding stock for the new world. I think Severian, Thais, Odilo and Pega are meant to represent the only corrupted, Urthian humans to survive the flood. I think it is safe to assume these four did not produce children and the new, pure humanity of Ushas was able to evolve into green people and beyond.

[I had always been mystified by the elusive sub-text of BOTNS. A couple years ago I immersed myself in this list and other resources to come to these conclusions. Thanks to those patient souls here who indulged me with incisive feedback on ideas.]

-bsharp

John Smith — 05 Jun 2008, 17:22 · in reply to b sharp

This post has a lot of interesting ideas about pre-Christian influences on BOTNS.

However, I have to disagree with this statement:

"For me, it is clear that Wolfe means to depict Urth

as populated by a flawed
race of people. For the universes to have a better
future, this flawed race needs
to be wiped out, starting over from scratch. "

Wiping out races is the final solution of the Nazis and the solution (at times) of the Old Testament God. The Christian solution is mercy and redemption. The fact that people are flawed is the reason mercy is needed. I think (and hope) that this is Wolfe's view.

--- b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Dave Tallman — 05 Jun 2008, 19:03 · follows John Smith

*

*thalassocrat wrote:

I've argued at length previously for just that inversion. Was it worth killing almost everybody on Urth to restore the Sun, just one star among many with human-populated worlds?

b sharp wrote:

For me, it is clear that Wolfe means to depict Urth as populated by a flawed race of people. For the universes to have a better future, this flawed race needs to be wiped out, starting over from scratch.

Both of these moral arguments are missing something, in my view. They are only concerned with what happens to the human race. Environmentalists call this anthropocentrism, and they consider it a serious moral flaw. The whole Urth and its ecosystem was at stake, not just humanity. Typhon's empire started an interstellar war, and as a side effect the Sun was damaged. The whole Urth would lose millions of years of life, for countless species and new ones yet to evolve. Is it a good and just solution for the human race to jet off into space and leave Urth to freeze? I don't think Wolfe would agree, based on his short stories like "Beautyland." Shouldn't humanity pay some price to put things right? (That's an argument that has some application today, too).

What's so great about Ushas? It might be awesome in the long run. When Sev asked to find the garden, the Autarch opened a way to the Garden (though he thought Sev wouldn't be permitted to enter, and he was right). It might be the Edenic future of humanity in harmony with nature (as the Green Man also indicated).

Eric Ortlund — 05 Jun 2008, 21:31 · in reply to Dave Tallman

From: urth-bounces at lists.urth.net [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net] On Behalf Of Dave Tallman
Sent: Thursday, June 05, 2008 1:03 PM
To: urth at urth.net
Subject: Re: (urth) What's So Great About Ushas? [mx][spf]

thalassocrat wrote:

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I agree with what's said above here. I find the "moral inversion" argument unconvincing for two reasons. First, Urth of the New Sun has several characters say that the trial isn't fair and that what happens isn't strictly fair, and that there's no way it could be - it is a matter of making is as close to fair as possible, with everyone realizing that the coming of the New Sun won't be just. Even Severian seems to recognize this; he plays on his own identity as a torturer in the fifth book several times. Second, I can't help but suspect that if the plot of the books unfolded in such a way that Severian refused to bring the new sun, because it would involve wiping out so many people, with the result that the sun died out, another sort of "moral inversion" argument would be made that Severian was being unjust to the people who would die as a result of that; I can't help but wonder if complaints would be registered regardless of what Severian did.

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David Duffy — 05 Jun 2008, 23:21 · in reply to Eric Ortlund

On Thu, 5 Jun 2008, Eric Ortlund wrote:
From: urth-bounces at lists.urth.net [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net]
On Behalf Of Dave Tallman
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These arguments all sound similar to traditional theological attacks which give us theodicy ie how can a good God send a flood to drown everyone, earthquake to China etc; therefore the agent of these things is evil.

So, pestilences and disasters (as opposed to war) ultimately come from God in this best of all possible worlds, therefore the suffering they engender is not evil per se. [As a strong atheist, I don't necessarily agree with these statements, you understand, but I suspect Wolfe does in some way].

Cheers, David.

Adam Thornton — 05 Jun 2008, 23:53 · in reply to David Duffy

On Jun 5, 2008, at 6:21 PM, David Duffy wrote:

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From what I can tell of Wolfe from his writings and interviews, he doesn't think very highly of pacifism, and I suspect his God favors justice over mercy. His Redeemer may not. I think Wolfe may believe that a good Flood to drown the unrighteous every so often isn't a bad idea.

Adam

b sharp — 06 Jun 2008, 04:11 · follows Adam Thornton

In my post I discuss something of an ethical stance which seems to be presented in a book by Gene Wolfe. I certainly didn't mean to presume to say this reflects Gene Wolfe's personal philosophy. It might, I suppose, but I consider that irrelevant. He is an author and we are readers and my interpretations are meant to be literary not personal (for him or me).

I'd like to consider a certain passage from *Sword of the Lictor*. While wandering in the mountains, Severian seems to be pondering what a human utopian planet would be like and considers a place:

"in which all the people, knowing themselves descended from a single pair of colonists, treated one another as brothers and sisters"

At first blush this statement seems to me to reek of potential racism. But perhaps it could be seen as a call to embrace the Adam and Eve story as a basis for human respect and caring. It certainly foreshadows Ushas.

"worlds where there was no currency but honor, so that everyone worked in order that he might be entitled to associate himself with some man or woman who had saved the community"

I dunno, sounds a bit like a "Vote For John McCain!" slogan. And might support the political/social philosophy that a vote for a war hero like McCain might entail.

"worlds in which the long war between mankind and the beasts was pursued no more" with a solution for the problem of how, "people who would kill no sentient animal might be shod and fed".

This seems to tie into the Green Man and supports Dave Tallman's idea that Ushas is a place of peace and justice for the entire ecosystem, not just humanity.

Interesting that Dave sees the hole in the sun as a mere side effect of Typhon's interstellar war. Others see it as a deliberate hiero punishment for humanity, carrying with it the seed of salvation through the New Sun.

Interesting that John Smith sees genocide as a tactic reserved for Nazis and the Old Testament (Jewish) God. Interesting bedfellows to say the least.

I like Eric Ortlund's observation that Severian is told he could view but not enter The Garden...I think this ties in with the Robert, Marie and Isangoma scene with the reading about Mt. Nebo. Borsky thinks that refers to Father Inire as a Moses figure, allowed to see but not enter the Promised Land. But perhaps Severian, in his less than conscious creation of Ushas but inability to participate in humanity's future, genetically, is a much better candidate as a Moses figure. Also, like Moses, Severian seems to be a conduit for God's power without really understanding, himself, how it works.

I think Peter Wright, in *Attending Daedalus*, considers the angel-like hierogrammates to be evil, manipulative bastards torturing the human race for their own selfish ends. But isn't Wright an atheist/socialist?

If Wolfe is a religious person of Christian persuasion, as he appears to be in interviews, I'd guess (if I must guess) that his moral intentions regarding the hieros are that human morality cannot be used to judge God and angels, only ourselves. But we must trust that the Divine Plan, no matter how terrible it may seem at a given instant in time will make things come out right in the end. Go through Hell to get to Heaven?

-bsharp

Roy C. Lackey — 06 Jun 2008, 06:38 · follows b sharp

Dave Tallman wrote:

Both of these moral arguments are missing something, in my view. They are only concerned with what happens to the human race. Environmentalists call this anthropocentrism, and they consider it a serious moral flaw.

****Moral**** flaw? I almost choked on a mouthful of roast beef when I read that! I've been a news junkie since at least the Cuban Missile Crisis, yet it somehow escaped my notice that "Environmentalists" had become the arbiters of morality.

The whole

Urth and its ecosystem was at stake, not just humanity. Typhon's empire started an interstellar war,

It did? Citation, please.

and as a side effect the Sun was damaged. The whole Urth would lose millions of years of life, for countless species and new ones yet to evolve.

And the upheaval of continents and a worldwide flood left all those innocent species unscathed? I wonder what Noah needed that Ark for.

Is it a good and just solution for the human race to jet off into space and leave Urth to freeze? I don't think Wolfe would agree, based on his short stories like "Beautyland." Shouldn't humanity pay some price to put things right? (That's an argument that has some application today, too).

As Andrew (Thalassocrat) has already indicated, the human race had long ago spread (during the First Empire) all over the galaxy, and probably beyond. No matter what happened to Urth, the bulk of humanity would be unaffected. If humanity had to pay a price on Urth, that price was almost entirely symbolic. The Hierogrammates, for all their power, could not overcome entropy. Humanity was spread too far and wide for every world to be punished.

-Roy

Mo Holkar / UKG — 06 Jun 2008, 07:54 · in reply to b sharp

At 05:11 06/06/2008, b sharp wrote:

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Interesting suggestion! Moses was also an abandoned infant, a killer, and (in Jewish tradition) highly sexually active.

I think this fits a lot better than the Father-Inire-as-Moses suggestion.

Mo

~ # ~

WolfeWiki

<http://www.holkar.net/pmwiki/>

Roy C. Lackey — 06 Jun 2008, 18:58 · follows Mo Holkar / UKG

Mo Holkar quoted and wrote:

At 05:11 06/06/2008, b sharp wrote:

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Severian, unlike Moses, did get to the Promised Land, which rather spoils the analogy. Whether he waded into the gene pool there or not is undetermined, I think.

-Roy

Adam Thornton — 06 Jun 2008, 19:04 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Jun 6, 2008, at 1:58 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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Well, Severian doesn't seem to *ever* keep it in his pants, as far as we know, so we can assume that he was at least enthusiastically trying to splash about. As it were.

Adam

Lane Haygood — 06 Jun 2008, 19:09 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Given Sev's... lack of fidelity to the Increate's honest truth... how much credence should we give to his stories of sexual profligacy?

Lane

On Jun 6, 2008, at 2:04 PM, Adam Thornton wrote:

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Adam

Matthew Keeley — 06 Jun 2008, 19:25 · in reply to Lane Haygood

On Fri, Jun 6, 2008 at 3:09 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:

Given Sev's... lack of fidelity to the Increate's honest truth... how much credence should we give to his stories of sexual profligacy?

Well, if Sev were making up his sexual encounters, surely he would have said that he slept with Agia? Plus Sev does mention some embarrassing aspects of his sex life - like the way Valeria finds another man after Sev runs off to bring the New Sun.

(Or perhaps he DID sleep with Agia, but didn't mention it because he didn't want to portray himself as sleeping with an evil and treacherous woman? Then again, he does admit he wanted her, and quite badly.)

-Matt

Chris Laybourn — 06 Jun 2008, 22:11 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

I just finished a first read of Urth of the New Sun so I'm really enjoying this chain.

Can someone explain to me what happens in the chapter where Severian encounters Typhon back during his reign? Typhon wants Severian to demonstrate his powers somehow and he pulls a dirk or knife and stabs it into a table but then we move on in the story. I'm sure there was something implicit in the book but I missed it. Thanks

Jeff Wilson — 07 Jun 2008, 03:01 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

Matthew Keeley wrote:

On Fri, Jun 6, 2008 at 3:09 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com
<mailto:lhaygood at gmail.com>> wrote:

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This doesn't strike me as embarrassing, and Severian seems to get a bit of a vicarious thrill from imagining their coupling.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< http://www.io.com/~jwilson >

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 07 Jun 2008, 03:41 · follows Jeff Wilson

On Fri, 06 Jun 2008 16:38:33 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"

<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

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symbolic. The Hierogrammates, for all their power, could not overcome

entropy. Humanity was spread too far and wide for every world to be

punished.

I still don't get the destruction of Urth as a punishment. According to the Hiero-dude-ish propaganda, the punishment has already happened - humanity beaten back down to a primitive state and barred from the worlds (at least on Urth), and (presumably) the sun deliberately wounded to keep Urth-humanity down. Sev is supposed to be an "epitome" who may bring the punishment to an

end. If he succeeds, a New Sun will come, and humanity will flourish once again, and be allowed back into space.

This propaganda runs in various forms all the way from the official New Sun dogma of Sev's youth, through eidolon-Malrubius' revelations to him, to the gates of Yesod.

Apheta to the sailors (UOTNS VI): "You know that we have condemned the peoples of Urth, and why. They now feel that they have earned our forgiveness, and the chance to resume the places they held of old ... And they have dispatched their Epitome to claim it for them."

Eidolon-Malrubius (Citadel XXXI) questions Sev closely on whether he would go to Yesod if he were to stand trial there, if gelding were to be the price of failure, if it might not bring a New Sun ... but he never mentions that the price of success will be the death of most humans (and most animals!) on Urth.

"If you pass - if *our race* is judged ready to reenter the wide seas of space - such a white fountain will be created in the heart of the sun."

Officially, the real situation is not revealed until Tzadkiel delivers his judgement. Up until then: the New Sun is to bring a rebirth of Urth as Urth, not as Ushas.

The propaganda is, of course, a lie and deception. But at the same time I see no evidence for "punishment" as the real intent. By their own story, the Hiero's intent is to foster the emergence of a race cognate to the Hieros, and thereby a race cognate to themselves.

If this is true, then somehow or other Sev + a small band of surviving Urth-humans + a New Sun is necessary for their plans. How, we don't know, but I suppose the easiest guess is that Sev's genes are the key, and that he is indeed supposed to splash mightily around in a reduced gene pool.

Anyway, I still don't see evidence of God's will in all of this.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 07 Jun 2008, 03:49 · follows Chris Laybourn

On Sat, 07 Jun 2008 08:11:12 +1000 Chris Laybourn

<laybournchris at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Thanks

Sev asks Typhon if killing a man by merely striking the table would be a good demonstration of his powers. Typhon says, "Yep!". Sev pulls out his dagger and bangs it into the table.

The chiliarch has let Sev into the presence of Typhon with a concealed weapon. Not good for the chiliarch!

b sharp — 07 Jun 2008, 04:15 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Chris, I think that scene can be attributed to Gene Wolfe playing with the reader's hopes and expectations a bit. When Severian and Typhon first met (in the future, in book 3 of the series) Typhon is portrayed as a powerful, and perhaps the most arrogant villain in all SF, showing hardly a hint of bluster or insecurity in an unswerving confidence in his own superiority. Somehow Severian manages to best him using only a bit of thinking and torturer's skill.

In their next meeting that you describe (in the past, in Book 5) Severian is possessed of awesome stellar powers and I know I wished, on first reading that scene, that Severian could somehow humble this ultimate, galactic bully Typhon with a cosmic bolt or maybe just a medium sized earthquake...

But Severian doesn't have conscious control of his power and Wolfe only allows Severian to eke out a petty victory over a lesser antagonist, through word play and guile. By striking Typhon's table with a hidden knife he assures a death sentence for the chiliarch who had physically abused him earlier, because the chiliarch was responsible for Typhon's safety.

It is a well done scene because it had to play out that way. Typhon appears to recognize Severian in their future meeting (though of course not vice versa). If Severian had blasted Typhon with cosmic power, their future conversation would have been quite different. And Severian's later mercy to the chiliarch provides one of the strongest cornerstones for building Severian's legend as The Conciliator.

b sharp — 07 Jun 2008, 05:31 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Thalassocrat I don't have strong opinions on the black hole in the sun. I've just seen the point argued in the past. Actually I find the whole hiero-human cognate race concept a bit squishy and hard to grasp. And Cyriaca's uncle's story? What the heck is going on there?

Anyway, in regard to seeing the hand of God in this story, I feel I come by that honestly. Since I'm not religious myself I wasn't looking for it but managed to find it anyway. For me the most direct, compelling evidence is Wolfe's system for naming things in this series (ignoring saints, for now). I think Wolfe has been quoted as saying things are what they are named in this story.

When he uses the word "fusil" he means a flint lock musket, the word's meaning. When he uses the word "destrier" he means something very close to the definition, a fast war horse. By this convention, when he uses the word "Abaia" I take it to mean as literally as possible to the earthly meaning of that word, it being: "a huge, magical eel". So when Wolfe uses the name "Tzadkiel" I take that as literally as possible just like his other references. Tzadkiel is, or very closely resembles, the Judeo-Christian archangel of God's judgement.

I find the hiero-cognate race story rather interesting in this perspective, especially with the Biblical description that humans are made in God's image. It would seem that in Wolfe's cosmos, angels have their origins in humans and vice versa. This is the interaction between Briah and Yesod. I wonder, if Wolfe ever contemplated that hierogrammates might ascend to a higher level by interacting with the universe that is at a higher level than Yesod. (I think he describes a universe lower than Briah, Abbadon). Would Wolfe be so bold as to speculate on the origin of God?

Roy C. Lackey — 07 Jun 2008, 05:51 · follows b sharp

Andrew wote:

[snip]

Eidolon-Malrubius (Citadel XXXI) questions Sev closely on whether he would go to Yesod if he were to stand trial there, if gelding were to be the price of failure, if it might not bring a New Sun ... but he never mentions that the price of success will be the death of most humans (and most animals!) on Urth.

"If you pass - if *our race* is judged ready to reenter the wide seas of space - such a white fountain will be created in the heart of the sun."

Officially, the real situation is not revealed until Tzadkiel delivers his judgement. Up until then: the New Sun is to bring a rebirth of Urth as Urth, not as Ushas.

I agree that the picture painted for Sev in NEW SUN isn't the same picture painted in URTH. Apparently almost everyone on Urth seemed to believe that when the New Sun came, all Urth's troubles would be over; the ice would retreat, the growing season be extended and who-knows-what-all. Life on Urth would be rosy again, as when mankind first went out to seize dominion over the galaxy, or at least as good as things were, in material terms, when Typhon ruled.

We all know Wolfe never planned to write a fifth book. When he was forced to deal with the practical details of bringing the nebulous religious ideal behind his original conception to the page, he may have had to change his mind about some things. But that's speculation.

The propaganda is, of course, a lie and deception. But at the same time I see no evidence for "punishment" as the real intent. By their own story, the Hiero's intent is to foster the emergence of a race cognate to the Hieros, and thereby a race cognate to themselves.

That's true. Whether you call it punishment, correction, justice or revenge, the Hierogrammates were determined to do unto humans what the Hieros of another universe had done unto them. As Sev put it: "They bring us through the pain we put them through." (URTH, XXII, 159) (Btw, the bit about entropy and humans being "sown over tens of thousands of worlds" is at XIX, 135.)

If this is true, then somehow or other Sev + a small band of surviving Urth-humans + a New Sun is necessary for their plans. How, we don't know, but I suppose the easiest guess is that Sev's genes are the key, and that he is indeed supposed to splash mightily around in a reduced gene pool.

Don't forget the mind-wiped losing sailors from the Ship.

Anyway, I still don't see evidence of God's will in all of this.

As Tzadkiel said at the trial, "The death agonies of the world you know will be offered to the Increate." (XXI, 153) (And I've been down this road more than once!)

-Roy

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 07 Jun 2008, 06:49 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Sat, 07 Jun 2008 15:51:45 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rlackey at stic.net> wrote:

I agree that the picture painted for Sev in NEW SUN isn't the same picture painted in URTH. Apparently almost everyone on Urth seemed to believe that when the New Sun came, all Urth's troubles would be over; the ice would retreat, the growing season be extended and who-knows-what-all. Life on Urth would be rosy again, as when mankind first went out to seize dominion over the galaxy, or at least as good as things were, in material terms, when Typhon ruled.

We all know Wolfe never planned to write a fifth book. When he was forced to deal with the practical details of bringing the nebulous religious ideal behind his original conception to the page, he may have had to change his mind about some things. But that's speculation.

Wolfe may well have decided to go down a different route with UOTNS than he did with BOTNS. But a couple of points ...

The picture painted by eidolon-Malrubius *may* have been a lie in the original BOTNS. Talos' play of course paints a different picture, one more like the UOTNS outcome. At the end of BOTNS we are left with two different scenarios (even if we are perhaps more inclined not to believe Talos).

For UOTNS + BOTNS, the eidolon-Malrubius picture is definitely a lie. It's not just a matter of Wolfe writing a different story in UOTNS, and the two not fitting very well together. By having Apheta paint the same (lying) picture to the sailors before landing on Yesod, he makes the stories part of the same narrative, at least in this respect. He's ruled out one of the scenarios for BOTNS.

In the UOTNS + BOTNS story, whether or not eidolon-Malrubius, the Hierodules, Apheta all know that the picture is a lie - I don't know. I believe the Hierodules were probably dupes, and if that's the case, eidolon-Malrubius was probably one, too. Apheta could have been a dupe also, at the time she spoke to the sailors. But Tzadkiel surely was never a dupe, and he must surely have been an active promoter of the lie, if not its source.

Are we then to believe that such a liar is anything like an angel, as commonly understood? Surely only if he is a fallen angel, and if he must be considered an angel at all (which I don't believe), I would say his real name is probably not "Tzadkiel"

As Tzadkiel said at the trial, "The death agonies of the world you know will be offered to the Increate." (XXI, 153) (And I've been down this road more than once!)

Yep, but it's still fun :) Against all the other evidence, I can't take this one statement as evidence that Tz is doing God's will. Maybe he thinks he is; maybe he's making a vicious joke.

Dave Tallman — 07 Jun 2008, 07:00 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

****Moral**** flaw? I almost choked on a mouthful of roast beef when I read that! I've been a news junkie since at least the Cuban Missile Crisis, yet it somehow escaped my notice that "Environmentalists" had become the arbiters of morality.

I'm sorry I mentioned environmentalism -- I thought their term "anthropocentrism" shed an interesting light on the debate. My point remains whether you believe in environmentalism or not: with the New Sun, the solar system remained capable of sustaining life for millions of years more. With no New Sun, the solar system would have been a dead zone in a very short time.

/ The whole

/>/Urth and its ecosystem was at stake, not just humanity. Typhon's empire

/>/started an interstellar war,

/

It did? Citation, please.

"I have told you that I was autarch on many worlds. I shall be autarch again, and this time on many more," suggests an expanding empire outside our own solar system. Empires normally expand by war. The story of the boastful cock also suggests humanity fought other powers in space.

And the upheaval of continents and a worldwide flood left all those innocent species unscathed? I wonder what Noah needed that Ark for.

No, obviously many species and habitats were destroyed. But Ushas remained a place where life and evolution was possible. In Ragnorak, the whole solar system would soon be devoid of life without any hope of recovery.

Note that the Ragnorak way wasn't human-casualty-free either:

I asked if everyone would escape.

"No, not everyone. Some would not go, some could not be found. No home could be found for others."

Given a habitable Ushas, there was no need for a Noah's Ark this time. Time travel and mirrors could bring people, animals, and plants from the past and other planets. There's a hint of this when the old Autarch said "Many will seek to flee by that road (the Mirror Book) if the pelagic argosy sights land."

As Andrew (Thalassocrat) has already indicated, the human race had long ago spread (during the First Empire) all over the galaxy, and probably beyond.

No matter what happened to Urth, the bulk of humanity would be unaffected.

If humanity had to pay a price on Urth, that price was almost entirely symbolic. The Hierogrammates, for all their power, could not overcome entropy. Humanity was spread too far and wide for every world to be punished.

I meant "pay the price" in the sense of making a sacrifice rather than taking a punishment. To me, it is worth the short-term cost in lives to preserve the biosphere.

//Andrew (Thalassocrat) wrote://

Anyway, I still don't see evidence of God's will in all of this.

There's Sev's ability to raise the dead, which is beyond the technology of even Tzadkiel. "Why couldn't Tzadkiel have called me back as I called back Zama?" which caused Famulimus to kiss the floor before his feet. It looks to me like Sev was on the side of the angels (real ones) in the end.

Roy C. Lackey — 07 Jun 2008, 07:02 · follows Dave Tallman

Andrew wrote:

[snip]

Eidolon-Malrubius (Citadel XXXI) questions Sev closely on whether he would go to Yesod if he were to stand trial there, if gelding were to be the price of failure, if it might not bring a New Sun ... but he never mentions that the price of success will be the death of most humans (and most animals!) on Urth.

"If you pass - if **our race** is judged ready to reenter the wide seas of space - such a white fountain will be created in the heart of the sun."

Looking at that quote again just now, it occurs to me that it offers support to my earlier speculation. If the white fountain had actually been created **in** the heart of the old sun, rather than travelling for millennia from some unspecified place **to** the sun, it would not have passed near Urth to get there. If its mass had never come nearer Urth than the sun, would Urth have been spared the violent upheavals that occasioned its destruction?

-Roy

Dave Tallman — 07 Jun 2008, 07:16 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I agree that the picture painted for Sev in NEW SUN isn't the same picture painted in URTH. Apparently almost everyone on Urth seemed to believe that when the New Sun came, all Urth's troubles would be over; the ice would retreat, the growing season be extended and who-knows-what-all. Life on Urth would be rosy again, as when mankind first went out to seize dominion over the galaxy, or at least as good as things were, in material terms, when Typhon ruled.

The teachings of the Conciliator didn't paint a rosy picture at all:

Declan wished to know how Urth would fare when the New Sun came; and I, understanding little more than he did himself, drew upon Dr. Talos's play, never thinking that in a time yet to come Dr. Talos's play would be drawn from my words.

Earlier:

I thought of Dr. Talos's play, in which the ground shakes and Jahi says: "The end of Urth, you fool. Go ahead and spear her. It's the end for you anyway."

If the majority of his followers forgot that and turned it into a rosy promise of utopia that wasn't the Conciliator's fault.

Roy C. Lackey — 07 Jun 2008, 08:58 · follows Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

/ The whole

/>/Urth and its ecosystem was at stake, not just humanity. Typhon's

empire
/>/started an interstellar war,
/
It did? Citation, please.

"I have told you that I was autarch on many worlds. I shall be autarch again, and this time on many more," suggests an expanding empire outside our own solar system. Empires normally expand by war.

He certainly had ambitions; but he died and his dreams of empire died with him. I still see no evidence that Typhon was waging an interstellar war, still less that Urth's sun was damaged in consequence of waging it.

As Andrew (Thalassocrat) has already indicated, the human race had long ago spread (during the First Empire) all over the galaxy, and probably beyond.

No matter what happened to Urth, the bulk of humanity would be unaffected.

If humanity had to pay a price on Urth, that price was almost entirely symbolic. The Hierogrammates, for all their power, could not overcome entropy. Humanity was spread too far and wide for every world to be punished.

I meant "pay the price" in the sense of making a sacrifice rather than taking a punishment. To me, it is worth the short-term cost in lives to preserve the biosphere.

That's easy to say when you're not the one drowning in the flood. The millions of people who did drown were not making any sort of sacrifice. They weren't even consulted. That was my point earlier about the difference between making a voluntary sacrifice and being the unwilling *victim* of one. The people on Urth had done nothing to wound the sun; they had no part in Empire; no part in the cruel fashioning of the Hierogrammates in another universe. But they were punished just the same, punished to death.

-Roy

Dave Tallman — 07 Jun 2008, 13:30 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Robert C. Lackey wrote:

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Let's look at the alternative scenario again. Urth gets colder and colder for thousands of years more. Millions die because can't find food, from exposure, or from warring over scarce resources. Finally the population is reduced enough that the Heiros can offer an evacuation and many take them up on it. Many still die because they can't be found or there is no room for them. Some get to die voluntarily because they won't leave. Finally, all of Urth's ecosystem dies forever.

The Heiros attempt to give the many who will die from the New Sun some representation with a trial by combat between Sev and the sailors. I see you have already argued about trials by combat in the Knight series, so I won't argue that was a just proceeding (the Heiros admit it

wasn't, too).

In the end, most of us don't get a choice of when and how we die. The situation of Urth was a choice between bad alternatives. I can see enough positives in the choice that was taken that I can't buy the moral inversion argument. But you may see it differently.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 07 Jun 2008, 13:51 · follows Dave Tallman

On Sat, 07 Jun 2008 17:16:02 +1000 Dave Tallman
<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

The teachings of the Conciliator didn't paint a rosy picture at all:

Declan wished to know how Urth would fare when the New Sun came; and I, understanding little more than he did himself, drew upon Dr. Talos's play, never thinking that in a time yet to come Dr. Talos's play would be drawn from my words.

Earlier:

I thought of Dr. Talos's play, in which the ground shakes and Jahi

says:

"The end of Urth, you fool. Go ahead and spear her. It's the end for you anyway."

If the majority of his followers forgot that and turned it into a rosy promise of utopia that wasn't the Conciliator's fault.

That doesn't really have anything to do with my point, which is just that in the combined BOTNS + UOTNS narrative, eidolon- Malrubius and Apheta both lied and/or acted to deceive concerning the effects and the purpose of the New Sun. (The deception seems to have been part of a long-running program, because the old Autarch and presumably his predecessors had been deceived also.)

I also don't think it has much to do with Roy's point, which concerned the possible discontinuity between BOTNS and UOTNS.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 07 Jun 2008, 14:07 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On Sat, 07 Jun 2008 23:30:11 +1000 Dave Tallman
<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

Let's look at the alternative scenario again. Urth gets colder and colder for thousands of years more. Millions die because can't find food, from exposure, or from warring over scarce resources. Finally the population is reduced enough that the Heiros can offer an evacuation and many take them up on it. Many still die because they can't be

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The
situation of Urth was a choice between bad alternatives. I can see
enough positives in the choice that was taken that I can't buy the
moral
inversion argument. But you may see it differently.

It is just wildly implausible that the Hierogrammates could not have at least warned the people
of Urth what was coming, even if the Apheta and her fellow trogladyte
wasp-people/larvae/bureaucrats couldn't make the numbers stack up for a real rescue effort.

Instead, they lied about it.

Take away the unsupported assumption that the Hierogrammates are executing the will of God.
Then the only plausible conclusion IMO is that they wanted most of the people on Urth to die.

Further: as far as I know, there is no hint in the narrative is there any hint that the intended
purpose of the New Sun is to prolong the survival of the biosphere. The only stated purpose is to
(somehow) promote the rise of a new generation of Hieros. We are told that the whole Hieros
caused millenia of pain and suffering. For what good? Just to keep the cycle going?

If you want to tot up the utilitarian P&L, you need to expense for that cycle as well.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 07 Jun 2008, 14:28 · follows thalassocrat at
nym.hush.com

On Sat, 07 Jun 2008 17:02:38 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Looking at that quote again just now, it occurs to me that it
offers support
to my earlier speculation. If the white fountain had actually been
created
in the heart of the old sun, rather than travelling for
millennia from
some unspecified place *to* the sun, it would not have passed near
Urth to
get there. If its mass had never come nearer Urth than the sun,
would Urth
have been spared the violent upheavals that occasioned its

destruction?

As it turned out in UOTNS, I don't think there were any violent upheavals? Baldanders speaks of gravity waves which he can detect, and which may be enough to tinkle the bells in Valeria's audience hall, but that seems to be about it.

Jeff Wilson — 07 Jun 2008, 23:58 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com wrote:

On Sat, 07 Jun 2008 17:02:38 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rlackey at stic.net> wrote:

Looking at that quote again just now, it occurs to me that it offers support to my earlier speculation. If the white fountain had actually been created
in the heart of the old sun, rather than travelling for millennia from some unspecified place *to* the sun, it would not have passed near Urth to get there. If its mass had never come nearer Urth than the sun, would Urth have been spared the violent upheavals that occasioned its destruction?

I don't see the narrative presenting "appears in the sun" as an alternative possibility to "travels to the sun". It could be that the fountain-like flux of energy will only turn on full blast once the arriving object enters the sun, and before then it is only figuratively the White Fountain, but isn't the celestial object that Severian draws his power already visible and remarked upon during the first four books?

As it turned out in UOTNS, I don't think there were any violent upheavals? Baldanders speaks of gravity waves which he can detect, and which may be enough to tinkle the bells in Valeria's audience hall, but that seems to be about it.

Other than the flooding that submerges Nessus, the Citadel, the House Absolute, and all land features previously within sight of the area?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 08 Jun 2008, 00:43 · follows Jeff Wilson

On Sun, 08 Jun 2008 09:58:21 +1000 Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

As it turned out in UOTNS, I don't think there were any violent upheavals? Baldanders speaks of gravity waves which he can detect, and which may be enough to tinkle the bells in Valeria's audience hall, but that seems to be about it.

Other than the flooding that submerges Nessus, the Citadel, the House Absolute, and all land features previously within sight of the area?

Sorry, I meant earthquakes and such, not flooding, which I assumed was caused by the New Sun melting the ice. Roy was speculating whether a White Fountain created inside the sun would have been less destructive than the tidal forces or whatever of one whizing past Urth on its way to the sun.

But looking back at Baldanders' speech to Valeria, I think I was wrong: he speaks of these forces warming the "dead heart" of Urth & implies that volcanic activity etc will ensure. So my original comment was probably wrong.

Roy C. Lackey — 08 Jun 2008, 04:27 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

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But looking back at Baldanders' speech to Valeria, I think I was wrong: he speaks of these forces warming the "dead heart" of Urth & implies that volcanic activity etc will ensure. So my original comment was probably wrong.

Here's the quote:

"It has arrived at last, madame. The force that made your bells sound has warmed the cold heart of Urth once more. Now they toll the death of continents." (URTH, XLII, 300)

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 08 Jun 2008, 04:34 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Dave Tallman wrote:

The Heiros attempt to give the many who will die from the New Sun some representation with a trial by combat between Sev and the sailors. I see you have already argued about trials by combat in the Knight series, so I won't argue that was a just proceeding (the Heiros admit it wasn't, too).

You mean Hierogrammates, not Hieros, who were a race of beings cognate to the humans of Briah and who fashioned the Hierogrammates in another universe, since collapsed. That's why the Hierogrammates were messing with Urth. Since the humans of Urth's First Empire had not become the Hieros of Briah, and since Urth's resources were largely gone after Typhon's time, obviously something had to change if the Hierogrammates were to have any hope of repeating the cycle in Briah. The only way they had of accomplishing that was apparently to start over. So they arranged for Urth to be destroyed and reborn as Ushas.

As has been said and the text affirms, Urth's survival was not necessary for human survival. Urth's only real value was emotional or spiritual, because it was the ancestral home of the species, and by extension the ancestral home, potentially, of the Hieros who might eventually produce the Hierogrammtes; or so they hoped. Whether or not what they did had the blessing of the Increate is another argument.

Apheta said:

"You know that we have condemned the peoples of Urth, and why. They now feel they have earned our forgiveness, and the chance to resume the places they held of old--" (URTH, XVI, 112-13)

No one believes that the black hole in the sun was due to natural causes. No one argues that the black hole was there before Typhon's time. That's why the first ruler to go to Yesod to win a New Sun was his successor, Ymar. There was no need for anyone to make the trip to Yesod in hopes of fixing what hadn't been broken before Typhon's time. The entire purpose of a representative of Urth going to Yesod was to bring a cure for the damaged and dying sun. The cure was a white hole, aka white fountain, that became almost synonymous with a religious figure, known both as the New Sun and the Conciliator. The reason Severian was sent back to Urth in Typhon's time was to establish the Conciliator legend, which he did. That all adds up to this: The condemnation Apheta spoke of was directly connected to Urth's dying sun, not some incident or nebulous amalgam of transgressions committed by the people of Urth before Typhon's era.

If the Hierogrammates caused the black hole in the sun, as has been argued before, then they are directly responsible for the destruction of Urth's biosphere that would have resulted from the ice-future. Ushas avoided the ice-future, all right. Do they get a pat on the back for fixing a problem they created? Not from me.

If Typhon somehow caused the black hole in the sun and the Hierogrammates took it upon themselves to "condemn" the peoples of Urth for *his* transgression, then the result, for Urth, is the same; destruction of the world and the death of the blameless by way of a white hole. It's the wife-beater defense writ large: "Now look what you made me do." If the Hierogrammates acted at the behest of the Increate, then it can and will be written of by the curious logic of the religious minded as justifiable, and there is no point in pursuing that argument. If the Hierogrammates acted solely out of self-interest, then the argument changes to -- where do they get the moral authority? If they got it from the Increate; case closed. But if they are self-anointed free agents?

In the end, most of us don't get a choice of when and how we die. The situation of Urth was a choice between bad alternatives. I can see enough positives in the choice that was taken that I can't buy the moral inversion argument. But you may see it differently.

And I do.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 08 Jun 2008, 04:47 · follows Roy C. Lackey

I wrote:
written of by the curious logic of the religious minded as justifiable, and

I meant "written off".

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 08 Jun 2008, 07:23 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Just a follow-up on what I said before.

There is no doubt that the black hole came to be in the sun during Typhon's era. At issue is whether he or the Hierogrammates was directly to blame for it. I've addressed the Hierogrammate side, somewhat. There is no direct evidence in the Urth Cycle to pin it on Typhon, but that doesn't mean he didn't cause it. Still, Apheta's statement gives pause:

"You know that we have condemned the peoples of Urth, and why. They now feel they have earned our forgiveness, and the chance to resume the places they held of old--" (URTH, XVI, 112-13)

What does she mean by "condemned"? If Typhon did cause the black hole, whether accidentally or purposefully, then the Ragnarok-future can be laid at his feet and a rational defense of the Urth-to-Ushas catastrophic transition can be made, even if I don't agree with it. But she said "we" "condemned". Naughty Typhon might have supplied the "why" of it, but it was the Hierogrammates and their minions, the "we", who did the condemning of Urth's peoples.

Had Typhon been directly responsible for the black hole, she might have said something like, "You Urth people screwed up and now you are suffering for it, and it's only going to get worse for you as time goes on. But because we are such nice guys we are going to give you a chance to fix your sun. The fix will be quite painful, but we offer you the opportunity. All you have to do is jump through a few hoops for us. Take it or leave it." But she said something very different.

The only way to negate the condemnation was for a representative of Urth's peoples to "earn" the "forgiveness" of the Hierogrammates. By "earn" she meant the Epitome's sham trial/examination. The "forgiveness" came in the form of the awarding of a white hole to cancel out the black hole in Urth's sun.

That leaves no choice but to absolve Typhon of responsibility for the black hole and place it squarely on the Hierogrammates, with or without the Increate's blessing.

The question then becomes: *Why* did the Hierogrammates condemn Urth's peoples during Typhon's era?

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 08 Jun 2008, 08:28 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

That leaves no choice but to absolve Typhon of responsibility for the black hole and place it squarely on the Hierogrammates, with or without the Increate's blessing.

Your reasoning here is almost air-tight, except that

- 1) time travel makes all the time-conditional predicates suspect.
- 2) a very common Wolfe theme is an evil person's misdeed furthering a higher power's plan for the greater good, without the person being any less evil or the higher power any less good.

This means that the black hole can be the fault of Typhon *and* it can be part of a righteous condemnation for other past or future misdeeds, at least in the the author's opinion.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Dave Tallman — 08 Jun 2008, 08:40 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

That leaves no choice but to absolve Typhon of responsibility for the black hole and place it squarely on the Hierogrammates, with or without the Increate's blessing.

The question then becomes: *Why* did the Hierogrammates condemn Urth's

peoples during Typhon's era?

I think you present a compelling case that the Hierogrammates are responsible for the black hole. The reasons are not spelled out in detail, but we do have this: "I tried to tell them how the Hierodules feared us because we had spread through the worlds in the ancient times of Urth's glory, extinguishing many other races and bringing our cruelty and wars everywhere."

Sev could only have learned this from conversations on the Ship, so it's a one-sided presentation, but I'll take it as true that humans committed multiple genocides against intelligent races. They may not have all happened in the reign of Typhon, but Typhon was carrying on the the same empire and intent on further genocide.

Placing the black hole makes little sense as a pure act of war. It was slow-acting, allowing plenty of time for evacuation for a space-faring people, and it only touched one of many worlds humanity owned. I see it more as a shot across the bow, telling Typhon, "Look what we can do. You'd better back off." The ones who did it probably didn't anticipate that millions would remain in jeopardy for centuries.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 08 Jun 2008, 10:24 · follows Dave Tallman

On Sun, 08 Jun 2008 17:23:53 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

The question then becomes: *Why* did the Hierogrammates condemn
Urth's
peoples during Typhon's era?

My reading: because it would lead in the future to the conclusion actually reached at the end of UOTNS.

That is: Sev + a small band of Urth humans (but not too small: I suppose the mind-wiped sailors are there to make the gene pool viable while at the same time small enough for Sev's genes to quickly percolate through the whole race) + a viable planet.

For this, they need an Urth humanity too weak to avoid genocide; and the mythos of the New Sun to produce a Sev willing to participate in the genocide; whatever line of descent in the interim required to produce a Sev with Sev's genes/powers/whatever; and a revitalised sun. They use admirable economy of action in achieving all of these rnd-points.

[Digression: I still think that the wounding of the sun might in fact have happened back in Apu Panchu's day. It takes millions of years for photons to travel from the core of the sun to the surface. Wound the core, and perhaps the effects will only be apparent on the timescales required for this. For the story, I think this would be pretty neat thematically: eg the Hierogrammate's plans unfolding over practically *all* of human history. But anyway ...]

Why did the Hierogrammates want this conclusion? As b_sharp says, the whole story about co-evolution is kind of squidgy. Why do the Hierogrammates care about recreating the Hieros? They don't need them to recreate the Hierogrammates, obviously! Do they just want to inflict the pain of some kind of forced evolution? Why would they do that? I can believe in the desire for revenge-at-a-remove, a little, but why with the goal of creating a superior race?

(Given that the Hiero-dudes lie, of course I discount anything they have to say about this, if it violates basic plausibility.)

Finding a better answer is obviously a matter for speculation. So, I speculate ...

In UOTNS XIX Apheta gives us a few crumbs of information about the Hieros and their relationship to the Hierogrammates.

"You say they [the Hieros] desired companions. How could they shape companions for themselves, who were themselves ever reaching higher and higher? [We have] the appearance of your own race, the race that our parents, the Hierogrammates, first set forth to follow."

There is no evident reason why she should be lying in this instance, so I accept it (provisionally!).

Evidently, the Hierogrammates followed after the Hieros in the latters' quest "higher and higher". I think this brought them to Yesod, only to find the Hieros had already departed for some higher sphere. Now they want to recreate a race of Hieros, but this time under their control. When the new Hieros find the way beyond Yesod, the Hierogrammates will be riding with them.

From this, I think further speculation follows quite easily, about why Sev, the progenitor of the new line of Hieros, should recapitulate events from the life of Jesus.

Chris Laybourn — 08 Jun 2008, 23:25 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Someone touched on this in an earlier email but I'm new and trying to fill in a lot of blanks.

It was mentioned that Wolfe did not intend to write "Urth" when he wrote Book of the New Sun. Why then did he write it? Too much pressure from the publisher to add a coda to the popular series?

If it was not in his original plans, do we know from interviews or elsewhere how much of the details of Urth of the New Sun were etched out during the writing of Book of the New Sun? Had he even conceived the flood, Tzadkiel, Yesod, etc...

Matthew Keeley — 09 Jun 2008, 01:15 · in reply to Chris Laybourn

This is something of a recurring topic in the archives. You might want to look there, but I'm not sure if there's really a consensus on Wolfe's thoughts while writing Urth.

-Matt

Roy C. Lackey — 09 Jun 2008, 02:24 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Jeff Wilson wrote:

2) a very common Wolfe theme is an evil person's misdeed furthering a higher power's plan for the greater good, without the person being any less evil or the higher power any less good.

No argument.

This means that the black hole can be the fault of Typhon *and* it can be part of a righteous condemnation for other past or future misdeeds, at least in the the author's opinion.

I understand what you are saying, and it's quite true that Wolfe has made characters express exactly that school of thought. The problem with the "everything that happens is part of God's Grand Design even if the actors don't know it and think otherwise" philosophy is that it cuts off all reasoned argument, period. I don't want to get into a debate about freewill and/or predestination or predetermination or whatever.

Getting back to Apheta's statement; if her "we" includes the Increate, then there is no more I can say. But if it doesn't, and unless one is willing to grant to a superior power the inherent right to impose its will on a lesser power, then the Hierogrammates' motives become more than suspect. Unless Might makes Right, they be taken for bad guys.

You can spin the Ushas future into as pretty a picture as you care to imagine and say that everything will work out for the best in the best of all possible worlds, but the ends still don't justify the means -- unless the Increate had a hand in it. Even if the Hierogrammates only **believed** they were doing the will of the Increate, that doesn't excuse their actions. History books and modern newspapers are littered with the dead who died because someone believed they were doing what God wanted them to do.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 09 Jun 2008, 04:15 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Andrew wrote:

[Digression: I still think that the wounding of the sun might in fact have happened back in Apu Panchu's day. It takes millions of years for photons to travel from the core of the sun to the surface. Wound the core, and perhaps the effects will only be apparent on the timescales required for this. For the story, I think this would be pretty neat thematically: eg the Hierogrammate's plans unfolding over practically **all** of human history. But anyway ...]

Against this are Typhon's comments about his astronomers being wrong in their predictions about the rate of change in the sun's output. Contrary to their predictions, it had declined by a small but detectable amount in just a "few years", followed by crop failures, famine and riots. So Typhon had

some reason to be keeping an eye on the sun even before effects of the change became apparent. The change seems to have happened on his watch.

Why did the Hierogrammates want this conclusion? As b_sharp says, the whole story about co-evolution is kind of squidgy. Why do the Hierogrammates care about recreating the Hieros? They don't need them to recreate the Hierogrammates, obviously!

It doesn't make much sense to me, either. There is that bit about some small improvement being made with each cycle of the universes, but I don't know what the end result is supposed to be, unless it is some form of Nearer My God to Thee -- either to become powerful enough to challenge God, or to

become God. Sort of along the lines of what Silk(?) said about someone who is playing a role becoming that which he pretends to be. Ala Quetzal.

Evidently, the Hierogrammates followed after the Hieros in the latters' quest "higher and higher". I think this brought them to Yesod, only to find the Hieros had already departed for some higher sphere. Now they want to recreate a race of Hieros, but this time under their control. When the new Hieros find the way beyond Yesod, the Hierogrammates will be riding with them.

Wolfe cleverly makes Apheta say that of the *works* of the Hieros, only the Hierogrammates remain. What does that really say about the Hieros? Did they die off when their universe collapsed or did they escape like the Hierogrammates? If they are not on Yesod, where are they if they still exist? If they are on some higher plane than Yesod, shouldn't they be even more powerful than their "creations", be in a position to thwart unwanted followers?

Note how that bit about the Hieros fashioning the Hierogrammates to be their "companions" sounds a lot like the popular perception of God and the angels. Or the Seven Worlds cosmology in TWK, and how some have suggested that its Most High God is the Demiurge.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 09 Jun 2008, 04:23 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

You can spin the Ushas future into as pretty a picture as you care to imagine and say that everything will work out for the best in the best of all possible worlds, but the ends still don't justify the means -- unless the Increate had a hand in it. Even if the Hierogrammates only *believed* they were doing the will of the Increate, that doesn't excuse their actions. History books and modern newspapers are littered with the dead who died because someone believed they were doing what God wanted them to do.

How can we objectively distinguish between the two cases? Otherwise, you're merely substituting your judgment for theirs in determining if the Increate "really" wants them to do the deed.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Lane Haygood — 09 Jun 2008, 04:36 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Maybe that's the point. No matter how much ends-based reasoning we engage in, none of it is ever sufficient to create something truly moral, because what is moral must be judged by the propriety of the actions in themselves, and not by their consequences.

Lane

On Jun 8, 2008, at 11:23 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

You can spin the Ushas future into as pretty a picture as you care to imagine and say that everything will work out for the best in the best of all possible worlds, but the ends still don't justify the means -- unless the Increate had a hand in it. Even if the Hierogrammates only *believed* they were doing the will of the Increate, that doesn't excuse their actions. History books and modern newspapers are littered with the dead who died because someone believed they were doing what God wanted them to do.

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Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 09 Jun 2008, 08:14 · follows Lane Haygood

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

You can spin the Ushas future into as pretty a picture as you care to imagine and say that everything will work out for the best in the best of all possible worlds, but the ends still don't justify the means -- unless the Increate had a hand in it. Even if the Hierogrammates only *believed* they were doing the will of the Increate, that doesn't excuse their actions.

History books and modern newspapers are littered with the dead who died because someone believed they were doing what God wanted them to do.

How can we objectively distinguish between the two cases? Otherwise, you're merely substituting your judgment for theirs in determining if the Increate "really" wants them to do the deed.

My judgment has no bearing on what the Increate may have wanted them to do. I don't know what or even if the Increate wanted them to do anything. Either they were acting on orders from the Increate or they weren't. If they were, case closed. If they only believed they were, they were deluded.

In the case of Silk's "enlightenment", it is reasonably clear that the reader is intended to understand that it was a genuine communication from the Outsider, not just a "cerebral incident" as Dr. Crane would have it. The Hierogrammates' intercourse with the Increate, if there is any, is far from clear.

-Roy

Dave Tallman — 09 Jun 2008, 08:24 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

My reading: because it would lead in the future to the conclusion actually reached at the end of UOTNS.

That is: Sev + a small band of Urth humans (but not too small: I suppose the mind-wiped sailors are there to make the gene pool viable while at the same time small enough for Sev's genes to quickly percolate through the whole race) + a viable planet.

For this, they need an Urth humanity too weak to avoid genocide; and the mythos of the New Sun to produce a Sev willing to participate in the genocide; whatever line of descent in the interim required to produce a Sev with Sev's genes/powers/whatever; and a revitalised sun. They use admirable economy of action in achieving all of these rnd-points.

I have two issues with this idea; one is practical and the other artistic. On the practical side, the Sev who brings about the New Sun is an aquastor. The aquastor Malrubius acts as a mouthpiece for the Hierogrammates. If all they wanted was a puppet with the right genetics, then permitting Sev his adventures was a waste of time.

The artistic issue is that a heroic story has been converted into a horror story. In this reading, evil triumphs. Had Sev failed to bring the New Sun (if that were even permitted by these

all-powerful puppeteers) then Urth humans would have been just as much at their mercy after the Ragnorak evacuation. The whole epic becomes pointless,

Roy seems to be theorizing that Wolfe started with a heroic story and then converted it to a horror story when his original happy ending wouldn't work. I disagree with this; there was ample foreshadowing that the New Sun would have calamitous side-effects (Talos' play, the statement by the Autarch that many would seek to flee, and the dead rooster on the road). But I think the intention was for the reader to find a mixture of hope and sadness in the ending. Whether the reader does or not depends on the assumptions and attitudes one brings to the book.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 09 Jun 2008, 08:52 · follows Dave Tallman

On Mon, 09 Jun 2008 14:15:11 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"

<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Andrew wrote:

[Digression: I still think that the wounding of the sun might in fact have happened back in Apu Panchu's day. It takes millions of years for photons to travel from the core of the sun to the surface. Wound the core, and perhaps the effects will only be apparent on the timescales required for this. For the story, I think this would be pretty neat thematically: eg the Hierogrammate's plans unfolding over practically *all* of human history. But anyway ...]

Against this are Typhon's comments about his astronomers being wrong in their predictions about the rate of change in the sun's output. Contrary to their predictions, it had declined by a small but detectable amount in just a "few years", followed by crop failures, famine and riots. So Typhon had *some* reason to be keeping an eye on the sun even before effects of the change became apparent. The change seems to have happened on his watch.

But this is consistent with my story. Only in Typhon's time does the reduction in photon flow reach the surface of the sun; before that (maybe!) nobody has any cause to think there is anything amiss. It's a new phenomenon; his astronomers came up with the wrong explanation & so their prognosis was wrong.

I don't think it's a point that can be definitively settled either way. But given the lack of any other explanation in the narrative, it just feels right to me that the reason the Ship was close enough to the sun to cause an eclipse in Apu Panchau's time was because the Hiero-dudes were inserting a black sun. What else was it doing there? And to me it's just neat to have the dying of the old sun commence with the first appearance of the New.

But I don't think it's essential to understanding the main story line.

Evidently, the Hierogrammates followed after the Hieros in the latters' quest "higher and higher". I think this brought them to Yesod, only to find the Hieros had already departed for some higher sphere. Now they want to recreate a race of Hieros, but this time

under their control. When the new Hieros find the way beyond
Yesod,
the Hierogrammates will be riding with them.

Wolfe cleverly makes Apheta say that of the *works* of the Hieros,
only the
Hierogrammates remain. What does that really say about the Hieros?

Did they
die off when their universe collapsed or did they escape like the
Hierogrammates? If they are not on Yesod, where are they if they
still
exist? If they are on some higher plane than Yesod, shouldn't they
be even
more powerful than their "creations", be in a position to thwart
unwanted
followers?

We can only speculate & make up stories about this, of course.

I suppose the Hierogrammates are in the position of any other group intent on storming heaven,
in Wolfe's other work (eg, in TWK) & elsewhere.

My story goes that the Hieros were taken up to some kind of really- truly heaven by the action
of divine grace or whatever. The Hierogrammates completely misunderstand what this
involved, and think it's just another step beyond Yesod, one to be climbed or forced from below.
They see a Jesus figure as being important to this, and attempt to create one. Or something like
that. We know they'll fail, but they don't.

Anyway, I think it's fun to muse about variations on a Paradise Lost kind of theme to fill in
blanks here.

Note how that bit about the Hieros fashioning the Hierogrammates
to be their
"companions" sounds a lot like the popular perception of God and
the angels.
Or the Seven Worlds cosmology in TWK, and how some have suggested
that its
Most High God is the Demiurge.

But note that Apheta says in effect that the Hieros did *not* fashion the Hierogrammates to be
companions. "How could they shape companions for themselves, who were themselves ever
reaching higher

and higher?" I don't think they were angels, even to the Hieros. At most, senior white collar
workers at some stage in the evolution of a Hiero-hierarchy (as their name would indicate).

Roy C. Lackey — 09 Jun 2008, 09:06 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Dave Tallman wrote:
Roy seems to be theorizing that Wolfe started with a heroic story and
then converted it to a horror story when his original happy ending
wouldn't work.

I suppose one might draw that conclusion from what I have said in this latest round of an old
argument, but that's not my position. In past discussions I argued that the Hierogrammates
were operating on orders from On High because, much as you just said, and though my

perspective is different from yours, I don't think Wolfe would have written an epic "horror story", Peter Wright's views notwithstanding.

-Roy

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 09 Jun 2008, 09:36 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Mon, 09 Jun 2008 18:24:56 +1000 Dave Tallman

<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

Andrew wrote:

My reading: because it would lead in the future to the conclusion

actually reached at the end of UOTNS.

That is: Sev + a small band of Urth humans (but not too small: I

suppose the mind-wiped sailors are there to make the gene pool viable while at the same time small enough for Sev's genes to quickly percolate through the whole race) + a viable planet.

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I have two issues with this idea; one is practical and the other artistic. On the practical side, the Sev who brings about the New Sun is

an aquastor. The aquastor Malrubius acts as a mouthpiece for the Hierogrammates. If all they wanted was a puppet with the right genetics, then permitting Sev his adventures was a waste of time.

The artistic issue is that a heroic story has been converted into a

horror story. In this reading, evil triumphs. Had Sev failed to bring

the New Sun (if that were even permitted by these all-powerful puppeteers) then Urth humans would have been just as much at their

mercy

after the Ragnorak evacuation. The whole epic becomes pointless,

If the Hierogrammates were all-powerful puppeteers then it would indeed be boring and pointless, and I have never suggested they were, for this reason, and also because everything in the text suggests that they are not.

They don't need just his genes. They need him to do certain things of his own volition, perhaps because only he can do them, perhaps because the "Epitome's" volition is crucial. And it seems very clear to me that in UOTNS things are balanced on the knife-edge for the Hiero-dudes. If once Sev can catch his breath and start actually **thinking** and **questioning**, their plans may come unstuck.

So they bewilder him on Yesod; use sex to stop his questioning there, and once again to stop him thinking when he's back on the Ship; race him through his sham "mission" in Typhon's time;

and bring him back to his own era when it's too late to stop anything.

From fake trial to destruction of Urth, Sev's subjective time elapsed appears to be about a week. He is not a quick thinker.

The artistic objection is the most powerful, but in the end I just have to go with what I can make sense of. This is a dark story; genocide, and future of pain and suffering throughout the galaxies. But I think it all gets turned around in SS and LS, as I've argued elsewhere.

The point about Urth people still being vulnerable to the Hierogrammates in a different future is fairly irrelevant. If the Hieros wanted just to kill lots of humans they could do so whenever they chose. The genocide on Urth was for a purpose (ie to cut down the gene pool, or so I believe) - not just for random nastiness.

In a different future, Urth is never going to be the center of some new gimcrack interstellar empire. It's just going to die, slowly, or so we must assume. But all the other human worlds continue on, and Apheta makes it clear that they are too numerous and scattered for the not-all-powerful Hierogrammates to do much about them.

What would a different future achieve? First, no sudden death to the people of Urth. Second, no new race of Hieros spreading millenia of pain and suffering spreading through the galaxies.

(Clearly, the Urth itself must be important for the Hiero-dudes' plans. Somebody says somewhere in BOTNS that different continents have different templates which impose themselves on their populations; and I suppose in this story that the same goes for planets. Before long Urth will be uninhabitable. Probably Sev represents the Hiero-dudes' last shot at getting the new Hieros started.)

And if my speculation about the Hiero-dudes' agenda is correct, a different future means that their plans to storm heaven are foiled, at least for now. But presumably those plans are doomed anyway.

Gwern Branwen — 10 Jun 2008, 02:48 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 2008.06.08 23:15:11 -0500, "Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net> scribbled 2.7K characters:

Andrew wrote:

[Digression: I still think that the wounding of the sun might in fact have happened back in Apu Panchu's day. It takes millions of years for photons to travel from the core of the sun to the surface. Wound the core, and perhaps the effects will only be apparent on the timescales required for this. For the story, I think this would be pretty neat thematically: eg the Hierogrammate's plans unfolding over practically *all* of human history. But anyway ...]

Against this are Typhon's comments about his astronomers being wrong in their predictions about the rate of change in the sun's output. Contrary to their predictions, it had declined by a small but detectable amount in just a "few years", followed by crop failures, famine and riots. So Typhon had *some* reason to be keeping an eye on the sun even before effects of the change became apparent. The change seems to have happened on his watch.

...

-Roy

I'm not sure this is useful to know. Of course he has reason to keep an eye on the Sun, but that tells us nothing. After all, *we* [modern-day humanity in general] would definitely notice a decline in luminosity in a few years - we keep a very close eye on the Sun for all sorts of reasons, none of which are because we rule an evil empire or anything.

gwern

Pershing osco TACSAT SIN MI-17 DEVGRP Whitewater imagery lock PCMT

Roy C. Lackey — 10 Jun 2008, 05:04 · follows Gwern Branwen

Gwern Branwen quoted and wrote:

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Maybe I didn't convey the sense of it clearly enough. In context, it is apparent that something unusual had happened to the sun *before* the astronomers made there predictions as to what the effects of the change would be, a change that they didn't think would be noticed in a human lifetime. Here is the quote.

"It was a period of great confusion as well. My astronomers had told me that this sun's activity would decay slowly. Far too slowly, in fact, for the change to be noticeable in a human lifetime. They were wrong. The heat of the world declined by nearly two parts in a thousand over a few years, then stabilized. Crops failed, and there were famines and riots. I should have left then." (SWORD, XXV)

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 10 Jun 2008, 06:59 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Gwern Branwen quoted and wrote:

Against this are Typhon's comments about his astronomers being wrong in their predictions about the rate of change in the sun's output. Contrary to their predictions, it had declined by a small but detectable amount in just a "few years", followed by crop failures, famine and riots. So Typhon had *some* reason to be keeping an eye on the sun even before effects of the change became apparent. The change seems to have happened on his watch.

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The timeline of change is fairly arbitrary. The factoid about light emitted in the core of the sun taking millions of years to reach the surface is technically correct according to now- and then-current quantum mechanical reasons, but also depends on the internal, notional structure of the sun being fairly static; the introduction of one or more black holes of some size could churn things up a bit, and changes in the density, pressure, temperature, etc. can propagate much much faster, in some variable star cases in as little as a few weeks.

It's also arbitrary in that while Wolfe *can* bone up on fine details of physics, as in "How I Turned Back the German Invasion...", he doesn't necessarily do it in all cases (for example, the bogus explanation of magic mirrors accelerating light), and the gnawing worm at the heart of the sun, or the black beans cast on the sun's grave may only share with the then-current black hole models the quality of being a hidden celestial object of possibly cosmic, devouring gravitational potency and being linked to an opposite counterpart of brilliant radiance and equal, creative potency.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 10 Jun 2008, 08:52 · follows Jeff Wilson

Andrew wrote:

I don't think it's a point that can be definitively settled either way. But given the lack of any other explanation in the narrative, it just feels right to me that the reason the Ship was close enough to the sun to cause an eclipse in Apu Panchau's time was because the Hiero-dudes were inserting a black sun. What else was it doing there? And to me it's just neat to have the dying of the old sun commence with the first appearance of the New.

I have always thought that the Ship really was there to stage the eclipse that saved Sev's bacon. The eclipse was not a coincidence. Obviously, it is a physical impossibility for any vessel to transport or even come near a black hole, so if the Hierogrammates are the ones who put it in the sun, and regardless of when it happened, how was the deed done?

And that brings up the complementary question: If they could put a black hole directly in the sun (obviously no black hole traveled through the solar system wrecking havoc like the white hole later would), then they could have put the white hole directly in the sun, too. But they didn't. Why? Because they couldn't, or because they didn't want to? If they could not, that may put the blame for the black hole back on Typhon. But if they *chose* to send the white fountain by the scenic route (as they chose to send Sev back to Typhon's time instead of his own), why?

One answer may be to stretch the range of Sev's time-walking ability from the era of the Stone Town all the way to Ushas, said range delineated by light from the white fountain reaching Urth, all in furtherance of the Conciliator legend. Another answer is that they needed Urth destroyed to bring about Ushas.

-Roy

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 10 Jun 2008, 09:23 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Tue, 10 Jun 2008 15:04:50 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rlackey at stic.net> wrote:

Maybe I didn't convey the sense of it clearly enough. In context, it is apparent that something unusual had happened to the sun *before* the astronomers made there predictions as to what the effects of the change would be, a change that they didn't think would be noticed in a human lifetime. Here is the quote.

"It was a period of great confusion as well. My astronomers had told me that this sun's activity would decay slowly. Far too slowly, in fact, for the change to be noticeable in a human lifetime. They were wrong. The heat of the world declined by nearly two parts in a thousand over a few years, then stabilized. Crops failed, and there were famines and riots. I should have left then." (SWORD, XXV)

But I don't think this absolutely supports your position.

For example: maybe the astronomers knew about a black hole lurking in the sun's heart from way back. Whatever effect it was having, they expected it not to change noticeably in the near term, but for some reason they were wrong. That seems consistent with what Typhon says.

Or: they don't know about the black hole, but one day their sensitive instruments detect an anomaly in the sun's output, too small to be noticed without the instruments, but significant enough to send them scurrying for an explanation. They come up with one, but it's wrong. That seems consistent also.

Jeff Wilson — 10 Jun 2008, 09:29 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

I have always thought that the Ship really was there to stage the eclipse that saved Sev's bacon. The eclipse was not a coincidence. Obviously, it is a physical impossibility for any vessel to transport or even come near a black hole, so if the Hierogrammates are the ones who put it in the sun, and regardless of when it happened, how was the deed done?

We don't know this is true within the context of the books. Several examples of antigravity (the throne room and the fliers to name two) are provided that might be parleyed into protection from the hole's gravity.

there are numerous techical work-arounds suggested in popular science literature of the time, like using electrical charges and magnetic fields to move the collapsed mass without touching it.

(Black holes, btw, can come in all sizes, and the gravity at a distance is no greater than it would have been for the original object. It's just that the collapsed state allows one to closely approach the total mass all at once, instead of having it distributed over thousands or millions of miles.)

And that brings up the complementary question: If they could put a black hole directly in the sun (obviously no black hole traveled through the solar system wrecking havoc like the white hole later would),

Again, we don't know this for sure. *Something* moved the moon 100,000 miles closer to Urth than it is to Earth, and an incoming black hole is as plausible as many other explanations posited here.

then they could have put the white hole directly in the sun, too. But they didn't. Why? Because they couldn't, or because they didn't want to? If they could not, that may put the blame for the black hole back on Typhon. But if they *chose* to send the white fountain by the scenic route (as they chose to send Sev back to Typhon's time instead of his own), why?

One answer may be to stretch the range of Sev's time-walking ability from the era of the Stone Town all the way to Ushas, said range delineated by light from the white fountain reaching Urth, all in furtherance of the Conciliator legend. Another answer is that they needed Urth destroyed to bring about Ushas.

The worldwide upheavals may have been considered necessary to do away with Abaia, Erebus, and their ilk. It makes sense that something catastrophic would be required, and you'd want to do them as a batch to prevent the survivors of a first strike to grow stronger by taking up the resources of their dead rivals.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Dave Tallman — 10 Jun 2008, 11:43 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Andrew wrote:

/I don't think it's a point that can be definitively settled either
>/way. But given the lack of any other explanation in the narrative,
>/it just feels right to me that the reason the Ship was close enough
>/to the sun to cause an eclipse in Apu Panchau's time was because
>/the Hiero-dudes were inserting a black sun. What else was it doing
>/there? And to me it's just neat to have the dying of the old sun
>/commence with the first appearance of the New.

/

I have always thought that the Ship really was there to stage the eclipse that saved Sev's bacon. The eclipse was not a coincidence. Obviously, it is a physical impossibility for any vessel to transport or even come near a black hole, so if the Hierogrammates are the ones who put it in the sun, and regardless of when it happened, how was the deed done?

I have another possible explanation for the eclipse. The exact dimensions of the Ship aren't given, but could it really be large enough to shadow the Sun and let the stars be seen like that? It would have to be almost as big as the moon. Why couldn't the eclipse be a normal one, caused by the moon?

Sev got to that place and time by following Juturna's directions, "That way the future, that way

the past." (UotNS XLVII). She may have opened the corridor of time for him and picked a time when real total eclipse was due. That would be a nice nod to the famous time-travel story by Mark Twain, "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court." (Another hint: when Juturna's face is first seen in SooT II, it is compared to the moon.)

And that brings up the complementary question: If they could put a black hole directly in the sun (obviously no black hole traveled through the solar system wrecking havoc like the white hole later would), then they could have put the white hole directly in the sun, too. But they didn't. Why? Because they couldn't, or because they didn't want to? If they could not, that may put the blame for the black hole back on Typhon. But if they *chose* to send the white fountain by the scenic route (as they chose to send Sev back to Typhon's time instead of his own), why?

Perhaps there were legalities that had to be observed. There were dire consequences to the New Sun, but if the Hierogrammates were answerable to higher authorities they could point to Sev and say: "Here's the representative of Urth that requested this. We also sent him back to the time when the black hole was placed and gave him the chance to provide a warning about what was coming, backed up with miracles to increase his credibility."

The business about the photons taking a long time to reach the surface of the Sun is interesting physics but it's never referred to in the narrative. It forces the story about the black hole being placed as a response to human wrongdoing to be a lie. If Wolfe intended this interpretation I think there would be more clues.

StoneOx17 at aol.com — 10 Jun 2008, 13:09 · follows Dave Tallman

In a message dated 6/10/2008 7:43:28 AM Eastern Daylight Time, davetallman at msn.com writes:

"I have another possible explanation for the eclipse. The exact dimensions of the Ship aren't given, but could it really be large enough to shadow the Sun and let the stars be seen like that? It would have to be almost as big as the moon. Why couldn't the eclipse be a normal one, caused by the moon?"

If the ship were a lot closer than the moon, it could be a lot smaller and shadow the sun. If it were 3000 times closer (low earth orbit), it could be 3000 times smaller, or only around a mile in diameter.

Peter

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Jeffrey Brent McBeth — 10 Jun 2008, 13:10 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Tue, Jun 10, 2008 at 03:52:47AM -0500, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

I have always thought that the Ship really was there to stage the eclipse that saved Sev's bacon. The eclipse was not a coincidence. Obviously, it is a physical impossibility for any vessel to transport or even come near a black hole, so if the Hierogrammates are the ones who put it in the sun, and regardless of when it happened, how was the deed done?

Err, not impossible at all. The easiest way to transport a black hole would be to dump a bunch of electrons into it and then use an electrical field to move it around. If you had a big enough mass and enough time, you could also just use gravity to move one around.

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over
the man who cannot read them."
-- Mark Twain

b sharp — 10 Jun 2008, 14:44 · follows Jeffrey Brent McBeth

Thalassocrat,

I am confused. Could you explain who the hiero-dudes are. Not hierodules I guess. Nor Hierogrammates. They are the humans who spread across the galaxy and who invented the hierogrammates as ideal beings/companions? They plan to storm heaven? Are hiero-dudes from after Ushas or are they related to Typhon's era diaspora? Or something else? Help!

-bsharp

Jeff Wilson — 10 Jun 2008, 15:00 · in reply to StoneOx17 at aol.com

StoneOx17 at aol.com wrote:

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davetallman at msn.com writes:

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If the ship were a lot closer than the moon, it could be a lot smaller and shadow the sun. If it were 3000 times closer (low earth orbit), it could be 3000 times smaller, or only around a mile in diameter.

That would make it only about 80 miles up, a rapidly decaying orbit to be sure. It would have to have some form of lift to let it hover in place anyway, because at orbital speeds the eclipse would only last a second or less.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

b sharp — 10 Jun 2008, 15:05 · follows Jeff Wilson

I've seen the arguments about the eclipse before. The timing of a black hole or hiero-ship caused eclipse seems too coincidental. Quite a double duty for that event....trans-universal stellar events also stopping a primitive ritual sacrifice among savages on Urth? Yes, it is our hero, but we already know Severian can't be killed, as his resurrection from having his head bashed in by the savages later shows. Why would the hieros time the crucial event to rescue Severian when he doesn't need rescuing and would be killed again fairly soon?

I've always been partial to Dave Tallman's interpretation. The scene SO echoes the Connecticut Yankee scene and Wolfe makes numerous other literary allusions through this series. Moreover, as Conciliator, Severian's emotions during crisis situations cause natural, urthly upheavals...storms, earthquakes. An eclipse seems like a reasonable next upheaval. Though

magnitudes more energy might be required than the other events I think the pleasure in alluding to Twain overcame any reservations Wolfe might have had.

-bsharp

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 10 Jun 2008, 15:16 · follows b sharp

On Wed, 11 Jun 2008 00:44:37 +1000 b sharp
<bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:
Thalassocrat,

I am confused. Could you explain who the hiero-dudes are. Not hierodules I guess. Nor Hierogrammates. They are the humans who spread across the galaxy and who invented the hierogrammates as ideal beings/companions? They plan to storm heaven? Are hiero-dudes from after Ushas or are they related to Typhon's era diaspora? Or something else? Help!

I use it loosely for the Hierogrammates, Hierarchs (like Apheta) and Hierodules as a combined group, but I guess I would usually be thinking mostly of the Hierogrammates.

I don't include the Hieros in the group; they've gone away, I think probably to heaven. I suspect the Hierogrammates of having designs on that heaven. I think the Hierarchs are probably part of the plot, but I think the Hierodules are most likely dupes (in other words I think Inire and Sev's buddies F, B & O are probably acting in good faith).

For what it's worth, the different classes do seem to match in a way the hierarchies of ancient Greek temple and cult bureaucracies, which is where the terms originate from. Hieros as priests at the top; hierogrammates as scribes, being senior bureaucrats; hierarchs being executors of ritual etc; and hierodules the slaves.

In these organisations, "hiero" or "holy" could mean just "cult/temple bureaucracy staffer". So you could have titles like "holy debt collector".

Matthew Groves — 10 Jun 2008, 15:52 · in reply to b sharp

Isn't it stated almost explicitly in the afterword that the eclipse was caused by Tzadkiel's ship? If you think the Twain references are there, they can still be there if the ship causes the eclipse rather than the moon.

Eric Ortlund — 10 Jun 2008, 16:01 · in reply to Matthew Groves

I hope I'm not going to put my foot in my mouth here . . . but if I'm thinking of the correct scene, my understanding has been that Severian himself causes the eclipse - since he is, in his own body and person, the new sun, his own body is what causes the shadow to fall, since he is standing between the sun and the natives. That's why they bow down to him.

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 10 Jun 2008, 16:30 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Tzadkiel's Ship -- *counting its sails*, is significantly bigger than a mile in diameter, at least for purposes of shadow-casting. Solar sails have to be (a) very very large and (b) quite opaque in order to be effective.

On Tue, Jun 10, 2008 at 8:00 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
StoneOx17 at aol.com wrote:

In a message dated 6/10/2008 7:43:28 AM Eastern Daylight Time,
davetallman at msn.com writes:

"I have another possible explanation for the eclipse. The exact dimensions of the Ship aren't given, but could it really be large enough to shadow the Sun and let the stars be seen like that? It would have to be almost as big as the moon. Why couldn't the eclipse be a normal one, caused by the moon?"

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That would make it only about 80 miles up, a rapidly decaying orbit to be sure. It would have to have some form of lift to let it hover in place anyway, because at orbital speeds the eclipse would only last a second or less.

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 10 Jun 2008, 19:23 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Eric Ortlund wrote:

I hope I'm not going to put my foot in my mouth here . . . but if I'm thinking of the correct scene, my understanding has been that Severian himself causes the eclipse - since he is, in his own body and person, the new sun, his own body is what causes the shadow to fall, since he is standing between the sun and the natives. That's why they bow down to him.

Even the most ignorant savages can tell the difference between an eclipse and a man's shadow. Dawn had been delayed by an eclipse. The natives knew that the sun should have been up, so they feared that what they had regarded as a boast by Severian -- that he was somehow connected with the sun and its daily comings and goings -- might be true. That is the point at which they bowed to him, *then* the sun came out and cast his shadow over them. (URTH, XLIX, 350)

In a natural eclipse, the sun doesn't come back that quickly. It was a staged event. The Ship can move out of the way much faster than the moon, and it did.

-Roy

Eric Ortlund — 10 Jun 2008, 20:22 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Eric Ortlund wrote:

I hope I'm not going to put my foot in my mouth here . . . but if I'm thinking of the correct scene, my understanding has been that Severian himself causes the eclipse - since he is, in his own body and person, the new sun, his own body is what causes the shadow to fall, since he is standing between the sun and the natives. That's why they bow down to him.

Even the most ignorant savages can tell the difference between an eclipse and a man's shadow. Dawn had been delayed by an eclipse. The natives knew that the sun should have been up, so they feared that what they had regarded as a boast by Severian -- that he was somehow connected with the sun and its daily comings and goings -- might be true. That is the point at which they bowed to him, *then* the sun came out and cast his shadow over them. (URTH, XLIX, 350)

In a natural eclipse, the sun doesn't come back that quickly. It was a staged event. The Ship can move out of the way much faster than the moon, and it did.

-Roy

Hi Roy -

I think I understand you, but, instead of a difference between an eclipse and Severian's shadow, I think the two are the same - Severian is blocking out the sun behind him with his own body. If that sounds strange . . . well, he's the new sun! I think this is a simpler theory than positing the ship being there right at the same time, and I think better fits with the way Wolfe hints at us in his own postscript to the book. Blessings!

Dave Tallman — 11 Jun 2008, 00:09 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

In a natural eclipse, the sun doesn't come back that quickly. It was a staged event. The Ship can move out of the way much faster than the moon, and it did.

You make a good point about the sudden ending of the eclipse, which also coincided with exactly when Sev needed it. I was doubtful that the Ship would come that far into the solar system, since it usually stays beyond the orbit of Dis (Pluto), but I found evidence in the text that corroborates this theory, in Urth XXVI.

Sometimes they bring the big one in a good bit closer than this," the hand detailed to guide us confided as we came aboard. "Only they can't help getting between someone's eyes and a few stars when they do..."

Getting between eyes and one star in particular (the Sun) is exactly what we need, so I'm convinced.

Jeff Wilson — 11 Jun 2008, 01:07 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Tzadkiel's Ship -- *counting its sails*, is significantly bigger than a mile in diameter, at least for purposes of shadow-casting. Solar sails have to be (a) very very large and (b) quite opaque in order to be effective.

LEO velocity is about 5 miles per second, so each second of eclipse is 5 miles worth of ship, plus the penumbra penalty (altitude times twice the tangent of the sun's arc width (0.5 degrees)). There would also need to be some means of maneuvering the entire ship within a moment or a

massive number of crew available to trim the sails in a like period of time.

The mentioned but not seen tender could also have been used, as it seems to have some indefinite capacity and size.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 11 Jun 2008, 01:08 · in reply to Matthew Groves

Matthew Groves wrote:

Isn't it stated almost explicitly in the afterword that the eclipse was caused by Tzadkiel's ship? If you think the Twain references are there, they can still be there if the ship causes the eclipse rather than the moon.

It may be a Twain reference, but there was also an historic example on February 29, 1504 involving Columbus and a lunar eclipse, from whence the story element springs.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 11 Jun 2008, 02:52 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Jeffrey Brent McBeth quoted and wrote:

I have always thought that the Ship really was there to stage the eclipse that saved Sev's bacon. The eclipse was not a coincidence. Obviously, it is a physical impossibility for any vessel to transport or even come near a black hole, so if the Hierogrammates are the ones who put it in the sun, and regardless of when it happened, how was the deed done?

Err, not impossible at all. The easiest way to transport a black hole would be to dump a bunch of electrons into it and then use an electrical field to move it around. If you had a big enough mass and enough time, you could also just use gravity to move one around.

-----<<

Neat trick, that, if the Ship can hold it below or above its decks without getting sucked in. Stipulating such a fantastic container for a baby black hole, then what? How does it get from the Ship to the center of the sun? Or failing that, if a fly-by is made and the black hole jettisoned to the surface of the sun, then what? How long does it take to eat up enough of the sun to make the textually specified difference in the temperature on Urth?

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 11 Jun 2008, 03:34 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Jeffrey Brent McBeth quoted and wrote:

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Er, wasn't it one of Typhon's children who threw "black beans on the grave of the sun"? They would have had access to several ships who could have been used to as magnetic tongs to move a small hole in, and if Wolfe is using the then-plausible Einstein-Rosen bridge idea, they could use the smaller hole to gate in a larger one from elsewhere in the galaxy, and thus leapfrog up to whatever size was necessary.

This churning of multiple black holes inside the sun (the largest being presumably the worm said to gnaw at its heart) could lead to a compacting of the interior layers, which would have a more immediate effect on the surface, letting it also shrink and thus reduce its output, since there's less surface to give off light.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 11 Jun 2008, 05:05 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

Neat trick, that, if the Ship can hold it below or above its decks without getting sucked in. Stipulating such a fantastic container for a baby black hole, then what? How does it get from the Ship to the center of the sun?

Or

failing that, if a fly-by is made and the black hole jettisoned to the surface of the sun, then what? How long does it take to eat up enough of the sun to make the textually specified difference in the temperature on Urth?

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I don't believe there is any mention at all of Typhon's children in the Urth Cycle, and the only black bean story I recall is the one told by Jonas at the very end of SHADOW, which makes no mention of the sun. Anyway, "grave of the sun" sounds like that sun is already dead. Where is the quote found?

-Roy

b sharp — 11 Jun 2008, 12:35 · follows Jeff Wilson

I feel the need to tout my interpretation of the eclipse again. By having Severian himself (subconsciously) cause the eclipse, the multiple problems of a ship-caused eclipse are eliminated. It addresses Roy C. Lackey's observation that the eclipse ended much more quickly than a natural eclipse.

I haven't heard any explanation for why the Hiero-dudes on a cosmic mission would bother parking their vehicle in an exact spot for an exact time period to perform the useless task of saving Severian's life, when he will be killed again soon and can't actually BE killed.

But I was thinking about it and came up with a couple medium-weak explanations for those convinced the eclipse was spaceship-caused:

1. The hiero-dudes needed to create the illusion Severian could control the sun because the legend of Apu Punchau (Head of the Day) was necessary to prepare Urth for the legend of the Conciliator-New Sun. Though Apu Punchau seems to have been completely forgotten by humans in Severian's time. Was this eclipse necessary for sungod worship in the future of Urth?
2. Severian had to have the name/title "Apu Punchau" to make the scene with Hildegryn and the Cumaean work in the future. I'm not sure why that would be necessary.

Are there any other reasons the eclipse is so essential the Hieros had to create it?

If not, I'll have to consider the idea of Severian causing the eclipse at least as a strong competing theory to the spaceship theory. It makes poetic sense to me that Severian's first (in Urth history) use of Conciliator/New Sun power would be to control the sun's light.

Moreover I am not in the camp that sees Severian as a contemptible dupe for the Hiero-dudes. Though they surely manipulate him and deny him knowledge at some points, I perceive they have a true reverence for him. He isn't just a tool. Since this reverence couldn't be based on his intellect or personal morality or his accidental selection as New Sun, it must be partly based on powers he has that exceed their own.

-bsharp

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Jun 2008, 15:27 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Tue, Jun 10, 2008 at 6:07 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Tzadkiel's Ship -- *counting its sails*, is significantly bigger than a mile in diameter, at least for purposes of shadow-casting. Solar sails have to be (a) very very large and (b) quite opaque in order to be effective.

LEO velocity is about 5 miles per second, so each second of eclipse is 5 miles worth of ship, plus the penumbra penalty (altitude times twice the tangent of the sun's arc width (0.5 degrees)). There would also need to be some means of maneuvering the entire ship within a moment or a massive number of crew available to trim the sails in a like period of time.

The numbers I've seen for an effective solar sail are in the range of tens of thousands of miles.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I once absend-mindedly ordered Three Mile Island dressing in a restaurant and, with great presence of mind, they brought Thousand Island Dressing and a bottle of chili sauce. -- T. Pratchett

Matthew King — 11 Jun 2008, 16:39 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I don't believe there is any mention at all of Typhon's children in the Urth Cycle, and the only black bean story I recall is the one told by Jonas at the very end of SHADOW, which makes no mention of the sun. Anyway, "grave of the sun" sounds like that sun is already dead. Where is the quote found?

Jonas's story, minus the interruption:

In the old times, the lords of this world feared no one but their own people, and to defend themselves against them built a great fortress on a hilltop to the north of the city. It was not called Nessus then, for the river was unpoisoned. Many of the people were angry at the building of that citadel, holding it to be their right to slay their lords without hindrance if they so desired. But others went out in the ships that ply between the stars, returning with treasure and knowledge. In time there returned a woman who had gained nothing among them but a handful of black beans.

She displayed the beans to the lords of men, and told them that unless she were obeyed she would cast them into the sea and so put an end to the world. They had her seized and torn to bits, for they were a hundred times more complete in their domination than our Autarch.

I had interpreted the beans as the genesis of the sea monsters Abaia, et al. It is interesting that Jonas claims this to be the almost the only story he knows.

Dave Tallman — 11 Jun 2008, 17:26 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

b sharp wrote:

I feel the need to tout my interpretation of the eclipse again. By having Severian himself

(subconsciously) cause the eclipse, the multiple problems of a ship-caused eclipse are eliminated. It addresses Roy C. Lackey's observation that the eclipse ended much more quickly than a natural eclipse.

Severian went back several years before the time when the light of the White Fountain would reach Urth. His power was weakened; we know he couldn't time-travel, though he could do minor healings. I don't think he had enough power to pull off a lunar eclipse. He wasn't even thinking of doing such a thing at the time.

I haven't heard any explanation for why the Hiero-dudes on a cosmic mission would bother

parking their vehicle in an exact spot for an exact time period to perform the useless task of saving Severian's life, when he will be killed again soon and can't actually BE killed.

He could be killed if he died then, so long before the White Fountain's light that he "lost all count of years" (Urth L). By the time the light reached him his body would be nothing but bones. There would be no revival. To decode what happened we need to trace a historical rewrite.

1) The Hierogrammates find that Sev has disappeared. He is no longer available to help build the new Ushas, or supply his genes to new generations. This is a catastrophe for their plans.

2) They investigate and eventually question Joturna, finding out that Sev has gone into the past.

3) They know the outer limits of the time range he could get to. "Flying his time, he runs til he must halt; then halts he here because he cannot run." (Urth L).

4) They comb history for anomalies until they find the sudden use of Inca arches. (Sev made a building with arches before he died, and taught the hetmen how). (Urth XLIX).

5) They realize Sev needs a miracle to stay alive until the White Fountain light will let him return to the future.

6) They stage the eclipse.

Next stage: history develops with the legend of Apu-Punchau. He is strangled by his people when he attempts to leave, but the light of the White Fountain allows him to revive and stay with them. Millenia later, Hildegryn learns of Apu-Punchau and enlists witches to bring him back. Sev is involved and the merge happens. The Hierogrammates learn of this incident and figure it out; this is a new disaster that must be fixed to prevent the loss of Sev. F, B, and O go back to that time and split off a new eidolon. Problem solved.

With the early knowledge of who Apu-Punchau is, the investigation is simpler when Sev disappears from Ushas. But they still must stage the eclipse.

Jeff Wilson — 11 Jun 2008, 18:29 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

On Tue, Jun 10, 2008 at 6:07 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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The numbers I've seen for an effective solar sail are in the range of tens of thousands of miles.

I don't think we can square that figure with Sev's account of the masts and sails early in URT. Also, regular solar sails of even that scale aren't adequate to propel the Ship out of the solar system in the time frame given. Ounces of thrust per acre of sail vs a mass large enough to have signifigant surface gravity yields excruciatingly tiny acceleration.

oblate777 at speakeasy.net — 11 Jun 2008, 19:14 · follows Jeff Wilson

On Wed Jun 11 14:29 , Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> sent:

I don't think we can square that figure with Sev's account of the masts and sails early in URTH. Also, regular solar sails of even that scale aren't adequate to propel the Ship out of the solar system in the time frame given. Ounces of thrust per acre of sail vs a mass large enough to have significant surface gravity yields excruciatingly tiny acceleration.

Perhaps the sail technology used on the Ship is more exotic than a simple solar sail. For example, I point to the "mirrors" used by Father Inire.

rob t.

Andy Robertson — 11 Jun 2008, 20:06 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes writes:

The numbers I've seen for an effective solar sail are in the range of tens of thousands of miles.

Cordwainer Smith's solar sails spring to mind. In the framing story of "The Lady who sailed The Soul" there is a casual note that at one time the sails of one interstellar ship accidentally shaded the whole Earth.

Mr Wolfe, are you ****sure**** you never read Cordwainer Smith???

- hartshorn

David Duffy — 11 Jun 2008, 22:03 · in reply to oblate777 at speakeasy.net

On Wed, 11 Jun 2008, oblate777 at speakeasy.net wrote:

Perhaps the sail technology used on the Ship is more exotic than a simple solar sail. For example, I point to the "mirrors" used by Father Inire.

Especially given that the sailors mention it is quite common to get apports generated by the sails

David Duffy.

Roy C. Lackey — 12 Jun 2008, 00:05 · follows David Duffy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Tzadkiel's Ship -- ***counting its sails***, is significantly bigger than a mile in diameter, at least for purposes of shadow-casting. Solar sails have to be (a) very very large and (b) quite opaque in order to be effective.

Dan'l is correct. The Ship has seven sides, the decks covered by "masts beyond counting". (URTH, I, 2) Some of the masts are "separated by tens of leagues at least". (I, 6) Many sails are improbably ***huge***:

"Rising over the topmost sail as the New Sun of Urth might someday rise above the Wall of Nessus (yet far, far larger and more beautiful than even

the New Sun can ever be, just as that smallest and uppermost sail was an entire continent of silver, compared to which the mighty Wall of Nessus, a few leagues in height and a few thousand long, might have been the tumbledown fence of a sheepfold),[...] (XIV, 103)

The Ship's overall size has to be on a planetary scale.

This eclipse business just isn't that hard. All the Ship has to do is travel in a straight line between the sun and Urth, at the appropriate distance to achieve eclipse, and veer to one side to uncover the sun at the right moment.

-Roy

Matthew Groves — 12 Jun 2008, 00:20 · in reply to b sharp

But it is not until the eclipse is **over** that Severian's shadow falls upon them. (That is to say, he eclipses the sun, but not in the way you mean.) In order for a person to create a proper eclipse -- in which the darkness is comparable to night or twilight, I suspect he would have to be outside of Earth's atmosphere, and still fat enough to create an eclipse at such a distance. So, **really** fat. Also, during the time of the eclipse, Severian is moving around a lot and gesticulating while acting out his story for the natives. The Tzadkiel's ship explanation is infinitely more plausible.

On 6/11/08, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

I feel the need to tout my interpretation of the eclipse again.

b sharp — 12 Jun 2008, 03:45 · follows Matthew Groves

At the beginning of UotNS, while on the Ship deck, Severian specifically notes his weight has been reduced by 7/8. So Roy's assertion that the Ship is of planetary size is a bit exaggerated but not by so much. A bit smaller but of similar size to our Moon, and thus surely capable of causing an eclipse.

The lunar eclipse used by Columbus to intimidate the natives on February 29, 1504 is a good mention by Jeff Wilson. That event could have inspired both Twain and Wolfe. But of course, Severian's is not that one, being a solar eclipse.

Since I am quite in the minority in attributing the eclipse to Severian himself, I am probably wrong about it. The Ship's Moon size is evidence by itself. The comment that the big Ship is capable of getting deeper into the solar system but would pass between eyes and stars seems like it could be an auctorial clue that the ship caused the eclipse. Believing the assertion that Severian has gone too far into the past and is powerless at the time of his trial is also evidence against my interpretation.

But I still retain a sense I could be right. Something just seems missing if Severian only twice uses his power to affect nature in a cataclysmic way. Nobody, certainly not Severian, seems capable of accurately predicting when, where and how his power will manifest itself from his personal being. He might

have his
full powers always. In the afterward, Wolfe notes that a "thoughtful" reader can figure out what
caused the
eclipse. Most seem to take him at his literal word and think about the ship. But I always saw that
notation
as being a bit sarcastic, meaning that very little thought is needed to figure out what large body
could be
used to cause a solar eclipse.

But I am probably wrong on this one ;-).

-bsharp

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 12 Jun 2008, 04:03 · follows b sharp

On Thu, 12 Jun 2008 13:45:56 +1000 b sharp
<bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

But I still retain a sense I could be right. Something just seems
missing if Severian only twice uses his power
to affect nature in a cataclysmic way. Nobody, certainly not
Severian, seems capable of accurately
predicting when, where and how his power will manifest itself from

his personal being. He might have his
full powers always. In the afterward, Wolfe notes that a
"thoughtful" reader can figure out what caused the
eclipse. Most seem to take him at his literal word and think about

the ship. But I always saw that notation
as being a bit sarcastic, meaning that very little thought is
needed to figure out what large body could be
used to cause a solar eclipse.

It's certainly worth thinking about non-Ship explanations.

The Apu Punchauan villagers surely think that Sev has done a magic dance and chant routine to
banish the sun, then bring it back. It'd be neat if somehow they were correct. It would also be
neat if he somehow is responsible for wounding the Old Sun as well as bringing/being the New
Sun.

I've mused over whether Sev could have caused the black hole at this point, maybe by drawing
power from it and causing ummm some kind of core collapse or something [waving hands], but
I don't see anything in the text to make the idea work.

In the narrative you have Sev doing his little charade and dance routine, which the people
surely see as him doing a magic dance to banish the sun, then bring it back.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 12 Jun 2008, 04:47 · follows thalassocrat at
nym.hush.com

On Thu, 12 Jun 2008 10:05:12 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

"Rising over the topmost sail as the New Sun of Urth
might someday rise above the Wall of Nessus (yet far, far
larger and more beautiful than even the New Sun can ever

be, just as that smallest and uppermost sail was an entire continent of silver, compared to which the mighty Wall of Nessus, a few leagues in height and a few thousand long, might have been the tumbledown fence of a sheepfold),[...]
(XIV, 103)

So the wall of Nessus is more than 4,000 miles long (if "a few" = "three or more" & we're talking about Roman-style leagues).

Not really related to the eclipse issue, but how seriously are we supposed to take Sev and other characters' sizing estimates?

The Great Wall of China is about 4,000 miles long, but that's not a city wall.

If a 4,000 mile wall enclosed a circle, the diameter would be about 1,300 miles and the enclosed area roughly the size of India.

More likely, I suppose, it encloses an area along the length of Gyll? Say a rough rectangle about 2,000 miles long and 100 miles wide. That gives an area about the size of Spain.

Nessus is a big place!

Roy C. Lackey — 12 Jun 2008, 05:09 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

b sharp wrote:

At the beginning of UotNS, while on the Ship deck, Severian specifically notes his weight has been reduced by 7/8. So Roy's assertion that the Ship is of planetary size is a bit exaggerated but not by so much. A bit smaller but of similar size to our Moon, and thus surely capable of causing an eclipse.<<<

These are the facts:

Dan'I said: "Tzadkiel's Ship -- *counting its sails*, is significantly bigger than a mile in diameter, at least for purposes of shadow-casting. Solar sails have to be (a) very very large and (b) quite opaque in order to be effective." [his emphasis]

I backed him up with dimensions cited from the text, and said: "The Ship's overall size has to be on a planetary scale."

Both our statements concerned the Ship's physical size, not its mass, so Sev's weight is irrelevant.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 12 Jun 2008, 07:25 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Andrew wrote:

compared to which the mighty Wall of Nessus, a few leagues in height and a few thousand long, might have been the tumbledown fence of a sheepfold),[...]
(XIV, 103)

So the wall of Nessus is more than 4,000 miles long (if "a few" = "three or more" & we're talking about Roman-style leagues).

Not really related to the eclipse issue, but how seriously are we supposed to take Sev and other characters' sizing estimates?

A league is set at "about three miles" in an appendix to CLAW, and even if you set "a few" to equal the more conservative three, you get some pretty wild figures. Frankly, when you look at all the scattered comments about the Wall and apply pencil and paper to the numbers, nothing works out right, no matter how you look at it. Believe me, it's been tried!

Even just looking at its height, nine miles is absurd. For instance, the Wall is not supposed to be visible from Citadel Hill (unless you climb a tower), but the distance from the river (further upstream) to the Inn near the Sanguinary Field, which is near the Wall, was easily walked by Autarch Severian and his buddies, there and back, in much less than a day. If the Wall was really that tall, there would have been nowhere in the city that it couldn't be seen from even ground level, much less a hill.

More likely, I suppose, it encloses an area along the length of Gyll? Say a rough rectangle about 2,000 miles long and 100 miles wide. That gives an area about the size of Spain.

The city followed the river upstream for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, so if the Wall encloses it, it has to be much longer than it is wide.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 12 Jun 2008, 07:46 · in reply to oblate777 at speakeasy.net

oblate777 at speakeasy.net wrote:

On Wed Jun 11 14:29 , Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> sent:

I don't think we can square that figure with Sev's account of the masts and sails early in URTH. Also, regular solar sails of even that scale aren't adequate to propel the Ship out of the solar system in the time frame given. Ounces of thrust per acre of sail vs a mass large enough to have significant surface gravity yields excruciatingly tiny acceleration.

Perhaps the sail technology used on the Ship is more exotic than a simple solar sail.

Yes of course it is, it has to be. The problem is, when the author starts making up non-physical stuff, and doesn't stop with Wells' single improbability, where **does** he stop? We need some sort of connection to physical reality to judge the inventiveness of a SF story, lest it slump into undifferentiated fantastic speculation.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 12 Jun 2008, 08:13 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Tzadkiel's Ship -- **counting its sails**, is significantly bigger than a mile in diameter, at least for purposes of shadow-casting. Solar sails have to be (a) very very large and (b) quite opaque in order to be effective.

Dan'l is correct. The Ship has seven sides, the decks covered by "masts beyond counting". (URTH, I, 2) Some of the masts are "separated by tens of leagues at least". (I, 6) Many sails are improbably **huge**:

"Rising over the topmost sail as the New Sun of Urth might someday rise above the Wall of Nessus (yet far, far larger and more beautiful than even the New Sun can ever be, just as that smallest and uppermost sail was an entire continent of silver, compared to which the mighty Wall of Nessus, a few leagues in height and a few thousand long, might have been the tumbledown fence of a sheepfold),[...]
(XIV, 103)

The Ship's overall size has to be on a planetary scale.

I don't think this is supported by "Masts sprout from every deck, a hundred times taller than the Flag kepp of the Citadel," or by Severian being able to leap clear the distance from the deck to the startup wihtin a few minutes of indulging himself. (At least, he does not remark on the passage of time or become concerned over needing to eat or drink.)

This eclipse business just isn't that hard. All the Ship has to do is travel in a straight line between the sun and Urth, at the appropriate distance to achieve eclipse, and veer to one side to uncover the sun at the right moment.

A straight line with a sudden veer require the removal of gravity and inertia from the picture. Not that the Yesodis can't do that if they need to, but why bother with sails at all if you can do that?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 12 Jun 2008, 08:25 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

At the beginning of UotNS, while on the Ship deck, Severian specifically notes his weight has been reduced by 7/8. So Roy's assertion that the Ship is of planetary size is a bit exaggerated but not by so much. A bit smaller but of similar size to our Moon, and thus surely capable of causing an eclipse.

Gravity doesn't dictate size, rather mass and distance dictate gravity. An asteroid can have a gravity of 1g is you pack it itghtly so that you can be withing a few meters of the whole thing. Likewise, the Ship has about 1/8 gravity at most, but Severian writes that he is much closer to the center of its mass that people on the ground are to Urth's center.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Lane Haygood — 12 Jun 2008, 08:26 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

A straight line with a sudden veer require the removal of gravity and inertia from the picture. Not that the Yesodis can't do that if they need to, but why bother with sails at all if you can do that?

Could be a question of resource management. Removing gravity and inertia would doubtless take vast amounts of fuel or power. Maybe the Hieros only do that when they really need to.

Best,
Lane

Jeff Wilson — 12 Jun 2008, 08:33 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Lane Haygood wrote:

A straight line with a sudden veer require the removal of gravity and inertia from the picture. Not that the Yesodis can't do that if they need to, but why bother with sails at all if you can do that?

Could be a question of resource management. Removing gravity and inertia would doubtless take vast amounts of fuel or power. Maybe the Hieros only do that when they really need to.

Then it would be more efficient still to send a team of agents armed with turkey basters down to Echopraxia.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 12 Jun 2008, 09:05 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

Dan'l is correct. The Ship has seven sides, the decks covered by "masts beyond counting". (URTH, I, 2) Some of the masts are "separated by tens of leagues at least". (I, 6) Many sails are improbably *huge*:

"Rising over the topmost sail as the New Sun of Urth might someday rise above the Wall of Nessus (yet far, far larger and more beautiful than even the New Sun can ever be, just as that smallest and uppermost sail was an entire continent of silver, compared to which the mighty Wall of Nessus, a few leagues in height and a few thousand long, might have been the tumbledown fence of a sheepfold),[...]
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Then your quarrel is with Wolfe, not me. The text says what it says. Like I said before, the Wall of Nessus just can't be that tall and not be visible from ground level virtually anywhere in the city, either.

This eclipse business just isn't that hard. All the Ship has to do is travel in a straight line between the sun and Urth, at the appropriate distance to achieve eclipse, and veer to one side to uncover the sun at the right moment.

A straight line with a sudden veer require the removal of gravity and inertia from the picture. Not that the Yesodis can't do that if they need to, but why bother with sails at all if you can do that?

Indeed. And why bother manning and operating the Ship at all when they can use a "dimensional portal" (your term) to move people (and maybe planets) from Yesod to Bria, and time-walk to anywhen?

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 13 Jun 2008, 05:32 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

Dan'l is correct. The Ship has seven sides, the decks covered by "masts beyond counting". (URTH, I, 2) Some of the masts are "separated by tens of leagues at least". (I, 6) Many sails are improbably *huge*:

"Rising over the topmost sail as the New Sun of Urth might someday rise above the Wall of Nessus (yet far, far larger and more beautiful than even the New Sun can ever be, just as that smallest and uppermost sail was an entire continent of silver, compared to which the mighty Wall of Nessus, a few leagues in height and a few thousand long, might have been the tumbledown fence of a sheepfold),[...]
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Then your quarrel is with Wolfe, not me. The text says what it says. Like I said before, the Wall of Nessus just can't be that tall and not be visible from ground level virtually anywhere in the city, either.

Perhaps a hill or other rise of land intervenes?

This eclipse business just isn't that hard. All the Ship has to do is travel in a straight line between the sun and Urth, at the appropriate distance to achieve eclipse, and veer to one side to uncover the sun at the right moment.

A straight line with a sudden veer require the removal of gravity and inertia from the picture. Not that the Yesodis can't do that if they need to, but why bother with sails at all if you can do that?

Indeed. And why bother manning and operating the Ship at all when they can use a "dimensional portal" (your term) to move people (and maybe planets) from Yesod to Briah, and time-walk to anywhen?

Food for thought, indeed.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Dave Tallman — 13 Jun 2008, 11:07 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote:

The worldwide upheavals may have been considered necessary to do away with Abaia, Erebus, and their ilk. It makes sense that something catastrophic would be required, and you'd want to do them as a batch to prevent the survivors of a first strike to grow stronger by taking up the resources of their dead rivals.

The Ushas upheavals probably didn't destroy Abaia. Juturna, speaking as the White Fountain arrives, says he is still planning to "tame" (enslave) the human race (Urth XLIII). The religion predicted that the New Sun would "kill Abaia" (Sword XXI), but that was probably wishful thinking. It is unlikely that a flood would kill a being whose element is water. (However, it was a setback for Abaia's plans in some way, or he wouldn't have sent Idas to try to wreck Severian's mission on the Ship).

Severian accepts this fact a moment later. He realizes that Abaia will be left to trouble humanity, like the anvil in the metaphor of the aquastor Malrubius (in Citadel XXIV). The existence of an adversary is necessary for the advancement of the human race into Heiros. Severian finds Juturna is a name to be feared about a century later when he returns to Ushas (Urth LI).

I'd like to weigh in on why Juturna saves Sev from drowning. She says "It hasn't yet occurred. It will, because you spoke." The motive for saving him can't be in hopes of influencing him not to bring the New Sun; she's seen that he will do it.

In Citadel XXVIII, Sev says "I am not the first Severian... thus it was that... the undine thrust me up when it seemed I must drown. (Yet surely the first Severian did not; something had already begun to reshape my life)." Juturna must realize the same thing: even if she doesn't save him he will not drown. (Or he may have drowned and become an aquastor, as some have theorized about the skull Sev finds underwater -- I like that idea). Something kept him on the path of his destiny at the very beginning. If the Heirogrammates didn't intervene until they saw him become autarch once on his own, then I suggest that divine intervention caused that first aquastor.

By planning to save him as he says, Juturna increases her chances of getting out of the House Absolute alive. It's the reason Sev orders her to be spared. Knowing that Sev owes her something, she can try some further temptations later. (One such temptation is showing him the path to the past, where he was very nearly killed).

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 13 Jun 2008, 14:25 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Fri, Jun 13, 2008 at 4:07 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
The Ushas upheavals probably didn't destroy Abaia. Juturna, speaking as the White Fountain arrives, says he is still planning to "tame" (enslave) the human race (Urth XLIII). The religion predicted that the New Sun would "kill Abaia" (Sword XXI), but that was probably wishful thinking. It is unlikely that a flood would kill a being whose element is water. (However, it was a setback for Abaia's plans in some way, or he wouldn't have sent Idas to try to wreck Severian's mission on the Ship).

It isn't just a flood; new continents are thrust up. If Abaia, who is pretty huge, couldn't get out of the way in time, he would be left a rotting corpse on one of the new continents.

Which might explain the immense ribcage over New Crobuzon, come to think of it

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I once absend-mindedly ordered Three Mile Island dressing in a restaurant and, with great presence of mind, they brought Thousand Island Dressing and a bottle of chili sauce. -- T. Pratchett

Jeff Wilson — 13 Jun 2008, 14:48 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Jeff Wilson wrote:

The worldwide upheavals may have been considered necessary to do away with Abaia, Erebus, and their ilk. It makes sense that something catastrophic would be required, and you'd want to do them as a batch to prevent the survivors of a first strike to grow stronger by taking up the resources of their dead rivals.

The Ushas upheavals probably didn't destroy Abaia. Juturna, speaking as the White Fountain arrives, says he is still planning to "tame" (enslave) the human race (Urth XLIII). The religion predicted that the New Sun would "kill Abaia" (Sword XXI), but that was probably wishful thinking. It is unlikely that a flood would kill a being whose element is water.

Please recall, it's not a conventional top-down raining flood, but involves oceans slopping out of their basins to cover the land, and eventually the land turning over, continents sinking and new ones rising to take their place, which implies many of the deep trenches where Abaia and his forces might lurk will close up or be flushed out. Everything that lives on Urth has a near-certain chance to die, and it's not likely there's a special Yesodi effort to preserve Abaia in his own botanic garden.

(However, it was a setback for Abaia's plans in some way, or he wouldn't have sent Idas to try to wreck Severian's mission on the Ship).

Given the Ship's nature, we have no way to be sure when Idas was sent or from which version of Severian's history they boarded.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Adam Thornton — 13 Jun 2008, 14:52 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Jun 13, 2008, at 9:25 AM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Which might explain the immense ribcage over New Crobuzon, come to think of it

Except that Bas-Lag is flat.

I think it's also carried on the back of a giant turtle, and there are some elephants involved, but that's just speculation.

Adam

Roy C. Lackey — 14 Jun 2008, 07:53 · follows Adam Thornton

Dave Tallman wrote:

I'd like to weigh in on why Juturna saves Sev from drowning. She says "It hasn't yet occurred. It will, because you spoke." The motive for saving him can't be in hopes of influencing him not to bring the New Sun; she's seen that he will do it.

Right. Because you seem to have done homework in the archives, I assume you have read what I said on this subject a couple years ago and won't repeat it. Looking back on that stuff, maybe I was reasoning from a false premise.

In Citadel XXVIII, Sev says "I am not the first Severian... thus it was that... the undine thrust me up when it seemed I must drown. (Yet surely the first Severian did not; something had already begun to reshape my

life)." Juturna must realize the same thing: even if she doesn't save him he will not drown. (Or he may have drowned and become an aquastor, as some have theorized about the skull Sev finds underwater -- I like that idea). Something kept him on the path of his destiny at the very beginning. If the Heiogrammates didn't intervene until they saw him become autarch once on his own, then I suggest that divine intervention caused that first aquastor.

Setting aside for now the part about the first Severian (aka "Sev1" in a related past discussion) and the drowning stuff, maybe I was wrong to assume that Juturna experienced time in reverse order, as B, F, & O seem to do. That is, though our Sev (aka "Sev2") spoke to her in the throne room as the Conciliator and she had no memory of having saved him from drowning in the Gyoll, his words may not have been prophesy in the usual sense; in this case the "future" action of a person living backwards in time.

It is easier to believe that Juturna experiences time in the usual order, which avoids some otherwise logical difficulties I have pointed out before. She doesn't remember saving him because she hasn't done it yet, not because she is living her life backwards; it is because she is experiencing the fact of Sev having brought the New Sun. With the New Sun a reality that can't be undone (*), she is bowing to logical necessity. That is, she *will* use the Corridors of Time to go back to when he was a boy and save him, regardless of her personal or political inclinations, *because* that is in fact what happened. The fact that the Conciliator is standing there telling her so is the incontrovertible proof.

Her action will close a time loop that began that day in the Gyoll, which is what Sev meant when he said that "those who walk the corridors walked back to the time when he was young, and my own story -- as I have given it here in so many pages -- began." (CITADEL, XXXVIII) He meant that literally. His manuscript begins with that day at the Gyoll, never mind that the first two chapters are in reverse order of events. The "he" in the quote is Sev1; the other two pronouns refer to Sev2.

(*) After Ushas is born there cannot be an infinite number of excursions in Urth's past to try to stop it; at some point all such efforts must cease.

By planning to save him as he says, Juturna increases her chances of getting out of the House Absolute alive. It's the reason Sev orders her to be spared. Knowing that Sev owes her something, she can try some further temptations later. (One such temptation is showing him the path to the past, where he was very nearly killed).

Juturna wasn't worried about dying in the House Absolute; she could have avoided the whole scene by not going there in the first place at considerable effort. But it's the other end of the time loop. Questions of volition become problematic when time travel is involved, but it comes with the territory. <g>

Back to Sev1 and that day at the river. This business is even more complicated than it appears at first glance. To begin with, there are at least four factions who can walk the Corridors; the Hiero-dudes (to use Andrew's term); Abaia & Co. (including Juturna); the Green Man and Sev1, to say nothing of Sev2, with each faction having conflicting interests. Part of it depends on whether Sev1 went to Ushas and won a New Sun or not. Some say yes, some no. If he did, trying to sort out who did what to whom, and why, gets hairy. But I think the main when was that day at the river. There is also a question as to whether Sev1 and Sev2 maintained discreet lives after their paths diverged when someone intervened in Sev1's life, given that Sev1 became a time walker, or if they were the same person who lived for a week as the Conciliator in Typhon's time.

This needs its own thread.

-Roy

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 14 Jun 2008, 11:14 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Sat, 14 Jun 2008 17:53:02 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

[Cogent things about about Juturna, Sev1, Sev2 etc]

Just reiterating & summarising my theory:

Juturna goes back not just to save Sev but to drag him under, tangled in her hair (which he mistakes for the trailing roots of the water lillies or whatever they are).

The effect of this is inter alia is to delay his return from the river and so bring about his meeting with Vodalus. Also, I imagine, she does stuff to Sev's brain so that he will be drawn to Vodalus, and so on (noting that Sev has heard almost nothing about Vodalus at the time he meets him & that his sudden allegiance is ahrd to explain otherwise).

This sets up the divergence between Sev1 and Sev2 - as Sev (ie, Sev2) says, the graveyard scene is what sets everything else in motion, which is the reason why he starts his narrative with it.

Wihout it, I believe, Sev1 leaves the Guild with Triskele, in effect acting out Sev2's musing about a Triskele heading north to the wars with a new master.

SilkHorn's meeting with Sev at the end of SS puts things back on a Sev1-track. No Sev2, no New Sun, no Juturna going back to interfere ...

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 14 Jun 2008, 11:36 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

BTW, did anybody ever make anything more of Juturna's line:

"Catch Catodon ... Cast out his conation."

It atually looks a bit like a cryptic crossword clue, but that doesn't help me much. It's easy enough to gloss it, but why Catodon (sperm whale?), why express herself in this way etc.

Also: what were she and Baldanders doing in Valeria's audience chamber anyway? Even if you can think of reasons why they might want to warn her, what good would such a warning do?

Dave Tallman — 14 Jun 2008, 13:08 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

BTW, did anybody ever make anything more of Juturna's line:

"Catch Catodon ... Cast out his conation."

It atually looks a bit like a cryptic crossword clue, but that

doesn't help me much. It's easy enough to gloss it, but why Catodon (sperm whale?), why express herself in this way etc.

The phrase is in parallel to "He's tried to tame you instead," so I take it as a poetic expansion of the same concept. Abaia wants to rule humanity, and cast out their contation (human will), making them like the Ascians. The phrase may be worded this way to refer to Hobbes' Leviathan. Hobbes argued for an absolute monarchy to prevent anarchy. Abaia may be thinking along similar lines. Leviathan is the untameable sea monster from Job 41, which has sometimes been identified with the sperm whale.

Also: what were she and Baldanders doing in Valeria's audience chamber anyway? Even if you can think of reasons why they might want to warn her, what good would such a warning do?

Juturna was probably offering the undine's gift of water-breathing in exchange for loyalty to Abaia. If the autarch was under Abaia's control he would achieve a partial victory. He could claim legitimate rule over the survivors of the Commonwealth.

Baldanders said "What I am about to say is not important. But I will say it in order that you will listen to what is important afterward." He was interrupted by the arrival of Juturna and then the sea, so he never got to his main point. I suspect he wanted something from the House Absolute, and my guess is the Book of Mirrors. "Many will seek to flee by that road if the pelagic argosy sights land," the old autarch said. Valeria lacked the memories of the autarchs, so Baldanders might have been offering to show her how to use the Book to escape in order to obtain it for his own study and use.

Dave Tallman — 14 Jun 2008, 13:56 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

This sets up the divergence between Sev1 and Sev2 - as Sev (ie, Sev2) says, the graveyard scene is what sets everything else in motion, which is the reason why he starts his narrative with it.

I prefer to call him "SevN" instead of Sev2. It is clear that his life was rewritten multiple times. I think Wolfe tries to avoid time paradoxes. He usually thinks through the way that something could have happened without a time-loop, and then applies knowledge from that pass to modify the next one. For example, he had Sev construct arches so that he could be found and helped in the far past, rather than rely on a paradoxical time-loop where he is only found because of his interaction with Apu-Punchau.

Wihout it, I believe, Sev1 leaves the Guild with Triskele, in effect acting out Sev2's musing about a Triskele heading north to the wars with a new master.

SilkHorn's meeting with Sev at the end of SS puts things back on a Sev1-track. No Sev2, no New Sun, no Juturna going back to interfere. I found your theory in the archives recently, and I like it. It makes sense that Wolfe would have planted clues to what Sev's life would have been like without any interference. I don't think that the LS/SS novels were conceived that far in advance, though. I think Wolfe took the opportunity of the new series to repair an old ending which no longer satisfied him. As the whole set of books is now, it strengthens your case that the NS ending was an unhappy one.

Adam Thornton — 14 Jun 2008, 17:09 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Jun 14, 2008, at 2:53 AM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:
This needs its own thread.

I'd like to propose that every character in the entire saga is actually some iteration of Severian.

I don't think I want to *defend* that proposition, necessarily.

Adam

Dave Tallman — 14 Jun 2008, 17:32 · in reply to Adam Thornton

I'll accept this as the new thread even though the first theory is a joke. I'll try to propose a self-consistent set of rewrites of Sev's life around the drowning incident.

Sev1. (thalassocrat version) didn't nearly drown and got home that night without incident. He heals and cares for Triskele. When the dog is discovered, he runs north to the war and becomes a soldier. He does not become autarch; Baldanders probably does and no New Sun is brought.

Sev2. Identified as a good candidate for the New Sun because the story of his healed dog got around. His ancestry is checked and he is found to be a grandson of Fechin (b sharp theory). Hierogrammates begin to influence his life to make him an autarch.

Sev3. Abaia wants Sev stopped, so Juturna drowns him by catching him in her hair.

Sev4. Hierogrammates make an aquastor of Sev and save him. The woman who offered him soup was working for them -- the food was to help him stabilize but she misjudged the temperature. This Sev glimpsed the face of Juturna and believes she saved him.

SevN. Many rewrites later, Sev has brought the New Sun. He tells Juturna she saved him, and she goes along with this in hopes of tempting him in the future.

Roy C. Lackey — 15 Jun 2008, 05:21 · follows Dave Tallman

Andrew wrote:

This sets up the divergence between Sev1 and Sev2 - as Sev (ie, Sev2) says, the graveyard scene is what sets everything else in motion, which is the reason why he starts his narrative with it.

Without it, I believe, Sev1 leaves the Guild with Triskele, in effect acting out Sev2's musing about a Triskele heading north to the wars with a new master.

SilkHorn's meeting with Sev at the end of SS puts things back on a Sev1-track. No Sev2, no New Sun, no Juturna going back to interfere ...

Without the Conciliator, there would have been no Claw, no order of Pelerines to guard it. If no Pelerines, what was the monastic order Catherine ran away from that led to her imprisonment by the Guild, which led to both Severians having been born into their clutches in the first place?

The biggest problem I have with this theory is that it violates the integrity of the Urth Cycle as a stand-alone work, and it turns the sense of it upside-down in doing so. It also dooms Urth to the ice-future, the "do-nothing" future that Wolfe has disparaged.

-Roy

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 15 Jun 2008, 06:25 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Sun, 15 Jun 2008 15:21:34 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rlackey at stic.net> wrote:

Without the Conciliator, there would have been no Claw, no order
of
Pelerines to guard it. If no Pelerines, what was the monastic
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Catherine ran away from that led to her imprisonment by the Guild,
which led
to both Severians having been born into their clutches in the
first place?

Maybe I'm missing your point, but surely you have that problem however you think of Sev1?
Unless you believe that he became the Conciliator too, which I can't see at all.

On the other hand, I don't think it's too much to imagine a parallel to the Pelerines, based on
something other than the New Sun religion.

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it upside-down in doing so. It also dooms Urth to the ice-future,
the
"do-nothing" future that Wolfe has disparaged.

On the first point, I don't agree. Even taking BOTNS alone, without UOTNS, I think we are at
least invited to imagine that maybe it's not going to be all beer and skittles when the New Sun
arrives.

Perhaps the biggest hint: Sev himself, a torturer with no hint of Christ-likeness apart from his
recapitulation of parts of Jesus' life: what kind of salvation can we expect from him? The
inversion is there, hidden if at all by its obviousness.

Also, the cosmology propounded by aquastor-Malrubius - what is remotely attractive about it?
Dt Talos' play. The hints in the stories of Gabriel and the small angel and Gabriel versus the
cock, that perhaps the shadowy higher beings are not connected to the Increate.

The most creepy sign: Sav praying at the Pelerines' altar, but in the end praying only to himself.
By the end of UOTNS we know that Sev is the Conciliator. Put the two together and you have at
least a broad hint that there's nothing very holy going on here.

I think that Wolfe intended this to be a "horror story" from the start, but even if I'm wrong he at
least allowed plenty of scope for ambivalence.

On the second point, I take Wolfe as referring to Urth society as depicted in UOTNS, dwindling
on a resource-depleted world. But in the larger context, this is not the condition of humanity as
a whole - it's already spread, it's not degenerating on Urth. It doesn't need Urth reborn to save
humanity from the ice death.

Dave Tallman — 15 Jun 2008, 09:24 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

Also, the cosmology propounded by aquastor-Malrubius - what is
remotely attractive about it?

This is the core point. I believe many readers do find this cosmology has a certain epic beauty. "We shall not go to the stars again until we go as a divinity" reminds me of the Omega Point of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. With each cycle the Heiros shape better Heirogrammates, and the Heirogrammates shape better Heiros. This could be the working out of the will of God in Wolfe's universe.

The most creepy sign: Sav praying at the Pelerines' altar, but in the end praying only to himself. By the end of UOTNS we know that Sev is the Conciliator. Put the two together and you have at least a broad hint that there's nothing very holy going on here.

In an interview Wolfe once said, "I don't think of Severian as being a Christ figure; I think of Severian as being a Christian figure. He is a man who has been born into a very perverse background, who is gradually trying to become better." I don't think Sev's prayer is at all creepy. He is praying based on his conception of a God who has graced a human life in a miraculous way, and who can say if he is wrong about that?

I said in another message that the Triskele theory strengthens your case -- it does to a certain extent, but not unambiguously. Just because Sev has a longer relationship with Triskele does not make it certain that he won't go on to bring the New Sun as before.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 15 Jun 2008, 11:38 · follows Dave Tallman

On Sun, 15 Jun 2008 19:24:12 +1000 Dave Tallman
<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
I don't think Sev's prayer is at all
creepy.
He is praying based on his conception of a God who has graced a
human
life in a miraculous way, and who can say if he is wrong about
that?

My point is just that it isn't God he reaches with that prayer; it's himself.

(Citadel XIV) "My mind was among the starry wastes, far from Urth ... and it seemed to me that that to which I spoke was farther still - I had come, as it were, to the walls of the universe, and now shouted through the walls to one who waited outside ... I seemed to see ... through the chink in the universe to a new universe bathed in golden light, where my listener knelt to hear me. ... I could see a face and folded hands, and the opening, like a tunnel, running deep into a human head ... I was whispering into my own ear ..."

Now you can take that (at least) two ways. Maybe "the Outsider" hears him, and refers the prayer on Sev himself, indicating that Sev is indeed some kind of ersatz-Jesus. To me, that is an overwhelmingly unlikely.

Much more likely, this is an indication that the New Sun religion begins and ends with Sev. It has no connection to the true "Outsider".

brunians at brunians.org — 15 Jun 2008, 13:03 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Wolfe told me that Severian's powers are his as a manifestation of the Body of Christ.

At the 2002 WorldCon.

.

On Sun, 15 Jun 2008 19:24:12 +1000 Dave Tallman
<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

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overwhelmingly unlikely.

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begins and ends with Sev. It has no connection to the true
"Outsider".

David Wells — 15 Jun 2008, 17:31 · follows Dave Tallman

What a fascinating discussion. I have never really understood exactly how Juturna's intervention
and the Sev1/2/N divergence worked (about a decade ago my wild and unsubstantiated theory
that Severian had drowned and unknowingly self-resurrected via the "Claw" was robustly, and
rightly, criticised by this forum).

On Sat, 14 Jun 2008 12:09:50 -0500 Adam Thornton adam at io.com wrote:

I'd like to propose that every character in the entire saga is actually some iteration of Severian.

This, though not meant seriously, is interesting and inventive. It reminds me (warning: off topic)
of Richard Feynman's comment in his lecture accepting his Nobel Prize for Physics (see
http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/physics/laureates/1965/feynman-lecture.html) that "I
received a telephone call one day at the graduate college at Princeton from Professor Wheeler,
in which he said, "Feynman, I know why all electrons have the same charge and the same
mass" "Why?" "Because, they are all the same electron!". The idea being that a single electron
bounces back and forth from the Big Bang to the Big Crunch, becoming a positron going
backwards in time when it "bounces".

Or maybe not.

...but the thing that most puzzles me about Sev1/2/N is that it appears so unclear in what
way(s) the interested factions actually benefit or lose out when SevN brings the New Sun. Is this
because Wolfe is commenting on the uncertain effects of political machinations (and thus, by

implication, that their most important effect is on the egos of the machinators)? Or was it supposed to be clear whether the NS was a happy or unhappy ending (for whomever) and Wolfe didn't really succeed in explaining this? (As Dave Tallman seems to be suggesting)?

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Roy C. Lackey — 15 Jun 2008, 18:00 · follows brunians at brunians.org

Andrew quoted and wrote:

Without the Conciliator, there would have been no Claw, no order of Pelerines to guard it. If no Pelerines, what was the monastic order Catherine ran away from that led to her imprisonment by the Guild, which led to both Severians having been born into their clutches in the first place?

Maybe I'm missing your point, but surely you have that problem however you think of Sev1? Unless you believe that he became the Conciliator too, which I can't see at all.

If neither version of Sev became the Conciliator, then no one did. The circumstances of his birth were contrived, and some power or powers had been orchestrating the event long before that, possibly for generations, for the express purpose of producing the man who would bring a new sun. Time travel was used to do it.

Would Ymar have established the autarchy without the Conciliator? Doubtful, because if the Conciliator hadn't killed the Prefect, the Guild would not have changed. Would Talos even have written the play? No, because Canog could not have heard the Conciliator's speech or written his book upon which the play was based. The Curtain wall would not have been breached, which had allowed young Sev to sneak off to play and dream in that mausoleum that would probably not exist with those particular symbols above its door. The Conciliator religion was a necessary component of the circumstances governing and influencing both Severians' formative years.

If you break the causal chain that stretches from the arrival of the New Sun and Ushas, all the way back to the Conciliator in Typhon's time and forward again to Ushas, you radically alter the circumstances that put Sev1 in the Matachin tower. Without a Conciliator, Sev1 almost certainly would not have been there to bring a dead dog back to life.

On the other hand, I don't think it's too much to imagine a parallel to the Pelerines, based on something other than the New Sun religion.

The biggest problem I have with this theory is that it violates the integrity of the Urth Cycle as a stand-alone work, and it turns the sense of it upside-down in doing so. It also dooms Urth to the ice-future, the "do-nothing" future that Wolfe has disparaged.

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not going to be all beer and skittles when the New Sun arrives.

I agree.

Perhaps the biggest hint: Sev himself, a torturer with no hint of Christ-likeness apart from his recapitulation of parts of Jesus' life: what kind of salvation can we expect from him? The inversion is there, hidden if at all by its obviousness.

Also, the cosmology propounded by aquastor-Malrubius - what is remotely attractive about it? Dt Talos' play. The hints in the stories of Gabriel and the small angel and Gabriel versus the cock, that perhaps the shadowy higher beings are not connected to the Increate.

The most creepy sign: Sav praying at the Pelerines' altar, but in the end praying only to himself. By the end of UOTNS we know that Sev is the Conciliator. Put the two together and you have at least a broad hint that there's nothing very holy going on here.

Back to the dog. Where did the supernatural ability to raise the dead come from, an ability not even the god-like Hierogrammates possessed? You can argue that Sev2 got it from the White Fountain he fathered in Yesod, and that by the time of his boyhood had completed most of its journey to Urth, even if he was unaware at the time of his mystical connection to it. How else could Sev1 have done it? The alternative is to believe that Sev was born with the raw power, which makes him a candidate for divinity.

I think that Wolfe intended this to be a "horror story" from the start, but even if I'm wrong he at least allowed plenty of scope for ambivalence.

On the second point, I take Wolfe as referring to Urth society as depicted in UOTNS, dwindling on a resource-depleted world. But in the larger context, this is not the condition of humanity as a whole - it's already spread, it's not degenerating on Urth. It doesn't need Urth reborn to save humanity from the ice death.

Right, but Urth is still the ancestral home of the race, and as such is important to the designs of both the Hierogrammates and the Increate.

-Roy

brunians at brunians.org — 15 Jun 2008, 18:39 · in reply to David Wells

Severian drowns in the river Gyll.

Everything else that happens in BOTNS and UOTNS are hallucinations that he undergoes while dying.

.

What a fascinating discussion. I have never really understood exactly how Juturna's intervention and the Sev1/2/N divergence worked (about a decade ago my wild and unsubstantiated theory that Severian had drowned and unknowingly self-resurrected via the "Claw" was robustly, and rightly, criticised by this forum).

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This, though not meant seriously, is interesting and inventive. It reminds me (warning: off topic) of Richard Feynman's comment in his lecture accepting his Nobel Prize for Physics (see http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/physics/laureates/1965/feynman-lecture.html) that "I received a telephone call one day at the graduate college at Princeton from Professor Wheeler, in which he said, "Feynman, I know why all electrons have the same charge and the same mass" "Why?" "Because, they are all the same electron!". The idea being that a single electron bounces back and forth from the Big Bang to the Big Crunch, becoming a positron going backwards in time when it "bounces".

Or maybe not.

...but the thing that most puzzles me about Sev1/2/N is that it appears so unclear in what way(s) the interested factions actually benefit or lose out when SevN brings the New Sun. Is this because Wolfe is commenting on the uncertain effects of political machinations (and thus, by implication, that their most important effect is on the egos of the machinators)? Or was it supposed to be clear whether the NS was a happy or unhappy ending (for whomever) and Wolfe didn't really succeed in explaining this? (As Dave Tallman seems to be suggesting)?

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Adam Thornton — 15 Jun 2008, 18:41 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Jun 15, 2008, at 1:39 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
Severian drowns in the river Gyll.

Everything else that happens in BOTNS and UOTNS are hallucinations that he undergoes while dying.

Which makes the Gyll Owl Creek, of course.

Adam

Dave Tallman — 15 Jun 2008, 20:10 · in reply to David Wells

This, though not meant seriously, is interesting and inventive. It reminds me (warning: off topic) of Richard Feynman's comment ... that "I received a telephone call one day at the graduate college at Princeton from Professor Wheeler, in which he said, "Feynman, I know why all electrons have the same charge and the same mass" "Why?" "Because, they are all the same electron!". The idea being that a single electron bounces back and forth from the Big Bang to the Big Crunch, becoming a positron going backwards in time when it "bounces".

Or maybe not.

Interesting. This very theory is referred to in "Seven American Nights." The narrator takes it as an established fact in his contemporary physics (about a century in our future).

Dave Lebling — 15 Jun 2008, 22:21 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Severian is not actually /the/ Conciliator. The Conciliator, as should be obvious to anyone who knows Wolfe's religious background, is Christ. In the timeline of the first Severian, the Conciliator was a dim memory of Christ and his religion a dim memory of Christianity. His mother could still run away from an order of nuns, because nuns existed before Sev's turn as a "Conciliator-like" figure.

Severian, as a "Christ-like" figure, renewed these dim memories and caused that aspect of society and his own personality to be slightly different.

It was all part of the hierodules' plan.

-- Dave Lebling, aka vizcacha

b sharp — 16 Jun 2008, 12:55 · follows Dave Lebling

Dave Lebling says:

Severian is not actually /the/ Conciliator. The Conciliator, as should be obvious to anyone who knows Wolfe's religious background, is Christ.

I'm pretty convinced that there has never been a Jesus on Urth (and that is a major underlying theme of the series). Hence the Norse name "Urth" and the many allusions to pre-Christian gods and monsters ruling Urth long after the equivalent time period of Jesus on Earth. The occasional reference to roods or Bible verses can be attributed to souvenirs brought from a more spiritually advanced univiverse (Yesod?) to Briah by people (mostly Father Inire) able to make such travels.

Dave Tallman writes:

I prefer to call him "SevN" instead of Sev2. It is clear that his life was rewritten multiple times.

I lean against accepting the SevN concept because I think iterations of Severian are finite- tied to the 5 coffins in Sev's mausoleum. Two of them open means two have been released, with three more to go, if needed. Was Sev1 Ymar? or Severian in a different time-line or universe (Abaddon?).

I admit this is a literary interpretation, not scientific. I think Wolfe puts avatars of himself in his work and much of the most difficult stuff to decipher comes from his own personal experiences and thoughts, distorted and veiled. I see the mausoleum as a 5HoC reference....Number 5 and Severian seem very similar to me.....maybe Wolfe at the time of writing BotNS figured 5 literary avatars of himself would be enough.

Dave Tallman — 16 Jun 2008, 15:30 · follows b sharp

b sharp wrote:

I'm pretty convinced that there has never been a Jesus on Urth (and that is a major underlying theme of the series). Hence the Norse name "Urth" and the many allusions to pre-Christian gods and monsters ruling Urth long after the equivalent time period of Jesus on Earth. The occasional reference to roods or Bible verses can be attributed to souvenirs brought from a more spiritually advanced univiverse (Yesod?) to Briah by people (mostly Father Inire) able to make such travels.

On the other hand, every citizen in the Commonwealth is named for a saint, and the legend of the martyrdom of St. Catherine is essentially the same. I'm convinced it's a post-Catholic culture. Jesus may have been forgotten, but many elements of Christianity remain. (There are also altars, candles, shewbread, etc.).

I lean against accepting the SevN concept because I think iterations of Severian

are finite- tied to the 5 coffins in Sev's mausoleum. Two of them open means two have been released, with three more to go, if needed. Was Sev1 Ymar? or Severian in a different time-line or universe (Abaddon?).

In my way of counting, every use of knowledge from the future to change the past produces another rewrite of Sev's history, and there is evidence for many such interventions in his life. I'd never heard that interpretation of the multiple coffins. It's an interesting speculation.

Roy C. Lackey — 16 Jun 2008, 19:28 · follows Dave Tallman

Dave Lebling wrote:

Severian is not actually /the/ Conciliator. The Conciliator, as should be obvious to anyone who knows Wolfe's religious background, is Christ. In the timeline of the first Severian, the Conciliator was a dim memory of Christ and his religion a dim memory of Christianity. [snip]

Huh. My second thought after reading that was about the scene depicted on an inner door of the Old Autarch's whorehouse: "It had a stained-glass insert showing the Temptation." (SHADOW, IX, second page) Three possibilities for the subject matter come to mind; Eve with the "apple" in the Garden; Jesus in the wilderness; Severian on Mt. Typhon. This last can be reasonably dismissed because it would not happen until more than a year in the future; only revived Typhon and Sev would be there, and only Sev would live to tell the tale. So what did the picture show?

-Roy

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 17 Jun 2008, 00:06 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Tue, 17 Jun 2008 05:28:26 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rlackey at stic.net> wrote:

Huh. My second thought after reading that was about the scene depicted on an inner door of the Old Autarch's whorehouse: "It had a stained-glass insert showing the Temptation." (SHADOW, IX, second page) Three possibilities for the subject matter come to mind; Eve with the "apple" in the Garden; Jesus in the wilderness; Severian on Mt. Typhon. This last can be reasonably dismissed because it would not happen until more than a year in the future; only revived Typhon and Sev would be there, and only Sev would live to tell the tale. So what did the picture show?

I think "the Temptation" has to refer to something like it would in our world, which is certainly the Temptation of Eve. In Sev's world, the Temptation of Meschiane. At least on the basis of Dr Talos' play, you can have this story without Christianity.

b sharp — 17 Jun 2008, 03:01 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Thalassocrat writes:

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I must agree that in this situation the play's the thing! But if I remember Eschatology and Genesis correctly, the temptation is for Meschia, to which he succumbed with Jahi in the first creation and to which he probably will not succumb with the Contessa in the impending creation. Either way, the story would appear in Urth's legends thanks to Canog and a visual depiction would make an appropriate decoration for a brothel. Better than a Severian-Typhon image, anyway.

Jeff Wilson — 17 Jun 2008, 03:13 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

Thalassocrat writes:

I think "the Temptation" has to refer to something like it would in our world, which is certainly the Temptation of Eve. In Sev's world, the Temptation of Meschiane. At least on the basis of Dr Talos' play, you can have this story without Christianity.

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A scene depicting a tall, dark stranger with a dashing cape and sword in parley with a naked body builder might not be out of place if the brothel caters to minority tastes.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 17 Jun 2008, 07:42 · follows Jeff Wilson

On Tue, 17 Jun 2008 13:01:15 +1000 b sharp
<bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

I must agree that in this situation the play's the thing! But if I remember Eschatology and Genesis correctly, the temptation is for Meschia, to which he succumbed with Jahi in the first creation and to which he probably will not succumb with the Contessa in the impending creation. Either way, the story would appear in Urth's legends thanks to Canog and a visual depiction would make an appropriate decoration for a brothel. Better than a Severian-Typhon image, anyway.

Doesn't one of the demons say something about "the woman tempted me" not working this time around? I just assumed that Dr Talos was working a variation on a story which closely

resembled the ones in Genesis. But I suppose even with that his original could have had a Jahi tempting Meschia rather than serpent tempting Meschiane, and I guess the erotic-mural possibilities are maybe better that way (except for the hopefully very small minority interested in snake- sex).

Dave Tallman — 18 Jun 2008, 04:07 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

It isn't just a flood; new continents are thrust up. If Abaia, who is pretty huge, couldn't get out of the way in time, he would be left a rotting corpse on one of the new continents.

Which might explain the immense ribcage over New Crobuzon, come to think of it

I'm not sure Abaia is that much larger than the undines. In Citadel XXXVII, the steersman said he heard the voices of undines coming up the Gyoll, along with a deeper voice that gave orders, "go-and-do-that-and-this-and-that." If that was Abaia, he's not so big and immobile that he can't come up the river. If so, it seems like he could get out of the way of an earthquake. If Juturna could survive, so could he.

Jeff Wilson — 18 Jun 2008, 04:34 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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The enormous Blue Whale's voice is louder than a jet engine and can be heard through water over distances of hundreds of miles, perhaps thousands in the absence of motorized ships, and this was documented and popularized significantly before the publication of BOTNS. The presence of Abaia's voice doesn't require the presence of Abaia.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Dave Tallman — 18 Jun 2008, 11:55 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

<<mailto:urth%40lists.urth.net?Subject=Re%3A%20%28urth%29%20What%27s%20So%20Grea%20About%20Ushas%3F&In-Reply-To=%3C4858906F.1060708%40io.com%3E>>Jeff

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That's a clever work-around, but I don't think so. The steersman said that the women's voices were "not loud but big." The description implies a conversation (Citadel XXXVII): "They would say 'so-and-so-and-so.' Then... the deeper voice'd say 'go-and-do-that-and-this-and-that.' I heard the women's voices three times and the other voice twice."

In Urth XLIII, Juturna speaks of Abaia's intentions in the present tense, without any hint that he has died or is about to. She says "Abaia would make of us a great people," not "Abaia would have made of us a great people."

Do you know of anything in the text that suggests Abaia is such a size that he couldn't come up the river? The claim of the undines to be his brides and sweethearts in Shadow XV also suggests they are size-compatible. The legendary Abaia was an enormous magical eel that lived in a lake, so that doesn't imply an immobile size either.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 18 Jun 2008, 13:36 · follows Dave Tallman

On Wed, 18 Jun 2008 21:55:29 +1000 Dave Tallman
<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

Do you know of anything in the text that suggests Abaia is such a size
that he couldn't come up the river? The claim of the undines to be
his
brides and sweethearts in Shadow XV also suggests they are
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that
lived in a lake, so that doesn't imply an immobile size either.

Jonas confirms Sev's belief that Abaia et al are as big as mountains, not just the size of big ships. (Somewhere in Claw.)

I think they survive. Baldanders tells Valeria that things living in the ocean certainly will, and he seems to know stuff. He also warns of Erebus following the flood to do [bad stuff].

Roy C. Lackey — 18 Jun 2008, 17:55 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:
Jonas confirms Sev's belief that Abaia et al are as big as
mountains, not just the size of big ships. (Somewhere in Claw.)

Chapter VIII. "You were correct when you said Erebus and Abaia are as great as mountains, and I admit that I was surprised you knew it. Most people lack the imagination to conceive of anything so large, and think them no bigger than houses or ships. Their actual size is so great that while they remain on this world they can never leave the water--their own weight would crush them."

-Roy

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 18 Jun 2008, 18:02 · in reply to Dave Tallman

All that is required is that he be at least as large as the undines, and get trapped when the new continent arises.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

On Wed, Jun 18, 2008 at 4:55 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

<mailto:urth%40lists.urth.net?Subject=Re%3A%20%28urth%29%20What%27s%20So%20Great%20About%20Ushas%3F&In-Reply-To=%3C4858906F.1060708%40io.com%3E>Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Fred Kiesche — 18 Jun 2008, 18:15 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Funny you should float that theory...In the "Paladin of Shadows" series by John Ringo (military-oriented "technothriller"), the main character foils multiple terrorist attacks, destroys a sex-trade ring, starts a military fiefdom in Georgia (the country), has lots of wild sex, etc. Over several books.

Early on in the first book, he spots a kidnapping by some terrorists and attempts to foil it by climbing into the wheel wheel of a jumbo jet. So Ringo has said the action that follows might have happened...or it might all be the delusions of the dying main character and when the plane lands in Syria, they're going to be mighty puzzled by the frozen dead guy in the wheel well.

F.P. Kiesche III

"When you send a man out with a gun, you create a policymaker. When his ass is on the line, he will do whatever he needs to do...And if the implications of that bothers you, the time to do something about it is before you decide to send him out."?(David Drake, Caught in the Crossfire)

Blogging at TexasBestGrok!

--- On Sun, 6/15/08, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

From: brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> Subject: Re: (urth) The Severian

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Jun 2008, 19:12 · in reply to Fred Kiesche

Ambrose Bierce wrote a great short story on this theme, one of his truly remarkable Civil War stories.

This spy was hanged, the rope broke, he fell into a river, fought his way out and back home, was reunited with his sweetheart.....

This spy was hanged.

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From: brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Severian Behind Curtain #3

Fred Kiesche — 18 Jun 2008, 19:56 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Yep, Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, IIRC. Made into a great short film, which was, again IIRC, used when "Twilight Zone" (the original) tried switching to a one hour format during one season.

F.P. Kiesche III

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From: brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Severian Behind Curtain #3

To: recursive_loop at yahoo.com, "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Date: Wednesday, June 18, 2008, 3:12 PM

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From: brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Severian Behind Curtain #3
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Sunday, June 15, 2008, 2:39 PM

Severian drowns in the river Gyll.

Everything else that happens in BOTNS and UOTNS are hallucinations that he undergoes while dying.

Urth Mailing List

To post, write urth at urth.net

Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

Adam Thornton — 18 Jun 2008, 20:09 · in reply to Fred Kiesche

On Jun 18, 2008, at 2:56 PM, Fred Kiesche wrote:

Yep, Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, IIRC. Made into a great short film, which was, again IIRC, used when "Twilight Zone" (the original) tried switching to a one hour format during one season.

Which is why I said, days ago, "Thus proving the Gyll is Owl Creek."

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Jun 2008, 20:57 · in reply to Fred Kiesche

Yes, I believe that was its name.

.

Yep, Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, IIRC. Made into a great short film, which was, again IIRC, used when "Twilight Zone" (the original) tried switching to a one hour format during one season.

F.P. Kiesche III

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From: brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Severian Behind Curtain #3

Jeff Wilson — 19 Jun 2008, 03:26 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Do you know of anything in the text that suggests Abaia is such a size that he couldn't come up the river? The claim of the undines to be his brides and sweethearts in Shadow XV also suggests they are size-compatible. The legendary Abaia was an enormous magical eel that lived in a lake, so that doesn't imply an immobile size either.

Juturna also claims Severian could enjoy their company, despite his obviously smaller scale. This implies there are a variety of sizes of undines, and/or possibly male undines previously seduced from the land and given renewed growth similar to Baldanders. Idas would seem to confirm that undines grow and can have voices that pass for males. Ergo, the deeper voice speaking with the women doesn't necessarily have to be from Abaia, even if it is from a river-sized speaker.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 19 Jun 2008, 06:04 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Ambrose Bierce wrote a great short story on this theme, one of his truly remarkable Civil War stories.

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This spy was hanged.

The Tim Robbins film "Jacob's Ladder" is a much longer and less rewarding (except for Danny Aiello and the Disco-Cthulhu scene) treatment of the same idea.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Dave Tallman — 19 Jun 2008, 06:26 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

Jonas confirms Sev's belief that Abaia et al are as big as mountains, not just the size of big ships. (Somewhere in Claw.)

All right, I'll accept that Jonas knows what he's talking about. The simplest explanation for the conversation the steersman overheard is that the deep voice was a commander subordinate to Abaia, not Abaia himself.

I think they survive. Baldanders tells Valeria that things living in the ocean certainly will, and he seems to know stuff. He also warns of Erebus following the flood to do [bad stuff].

Even if Abaia didn't survive, Juturna and other sea people seem to believe in his agenda and they are capable of causing trouble. The new world of Ushas will have its "anvil."

David Wells — 19 Jun 2008, 18:31 · follows Jeff Wilson

brunians at brunians.org
Severian drowns in the river Gyll.

Everything else that happens in BOTNS and UOTNS are hallucinations that he

undergoes while dying.

I wonder whether Wolfe's publisher has considered pitching this to him in the interests of a Continuing Franchise:

The Recycling of the Apprentice

I

Resurrection and Retching

I coughed again and choked. Another wad of dark tangled fibers emerged with the stinking water.

It had all seemed so real, every sight, smell and taste remaining changeless in my mind. It seemed possible that I had experienced an incredibly detailed presentiment of my future. I could see a reflection in the brown water, someone standing over me and pumping the liquid from my lungs. Despite the indistinct nature of the image I began to feel sure that he was wearing a mask, when suddenly the pressure was released. When I, the torturer's apprentice Severian, finally arose I could see only the rose bushes that lined this part of the river's edge, hiding it from general view.

This had not appeared in my visions and I was unsure what it might signify. I considered whether my life might already have diverged from what I had so recently seen and already felt certain it would be my joy and curse never to forget.

I wondered whether the guard would still be present to admit me through the gate of the necropolis.

newt ;-)

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Adam Thornton — 19 Jun 2008, 18:35 · in reply to David Wells

On Jun 19, 2008, at 1:31 PM, David Wells wrote:

The Recycling of the Apprentice

I

Resurrection and Retching

There's a truly vile pun here about rebooting, but I am too gentlemanly to....damn.

Adam

O'Donnell, Tim BOSI — 10 Jul 2008, 14:50 · follows Dave Tallman

Hi,

Tim here, read the solar cycle there for the first time about 6 months ago and have re-read a few times since while working through the archives.

I am almost up to real-time in the archives (thank God) but when I saw the post below I figured it was time to wade in.

For all those who think that the Hieros were in some way evil and wanted to destroy Urth I have one question; why did they need Severian?

The idea of bad guys who are evil enough to kill millions but polite enough to ask permission first kind of amuses me.

If the honest intention of the hieros had been to destroy Urth for purposes other than those stated I think they would have just done it.

Looking forward to many a discussion!

Tim

On Fri, 06 Jun 2008 16:38:33 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net
<<http://lists.urth.net/listinfo.cgi/urth-urth.net>>> wrote:

I still don't get the destruction of Urth as a punishment. According to the Hiero-dude-ish propaganda, the punishment has already happened - humanity beaten back down to a primitive state and barred from the worlds (at least on Urth), and (presumably) the sun deliberately wounded to keep Urth-humanity down. Sev is supposed to be an "epitome" who may bring the punishment to an
end. If he succeeds, a New Sun will come, and humanity will flourish once again, and be allowed back into space.

This propaganda runs in various forms all the way from the official New Sun dogma of Sev's youth, through eidolon-Malrubius' revelations to him, to the gates of Yesod.

[...]

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Paul B — 10 Jul 2008, 15:48 · in reply to O'Donnell, Tim BOSI

Sure, I'll take a quick stab at this, being of the aforementioned "Hierogrammates are not as good as they seem" persuasion. They admit to wanting to condition humanity to become the Hieros. This conditioning can come in all sorts of forms, and the spiritual is certainly not to be discounted given how secular Urth is. My contention is that they need a mystical account of what they've done to Urth for it to matter, like a certain other flood, for which they recruit the mostly unwitting Severian to act as a mystic and write The Book of the New Sun as a mystical testament to what otherwise would be a pretty secular and unpleasant occurrence.

Don't forget that Urth isn't the only human-inhabited planet, and as the Anchorite mentions if they wanted to save the population there were less murderous ways to do it - planetary evacuation in Ragnarok scenario. I believe this suggests that they instead wanted to do something else to the population, and Severian's mystical roles as Apu Punchau, the Conciliator, and the Sleeper may well have something to do with it. I see him as a social engineering tool.

Curious about others' opinions though, myself.

Paul

On Thu, Jul 10, 2008 at 10:50 AM, O'Donnell, Tim (BOSI) <Tim.O'Donnell@bankofscotland.ie> wrote:
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Tim

On Fri, 06 Jun 2008 16:38:33 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey" <***rclackey at

O'Donnell, Tim BOSI — 10 Jul 2008, 15:55 · follows Paul B

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Curious about others' opinions though, myself.

Paul

I guess my problem with that is - why tell the humans that the Hieros are going to wipe out the planet?

Just cause the flood anyway and then tell the survivors and those repopulating the Earth that it was a natural disaster.

Then you could instil in the people the idea that the Hieros were the ultimate saviours of man by helping them post-flood.

I am not a Catholic and have no particular axe to grind but any other explanation of the Hieros seems unnecessary to me.

The Hieros are a higher order of imperfect vessels attempting to become like God.
It doesn't mean that their solution was perfect, but that in no way means they are evil.

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Paul B — 10 Jul 2008, 16:06 · in reply to O'Donnell, Tim BOSI

The fundamental moral facts in this case are that 1.) we know they can save the population of Urth and 2.) they choose not to. This makes any outcome morally suspect according to most ethical frameworks. As long as 1.) and 2.) are facts, the Hierogrammates cannot be good guys.

Incidentally, if I remember correctly as far as terminology goes the Hieros are an ascended race that the Hierogrammates (aliens) need as their own creators.

Paul

On Thu, Jul 10, 2008 at 11:55 AM, O'Donnell, Tim (BOSI) <Tim.O'Donnell at bankofscotland.ie <Tim.O%27Donnell at bankofscotland.ie>> wrote:
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Green, Dublin 2

Jeff Wilson — 10 Jul 2008, 16:44 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

The fundamental moral facts in this case are that 1.) we know they can save the population of Urth and 2.) they choose not to. This makes any outcome morally suspect according to most ethical frameworks. As long as 1.) and 2.) are facts, the Hierogrammates cannot be good guys.

I'm stuck by the parallel to the original Trek episode, "Empath", where the crusty, mean aliens torture McCoy within a whisker of death to see if the mute healing empath woman can/will cure him at the cost of her own life, before deciding to use their limited resources to save the her planet instead of others in danger.

Remember that the Hierogrammates are long-lived aliens from another dimension with rather fluid individualism, as at least some of them merge and split off intelligent parts of the greater whole. This and the whole time travel issues can give them such a skew outlook or moral and ethical values that they can be grim benefactors while still pushing humanity's evil buttons early and often. C.S. Lewis might compare them to parents adopting a wounded war orphan from some distant land and forcing them to undergo painful medical procedures without explanation because they don't yet share a common language, lest the child die before one or the other can learn.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Paul B — 10 Jul 2008, 17:03 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

It seems like you're challenging point 1.)

However, remember that the Hierogrammates have performed stellar engineering, and have the ability to time travel to boot. They are not likely to be resource constrained, and they are shown to be able to evacuate Urth as further proof. The examples you give are only interesting in a constrained scenario.

It is the contention of many, and I'd bet the author to be one of them, that "ethics" is not a strictly human concept. The only ethical system according to which the thing the Hierogrammates are doing is a good thing is utilitarianism - which has more flaws than most. If they wanted to be moral in any other sense, they'd have to try harder.

On Thu, Jul 10, 2008 at 12:44 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
Paul B wrote:

The fundamental moral facts in this case are that 1.) we know they can save the population of Urth and 2.) they choose not to. This makes any outcome morally suspect according to most ethical frameworks. As long as 1.) and 2.) are facts, the Hierogrammates cannot be good guys.

I'm stuck by the parallel to the original Trek episode, "Empath", where the crusty, mean aliens torture McCoy within a whisker of death to see if the

mute healing empath woman can/will cure him at the cost of her own life, before deciding to use their limited resources to save the her planet instead of others in danger.

Remember that the Hierogrammates are long-lived aliens from another dimension with rather fluid individualism, as at least some of them merge and split off intelligent parts of the greater whole. This and the whole time travel issues can give them such a skew outlook or moral and ethical values that they can be grim benefactors while still pushing humanity's evil buttons early and often. C.S. Lewis might compare them to parents adopting a wounded war orphan from some distant land and forcing them to undergo painful medical procedures without explanation because they don't yet share a common language, lest the child die before one or the other can learn.

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> <<http://www.io.com/%7Ejwilson>> >

Jeff Wilson — 10 Jul 2008, 17:37 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

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Okay, they evacuate everyone from Urth, then what? Where do they put the people? How do they get out of being responsible for them until the end of time? If they are responsible for them until the end of time, how do they justify withholding special treatment for the other zillion worlds of humanity? It's the problem of Israel all over again.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 10 Jul 2008, 18:48 · follows Jeff Wilson

O'Donnell, Tim (BOSI) wrote:

Hi,

Tim here, read the solar cycle there for the first time about 6 months ago and have re-read a few times since while working through the archives.

I am almost up to real-time in the archives (thank God) but when I saw the post below I figured it was time to wade in.<<

[snip]

Welcome, Tim!

Just to maintain proper attribution: I was not the author of the post you attributed to me.

On Fri, 06 Jun 2008 16:38:33 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at

b sharp — 10 Jul 2008, 19:39 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Paul B posts:

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I think there is a large gap in the broad exposition of your argument, that being that we don't need a science fiction story to find a legend of a God who has the power to stop all war, genocide, disease and child rape but chooses not to. Extending your argument would seem to demand either that Gene Wolfe feels the Judeo-Christian God is morally bankrupt or that Gene Wolfe is an atheist (or both). I don't think either is true.

I think any intelligent, thinking Christian eventually is troubled by the classic problem of an omniscient, omnipotent God who allows evil to flourish. I suspect the Hierogrammates and their relationship with the Increate are an attempt by Gene Wolfe to reconcile the contradiction (while injecting a healthy dose of science to explain religion).

-bsharp

Lane Haygood — 10 Jul 2008, 19:56 · in reply to b sharp

Now we've strayed into my territory (philosophy!).

I think that the analysis given of the Hierogrammates is too one-sided, ethically. We're assuming that morality works on a broadly utilitarian basis: e.g., it is somehow better to save the population of Urth than let it pass away.

Rather, if we look at the moral actions internally, we ask whether it is morally right for Severian to bring the New Sun, not on the basis of what effects it might have, but whether that act was right in and of itself. Analogizing to Biblical morality, look at the use of Noah's Flood to wash away what passed for a degenerate Earth/Urth. I'm no Catholic, so I don't know if there is a standard dogmatic theodicy that is accepted in response to the problem of evil, but I think that the majority-Christian view on that argument is the "God has his reasons" theodicy. In other words, it is unquestionable and axiomatic that God does only good things. So sending the Flood (make of that what you will) is a good act. Even if we cannot understand how it is good, if God has his reasons for it, they may be beyond what we can understand, being finite mortals and all

Then again, the Hieros don't suffer from God's disability in this case, as it were. They're not perfect beings, so they don't have to always act perfectly good. They may see it necessary to do evil in order to do some greater good, so they may accept that Severian must destroy Urth to get to Ushas. After all, this is eschatology and genesis we're talking about here, death and rebirth. And perhaps we're guilty of imposing a mortal, linear-time-bound morality upon beings that are not so bound. Maybe we view death and destruction as "bad" in and of themselves, when really they're just a necessary step along the way to birth/rebirth?

Lane

On Jul 10, 2008, at 2:39 PM, b sharp wrote:

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Paul B — 10 Jul 2008, 22:35 · in reply to b sharp

I don't understand the difficulty in holding a race of aliens, even an advanced race, to a moral standard.

On Thu, Jul 10, 2008 at 3:39 PM, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

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That, or perhaps more reasonably my argument would demand that the Hierogrammates aren't God. They aren't, being created by the Hieros (posthumans). The Problem of Evil, to which you're alluding to here, doesn't apply to them in Wolfe's world so there's no problem.

I think any intelligent, thinking Christian eventually is troubled by the classic problem of an omniscient, omnipotent God who allows evil to flourish. I suspect the Hierogrammates and their relationship with the Increate are an attempt by Gene Wolfe to reconcile the contradiction (while injecting a healthy dose of science to explain religion).

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I don't think the Hierogrammates have any different a relationship with God than the Hiero humans do, as both are created - one by the other, no less, according to Wolfe. Who is this "Increate" person, anyway?

Wolfe can logically both worship a God and condemn a race of aliens playing god.

Incidentally, the Problem of Evil has never had an answer besides "stop asking stupid questions", which is less than satisfactory in my mind. However, I'm not Wolfe.

Paul

Paul B — 10 Jul 2008, 22:50 · in reply to Lane Haygood

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Then again, the Hieros don't suffer from God's disability in this case, as it were. They're not perfect beings, so they don't have to always act

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Lane

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Jeff Wilson — 11 Jul 2008, 01:11 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

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The difficulty is in agreeing on the units of moral judgment. A Hierogrammate may be a race unto themselves and destroy an intelligent individual whose actions they dislike the way you or I destroy itchy nerve fibers by scratching ourselves or remove warts from each other's bodies.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 11 Jul 2008, 01:15 · in reply to Paul B

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Lane Haygood — 11 Jul 2008, 02:49 · in reply to Paul B

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Paul B — 11 Jul 2008, 03:13 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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That would be "on individual *human* life." Life in general will benefit enormously from the coming of Ushas, returning to the world-wide range where it had flourished in eons past.

And this right here would in fact be a utilitarian argument - the greater good is achieved (assuming Ushas is actually so great, but that's irrelevant for the moment). However, "murder is wrong" is not utilitarian, which is what I was saying before. It can be a general outcome of several moral systems.

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> <<http://www.io.com/%7Ejwilson>> >

Paul B — 11 Jul 2008, 03:19 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Sure, moral relativism can solve any ethical difficulty, if by "solve" one means "circumvent". However, the reason it might be less interesting to pursue here is precisely due to the nature of the author whose worlds, in all likelihood due to his personal beliefs, have mentions of absolute Truth and hence an absolute Morality to boot. The Increate or the Outsider or what have you is not compatible with moral relativism.

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Paul B — 11 Jul 2008, 03:36 · in reply to Lane Haygood

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The reason why human concepts of morality might not apply to the Hieros goes back to my residual Kantianism. For humans, our experience of the world is always subject the conditions for sensibility, space and time. That is, we _need_ time to be linear and run one way, or else our way of representing the world goes to bunk. But how does that apply to Hierodules/-grammates? We know that they are not similarly bound by the linear flow of time as humans are. Thus, the human moral fear of death, and our value judgment of death as bad are because death represents the end, or cessation of life. But for beings moving the opposite direction (Barbatus, etc.) or those capable of moving in any direction through the Atrium or Madregot might have a different feeling about death. So while we regard the putative murder of the Urthlings as an immoral act, to them it might be the height of morality because it paves the way for rebirth, or that worldly death is not something they need fear.

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I mentioned in my response to Jeff why I don't think it's proper, or at least fun, to consider moral relativism. If nothing else, it's more fun to consider a problem than to dismiss it. The destruction

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It's I suppose a consistent viewpoint that the Hierogrammates are good guys and Severian's following them unquestioningly is harmless. Thus, for example, when instead of taking the opportunity to question Apheta about what's actually going on he just does what he always does to all women he ever meets, it can be seen as a mostly harmless vice (though perhaps not quite worthy of the EPITOME OF HUMANITY). "Consistent" is about the highest praise I can give to this sort of interpretation though. However while Severian's character flaws might be surprising in his position as ambassador of a supposedly reformed humanity, they are certainly very fitting in an alternative position of puppet. It's just a matter of which perspective one finds more compelling.

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And as for Sev being a moral agent, well, we _all_ are moral agents, whether we're conscious of our status as such. And I don't necessarily read Severian's lack of introspection or analysis of his own actions as being an inherent blindness in his person, but from the tone he takes he seems to be attempting to give as objective a history as he can, not a memoir-ish analysis of his own life.

It's I suppose a consistent viewpoint that the Hierogrammates are good guys and Severian's following them unquestioningly is harmless. Thus, for example, when instead of taking the opportunity to question Apheta about what's actually going on he just does what he always does to all women he ever meets, it can be seen as a mostly harmless vice (though perhaps not quite worthy of the EPITOME OF HUMANITY). "Consistent" is about the highest praise I can give to this sort of interpretation though. However while Severian's character flaws might be surprising in his position as ambassador of a supposedly reformed humanity, they are certainly very fitting in an alternative position of puppet. It's just a matter of which perspective one finds more compelling.

Eh, I suppose I got a little carried away there. A redaction is in order: Of the women he's met, Severian does not, in fact, do Agia, Tzadkiel, or Madame Prefect that runs Matachin Tower in the Age of the Monarch. I would attribute these omissions to lack of opportunity/time.

Lane

On Thu, Jul 10, 2008 at 5:50 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

I think we're straying too far afield here.

On Thu, Jul 10, 2008 at 3:56 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:

Now we've strayed into my territory (philosophy!).

I think that the analysis given of the Hierogrammates is too one-sided, ethically. We're assuming that morality works on a broadly utilitarian basis: e.g., it is somehow better to save the population of Urth than let it pass away.

Wha?! Saying that murder on a planetwide scale is wrong is not an inherently utilitarian statement but a very general one. It doesn't assume much about a moral framework, save one that places inherent value on life.

Rather, if we look at the moral actions internally, we ask whether it is morally right for Severian to bring the New Sun, not on the basis of what effects it might have, but whether that act was right in and of itself. Analogizing to Biblical morality, look at the use of Noah's Flood to wash away what passed for a degenerate Earth/Urth. I'm no Catholic, so I don't know if there is a standard dogmatic theodicy that is accepted in response to the problem of evil, but I think that the majority-Christian view on that argument is the "God has his reasons" theodicy. In other words, it is unquestionable and axiomatic that God does only good things. So sending the Flood (make of that what you will) is a good act. Even if we cannot understand how it is good, if God has his reasons for it, they may be beyond what we can understand, being finite mortals and all

I think that one of the primary findings from the tetralogy is that Severian doesn't understand much of anything. It's not useful to theorize about him as a conscious, moral agent.

Then again, the Hieros don't suffer from God's disability in this case, as it were. They're not perfect beings, so they don't have to always act perfectly good. They may see it necessary to do evil in order to do some greater good, so they may accept that Severian must destroy Urth to get to Ushas. After all, this is eschatology and genesis we're talking about here, death and rebirth. And perhaps we're guilty of imposing a mortal, linear-time-bound morality upon beings that are not so bound. Maybe we view death and destruction as "bad" in and of themselves, when really they're just a necessary step along the way to birth/rebirth?

Lane

Like I said in the opening of this, it's only a useful exercise if you assume that morality is in some way universal. If the Hierogrammates operate on another moral level (and I see little reason to assume this - they are just advanced aliens), we can just give up and go home. However, that would sound a little like the proposed solutions to the Problem of Evil.

Paul

On Jul 10, 2008, at 2:39 PM, b sharp wrote:

Paul B posts:

The fundamental moral facts in this case are that 1.) we know they can save the population of Urth and 2.) they choose not to. This makes any outcome morally suspect according to most ethical frameworks. As long as 1.) and 2.) are facts, the Hierogrammates cannot be good guys.

and

It is the contention of many, and I'd bet the author to be one of them, that "ethics" is not a strictly human concept.

I think there is a large gap in the broad exposition of your argument, that being that we don't need a science fiction story to find a legend of a God who has the power to stop all war, genocide, disease and child rape but chooses not to. Extending your argument would seem to demand either that Gene Wolfe feels the Judeo-Christian God is morally bankrupt or that Gene Wolfe is an atheist (or both). I don't think either is true.

I think any intelligent, thinking Christian eventually is troubled by the classic problem of an omniscient, omnipotent God who allows evil to flourish. I suspect the Hierogrammates and their relationship with the Increate are an attempt by Gene Wolfe to reconcile the contradiction (while injecting a healthy dose of science to explain religion).

-bsharp

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Jeff Wilson — 11 Jul 2008, 04:12 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

Sure, moral relativism can solve any ethical difficulty, if by "solve" one means "circumvent". However, the reason it might be less interesting to pursue here is precisely due to the nature of the author whose worlds, in all likelihood due to his personal beliefs, have mentions of absolute Truth and hence an absolute Morality to boot. The Increate or the Outsider or what have you is not compatible with moral relativism.

I don't think moral relativism enters into it so much as moral segregation. The same Increate to which humans attribute their moral code against incest they also attribute the creation of living things that *require* incest to reproduce.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson@io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 11 Jul 2008, 04:20 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

I mentioned in my response to Jeff why I don't think it's proper, or at least fun, to consider moral relativism. If nothing else, it's more fun to consider a problem than to dismiss it. The destruction of Urth is a momentous occasion and the climax of chiliads of extensive planning, and I think that dismissing it as just something to get done gives it too short shrift.

Dismiss it?! I've been discussing it with these fellows for years on the list, and years before that on GENie with mantiss and Hartwell and the gang. Trying to reverse engineer a framework of moral philosophy is not easy, and you being dismissive of me is not helping anyone.

Eh, I suppose I got a little carried away there. A redaction is in order: Of the women he's met, Severian does not, in fact, do Agia, Tzadkiel, or Madame Prefect that runs Matachin Tower in the Age of the Monarch. I would attribute these omissions to lack of opportunity/time.

He actually declines to have sex with Dara, despite having "earned" it and her being resigned to it.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Paul B — 11 Jul 2008, 05:04 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Fri, Jul 11, 2008 at 12:20 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

Dismiss it?! I've been discussing it with these fellows for years on the list, and years before that on GENie with mantiss and Hartwell and the gang. Trying to reverse engineer a framework of moral philosophy is not easy, and you being dismissive of me is not helping anyone.

Now I don't think I understand. If the Hierogrammates are morally justified in doing what they do, what problem are you discussing? What are you reverse engineering? I'm not quite sure what moral segregation is, but it sounds like relativism, and if you believe it applies to this situation then I don't understand what you could talk about for years. There is then no ethical quandary and the sacrifice of Urth is just a necessity that isn't even terribly regrettable. What moral problem did you have in mind then?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> <<http://www.io.com/%7Ejwilson>> >

Jeff Wilson — 11 Jul 2008, 05:38 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

On Fri, Jul 11, 2008 at 12:20 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com
<<mailto:jwilson at io.com>>> wrote:

Dismiss it?! I've been discussing it with these fellows for years on the list, and years before that on GENie with mantiss and Hartwell and the gang. Trying to reverse engineer a framework of moral philosophy is not easy, and you being dismissive of me is not helping anyone.

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justified in doing what they do, what problem are you discussing? What are you reverse engineering? I'm not quite sure what moral segregation is, but it sounds like relativism, and if you believe it applies to this situation then I don't understand what you could talk about for years. There is then no ethical quandary and the sacrifice of Urth is just a necessity that isn't even terribly regrettable. What moral problem did you have in mind then?

in re "moral segregation":

Moral relativism vs moral absolutism generally is not argued with respect to nonhuman intelligences. I think it likely that the human condition boils down to universal moral principles for the most part. (Not all moral issues can be decided this way; likely there is a mix.) But moral absolutism for humans need not mean that there is an identical absolutism for nonhumans.

But first I need to figure out what the writer's moral philosophy is, then work out the nonhumans' possible moral philosophy by differential, then try to come to some common moral terminological ground with the various list people so we can have a coherent discussion of it. And that can take a loooooong time.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 11 Jul 2008, 06:24 · follows Jeff Wilson

Paul Borochin wrote:

I don't think the Hierogrammates have any different a relationship with God than the Hiero humans do, as both are created - one by the other, no less, according to Wolfe. Who is this "Increate" person, anyway?

Wolfe can logically both worship a God and condemn a race of aliens playing god.

We are on opposite sides in this particular argument; that is, I do think the Hierogrammates got their marching orders from the Increate/Outsider/Judeo-Christian God. Some might say Demiurge. But I've said it all before. Still . . .

Incidentally, the Problem of Evil has never had an answer besides "stop asking stupid questions", which is less than satisfactory in my mind.

I like the way you think. Like Sgt. Friday on the old "Dragnet" TV show: "Just the facts, ma'am." Reminds me of somebody.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 11 Jul 2008, 07:10 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

Sure, moral relativism can solve any ethical difficulty, if by "solve" one means "circumvent". However, the reason it might be less interesting to pursue here is precisely due to the nature of the author whose worlds, in all likelihood due to his personal beliefs, have mentions of absolute Truth and hence an absolute Morality to boot. The Increate or the Outsider or what have you is not compatible with moral relativism.

Would you agree that it can be good for the Increate to do something that it would be evil to be done by a man?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Paul B — 11 Jul 2008, 15:22 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Fri, Jul 11, 2008 at 3:10 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
Paul B wrote:

Sure, moral relativism can solve any ethical difficulty, if by "solve" one means "circumvent". However, the reason it might be less interesting to pursue here is precisely due to the nature of the author whose worlds, in all likelihood due to his personal beliefs, have mentions of absolute Truth and hence an absolute Morality to boot. The Increate or the Outsider or what have you is not compatible with moral relativism.

Would you agree that it can be good for the Increate to do something that it would be evil to be done by a man?

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> <<http://www.io.com/%7Ejwilson>> >

Okay, I think I understand what you're getting at. My own beliefs don't matter that much, but I'm certainly willing to entertain the notion that in Wolfe's books this sort of thing is possible, it certainly does fall into the purview of the Problem of Evil. Christians usually don't take this to mean that moral relativism exists, rather saying that God is a moral exception.

However, as far as the destruction of Urth goes, this doesn't have much bite simply because it's not the Increate that destroys Urth, but fleshy beings like us. You would have a hard time making the case for a theologically-based moral exception for aliens the same way that one is made for God.

Now this is unimportant, but I don't understand why "moral relativism", a well-established term meaning the opposite of moral absolutism, is inapplicable to nonhumans while something called "moral segregation", is. If anything, it would seem relativism would be much more compelling with nonhumans around. Is "moral segregation" a term in use by alien psychologists?

Paul

Paul B — 11 Jul 2008, 16:10 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Thanks I guess? One could always do worse than be compared to a fictional cop. Unfortunately I don't know too much about this one.

Paul

On Fri, Jul 11, 2008 at 2:24 AM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:
Paul Borochin wrote:

I don't think the Hierogrammates have any different a relationship with God than the Hiero humans do, as both are created - one by the other, no less, according to Wolfe. Who is this "Increate" person, anyway?

Wolfe can logically both worship a God and condemn a race of aliens playing god.

We are on opposite sides in this particular argument; that is, I do think the Hierogrammates got their marching orders from the Increate/Outsider/Judeo-Christian God. Some might say Demiurge. But I've said it all before. Still . . .

Incidentally, the Problem of Evil has never had an answer besides "stop asking stupid questions", which is less than satisfactory in my mind.

I like the way you think. Like Sgt. Friday on the old "Dragnet" TV show: "Just the facts, ma'am." Reminds me of somebody.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 11 Jul 2008, 18:23 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

On Fri, Jul 11, 2008 at 3:10 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com
<mailto:jwilson at io.com>> wrote:

Paul B wrote:

Sure, moral relativism can solve any ethical difficulty, if by "solve" one means "circumvent". However, the reason it might be less interesting to pursue here is precisely due to the nature of the author whose worlds, in all likelihood due to his personal beliefs, have mentions of absolute Truth and hence an absolute Morality to boot. The Increate or the Outsider or what have you is not compatible with moral relativism.

Would you agree that it can be good for the Increate to do something that it would be evil to be done by a man?

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com <mailto:jwilson at io.com>
< http://www.io.com/~jwilson <http://www.io.com/%7Ejwilson> >

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There's Wolfe's answer to the problems of pain and evil right there: God has the infinite and unfailing moral judgment to decide when people should suffer or die, and it's good that he does so. (There's no question of them not suffering or dying, because mortals have to suffer and have to die by definition, it's just a question of when and where.) When someone inflicts the suffering or death for selfish reasons, it's not just pain but evil, but it can still further the plan of the Increate.

However, as far as the destruction of Urth goes, this doesn't have much bite simply because it's not the Increate that destroys Urth, but fleshy beings like us. You would have a hard time making the case for a theologically-based moral exception for aliens the same way that one is made for God.

The details of how much the varied parties are each responsible for the destruction that happens and the destruction that is avoided are murky.

Now this is unimportant, but I don't understand why "moral relativism", a well-established term meaning the opposite of moral absolutism, is inapplicable to nonhumans while something called "moral segregation", is. If anything, it would seem relativism would be much more compelling with nonhumans around. Is "moral segregation" a term in use by alien psychologists?

I coined the phrase in analogy to racial segregation, the idea that different races can't / shouldn't share completely in a common social system; "separate but equal" being the ideal. Ergo, moral segregation is to say that human and aliens can have separate but equally moral values.

It's not moral relativism in that the actors are differentiated by biology more than sociology. There is no surmountable difference in viewpoint, because there are viewpoints that humans and aliens *can't share*. I believe humans can have moral absolutes that should apply to every person, but I don't believe those absolutes will apply to every alien. The whole reason for the word is to express the concept of "profoundly different".

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

b sharp — 13 Jul 2008, 03:52 · follows Jeff Wilson

Lane Haygood I think I agree with almost your entire post. My only quibble would regard where you say:

It may not be that the Hierogrammates are "morally superior" to humans, in that we all have the same capacity for judging moral and immoral actions, but rather that their nature makes them able to perceive moral dimensions on acts that we cannot.

Well, my claim has all along been that Hierogrammates are superior moral judges to humans based on their superior perception of moral (and other) dimensions.

\

Roy, sorry if I wasn't clear in agreeing with you that the Hierogrammates possess a lesser moral perception than God. And I think we agree they are superior to humans in this regard?

Roy says:

Tzadkiel was not only an admitted liar, he was a cheater as well.

But lying and cheating are considered immoral acts by humans. And not always. Many police and military types are specially trained in such tactics and they are considered moral actions because they help stop bad guys. Perhaps Tzadkiel feels no more guilt in lying to Severian than we would feel for using artificial mating calls to lure animals out of a toxic waste spill area.

and:

Being elected to a given position is hardly a qualifier for the morality of the elected.

Nobody doubts that elections are an imperfect system for choosing morally superior individuals, relying as they do on imperfect human judgement. But the fact that we continue to engage in elections and other selection processes for judges and justices etc. proves that humanity currently thinks it is possible to ascertain the moral superiority of one person over another.

and:

You have presented a closed system that, by definition, not only excludes challenges from outside the system, it dismisses those challenges as down-right impertinent.

Not true. I'm saying that if the Hierogrammates are as Gene Wolfe seems to present them, then humans are no more able to judge their morality than animals are able to judge the morality of human behavior. Hierogrammates might reasonably be judged by members of their own race, or by other beings with equal or greater moral perception.

(there is dialog in UotNS suggesting that humans would be like animals on some planets and to some other races of beings)

-bsharp

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http://www.imtalkathon.com/?source=EML_WLH_Talkathon_ChangeWorld

Lane Haygood — 13 Jul 2008, 07:38 · in reply to b sharp

Please call me just Lane. If I understand what you're getting at, I think we'd agree that the Hieros have a greater capacity for moral understanding, but not necessarily the actuality of it.

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 12, 2008, at 10:52 PM, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

Lane Haygood I think I agree with almost your entire post. My only quibble would regard where you say:

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(there is dialog in UotNS suggesting that humans would be like animals on some planets and to some other races of beings)

-bsharp

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Roy C. Lackey — 13 Jul 2008, 20:58 · follows Lane Haygood

b sharp quoted and wrote:

You have presented a closed system that, by definition, not only excludes challenges from outside the system, it dismisses those challenges as down-right impertinent.

Not true. I'm saying that if the Hierogrammates are as Gene Wolfe seems to present them, then humans are no more able to judge their morality than animals are able to judge the morality of human behavior. Hierogrammates might reasonably be judged by members of their own race, or by other beings with equal or greater moral perception.<<

As above. You are trying to define your way out of challenges to your belief(s) by presenting your belief(s) as axiomatic. Not only that, but anyone who disagrees with you is necessarily a fool.

Wolfe shows the Hierogrammates to have their own self-serving agenda. He shows them as powers above the stage manipulating events on Urth, and their intentions to continue manipulating the humans of Ushas to achieve their desired, and acknowledged, ends. It's too much to quote it all here, but it is right there in black and white in the dialogue Severian had with Apheta immediately after the fight with the sailors. In order to achieve their goals, the Hierogrammates will have to do unto humans exactly what the Hieros had done unto them in another universe. As Sev said to Gunnie then, "That's their justice, their whole reason for being. They bring us through the pain we brought them through."

If the Hieros of that other universe sinned by cruelly fashioning the Hierogrammates (which seems to be axiomatic in the Urth Cycle), then the Hierogrammates will be guilty of the exact same sin in Briah, and will start the whole ugly cycle all over again. The morality of the actions of self-serving creatures of Man's creation is not above the reproach of any man.

One's having power that is greater than another does not define morality.

-Roy

David Duffy — 14 Jul 2008, 00:28 · in reply to Lane Haygood

On Sun, 13 Jul 2008, Lane Haygood wrote:

Please call me just Lane. If I understand what you're getting at, I think we'd agree that the Hieros have a greater capacity for moral understanding, but not necessarily the actuality of it.

That was the point of the Cock and the Angel, surely?

| David Duffy (MBBS PhD) ,_-|\n
| email: davidD at qimr.edu.au ph: INT+61+7+3362-0217 fax: -0101 / *\n
| Epidemiology Unit, Queensland Institute of Medical Research _-_-/\n
| 300 Herston Rd, Brisbane, Queensland 4029, Australia GPG 4D0B994A v

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 14 Jul 2008, 06:47 · follows David Duffy

On Sun, 13 Jul 2008 16:58:53 -0400 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Wolfe shows the Hierogrammates to have their own self-serving agenda. He shows them as powers above the stage manipulating events on Urth, and their intentions to continue manipulating the humans of Ushas to achieve their desired, and acknowledged, ends. It's too much to quote it all here, but it is right there in black and white in the dialogue Severian had with Apheta immediately after the fight with the sailors. In order to achieve their goals, the Hierogrammates will have to do unto humans exactly what the Hieros had done unto them in another universe. As Sev said to Gunnie then,

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One's having power that is greater than another does not define morality.

Given all this, I still can't figure out why you believe that the Hierogrammates are working directly for the Increate. They weren't created directly by him; they display no apparent superiority to man apart from wielding greater power; their explicit agenda is entirely self-serving with no hint of holiness or whatever. And so on ...

b sharp — 14 Jul 2008, 12:19 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Thalassocrat says to Roy:

Given all this, I still can't figure out why you believe that the Hierogrammates are working directly for the Increate. They weren't created directly by him; they display no apparent superiority to man apart from wielding greater power; their explicit agenda is entirely self-serving with no hint of holiness or whatever. And so on ...

My understanding is that by definition, everything in the universes was created directly by the Increate in exact accordance to his plans. This includes holy, marvelously good angels (Hierogrammates) and unholy, evil devils (megatherians). Each has their assigned role. But even if you feel that the Hierogrammages are not holy and good that doesn't change their origin.

But it seems clear from interviews with Wolfe that there is an allegorical nature to BotNS and thus I think his intention must have been to present Hierogrammates as very, very good; better than human. If he failed to impress certain readers with their goodness I think it has to do with philosophical differences (most likely religious vs. atheist). He made the Hierogrammates angels, not Gandhi or MLK Jr. And angels are known to carry flaming swords and to wipe out whole populations of people, in the Bible.

Roy C. Lackey says in response to my post:

As above. You are trying to define your way out of challenges to your belief(s) by presenting your belief(s) as axiomatic. Not only that, but anyone who disagrees with you is necessarily a fool.

Roy, I think maybe I am not smart enough to understand exactly what you mean by that. I'll note that I don't really have any beliefs and my posts here are meant to describe what I think are Gene Wolfe intentions (perhaps reflecting his beliefs) in this story. I certainly don't

consider those who disagree with me to be fools.

We don't seem to understand each other's position and we are probably forced to agree to disagree on this issue. I might pose one remaining question though, to help me understand- If humans are qualified to judge the morality of Hierogrammates, by analogy, animals with some intelligence and social consciousness (let's say apes, cetaceans and dogs qualify) would be equally able to judge humans. Would you (or anyone else here) agree with this statement? And if not, why not?

-bsharp

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of conversation change the world?

http://www.imtalkathon.com/?source=EML_WLH_Talkathon_ChangeWorld

Paul B — 14 Jul 2008, 16:53 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

True, I'm curious about that myself! It seems evidence tying them to the Increate is hard to come by in the text, though at least they do mention it, though perhaps somewhat unusually ("Urth's agonies will be offered to the Increate" or something to that effect).

Paul

On Mon, Jul 14, 2008 at 2:47 AM, <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:

On Sun, 13 Jul 2008 16:58:53 -0400 "Roy C. Lackey"

<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Wolfe shows the Hierogrammates to have their own self-serving agenda. He shows them as powers above the stage manipulating events on Urth, and their intentions to continue manipulating the humans of Ushas to achieve their desired, and acknowledged, ends. It's too much to quote it all here, but it is right there in black and white in the dialogue Severian had with Apheta immediately after the fight with the sailors. In order to achieve their goals, the Hierogrammates will have to do unto humans exactly what the Hieros had done unto them in another universe. As Sev said to Gunnie then, "That's their justice, their whole reason for being. They bring us through the pain we brought them through."

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created directly by him; they display no apparent superiority to
man apart from wielding greater power; their explicit agenda is
entirely self-serving with no hint of holiness or whatever. And so
on ...

John Watkins — 14 Jul 2008, 17:28 · in reply to Paul B

Perhaps we're looking for the evidence in the wrong place. The strongest evidence that the
Hierogrammates are doing the will of the Increate is that the Outsider tells Silk that "When a
demon mimics a god, it can not help in some ways becoming like a god."

The Hierogrammates certainly pose as angelic beings. So even if all the points made about the
Hierogrammates being evil are correct, and even if their agenda is indistinguishable from that
of Maitre and Mr. Million, they

*can not help *in some way doing the Increate's will. This could mean that Severian's brining
the New Sun is not ultimately a Very Bad Thing after all.

Of course, I have no idea how this would work, or what the Increate's purpose would be, unless
it really is bringing the Green Man future.

On 7/14/08, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

True, I'm curious about that myself! It seems evidence tying them to the
Increate is hard to come by in the text, though at least they do mention it,
though perhaps somewhat unusually ("Urth's agonies will be offered to the
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Paul

On Mon, Jul 14, 2008 at 2:47 AM, <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:

On Sun, 13 Jul 2008 16:58:53 -0400 "Roy C. Lackey"
<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Wolfe shows the Hierogrammates to have their own self-serving
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If the Hieros of that other universe sinned by cruelly fashioning the Hierogrammates (which seems to be axiomatic in the Urth Cycle), then the Hierogrammates will be guilty of the exact same sin in Briah, and will start the whole ugly cycle all over again. The morality of the actions of self-serving creatures of Man's creation is not above the reproach of any man.

One's having power that is greater than another does not define morality.

Given all this, I still can't figure out why you believe that the Hierogrammates are working directly for the Increate. They weren't created directly by him; they display no apparent superiority to man apart from wielding greater power; their explicit agenda is entirely self-serving with no hint of holiness or whatever. And so on ...

Paul B — 14 Jul 2008, 17:40 · in reply to John Watkins

If I recall correctly, someone else recently tried this as an explanation. The problem with it is that if everyone is part of God's Plan, then the concept of "morality" as we know it doesn't exist and no actions can be judged - a preposterous conclusion. However, if you would like to make the case that only some, and not others, are doing God's will, then you'll have to prove why that is so.

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On Mon, Jul 14, 2008 at 1:28 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:

Perhaps we're looking for the evidence in the wrong place. The strongest evidence that the Hierogrammates are doing the will of the Increate is that the Outsider tells Silk that "When a demon mimics a god, it can not help in some ways becoming like a god."

The Hierogrammates certainly pose as angelic beings. So even if all the points made about the Hierogrammates being evil are correct, and even if their agenda is indistinguishable from that of Maitre and Mr. Million, they *can not help* in some way doing the Increate's will. This could mean that Severian's brining the New Sun is not ultimately a Very Bad Thing after all.

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John Watkins — 14 Jul 2008, 17:58 · in reply to Paul B

I don't think it means anything like the idea that everything is part of God's plan and thus morality is meaningless. I think it means something much more mundane--that, as Severian himself notes "time turns our lies into truths." In an even less poetic phrasing, habituation works--we become the thing we discipline ourselves to feign being because that's how character is shaped.

When the lie in question is that we speak for the divine, habituation and the Increate together act to annex our actions. For Patera Quetzal, a bloodsucking alien pretending to be a kindly old priest, this meant that he called off the human sacrifices and generally operated as a strong and faithful leader for his flock. For Kypris, and arguably even for Pas, it means that the sham religion of the Whorl is still operating to some degree to further the Outsider's ends.

I'm suggesting that a similar explanation could be at work behind the plans of the Hierogrammates, although in a more opaque manner. I am not suggesting that there is no basis for judging the actions of the Hierogrammates--their part in a divine plan could be necessary but completely unwitting.

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Paul B — 14 Jul 2008, 19:49 · in reply to John Watkins

Okay, but then you're simply saying that evil actions can produce good results. That is a truism which doesn't help determine the morality of the Hierogrammates' actions, which is what we're

after. I'm certainly willing to concede that some good came of what they did, but that does nothing to excuse the Hierogrammates.

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John Watkins — 14 Jul 2008, 20:16 · in reply to Paul B

I think Wolfe's point is deeper than merely "evil actions can produce good results." There's a significant difference from the fate of, for example, Gollum in the Lord of the Rings, who does evil things which lead to good results, and the fate of Kypris or Quetzal, whose evil is, to some degree, masquerading as good. In the Urth cycle, evil that masquerades as good winds up becoming good to some degree--not just accidentally having a good result, but changing internally to reflect the good that it imitates. This change isn't absolute--Quetzal still picks Green (although possibly that was a ploy to get them to Blue) and still drinks blood to survive. But it is significant.

At least, that's the sense I get from the juxtaposition of "time turns our lies into truths" and "When a demon mimics a god, it can not help in some ways becoming like a god." I would be surprised, with the significance this theme has in the Long Sun, with Quetzal and Kypris, and in the Short Sun, with the merger of the demonic Pas with the personality of the saintly Silk, if this same theme has no bearing on the New Sun.

This does not mean that I think the Hierogrammates are properly understood as archangels. Despite the name, Tzadkiel seems more sinister than that, and the scheme--genocide to further evolution--seems very morally problematic. But, again, I'd be surprised if the presumably evil Hierogrammates posing as presumably good angelic beings has no significance other than messing with our and Severian's assumptions. There's got to be something more going on than evil aliens manipulating Severian to bring about devastation--I just don't know what it is.

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Paul B — 14 Jul 2008, 21:08 · in reply to John Watkins

Accidental outcomes have nothing to do with it. I'm saying that an evil act that results in a good outcome is still evil, even if the good outcome was intended.

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Roy C. Lackey — 14 Jul 2008, 21:50 · follows Paul B

Andrew wrote:

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It could be summed up as basically what Dave Tallman said last month about a five-volume heroic epic being turned into a horror story if Ushas was intended by Wolfe to be viewed as a bad thing. I don't think Wolfe would have written such a story, and extra-textual comments he has made suggest that he didn't--the stuff about the "do nothing future" and Severian being, despite his horrific nurturing and obvious character flaws, a man trying to do the right thing.

Urth was unique as the birthplace of humanity, both from the perspective of the Increate and

the Hierogrammates, which is why Apheta said that the Hieros, if they were to be reproduced at all in Briah, would come from that particular "strand of your race" on Urth, presumably because that is the way it happened before in that other universe. No other planet would do.

There is no logical justification for Sev, as Epitome, to be truly representative of Urth's people (he ruled only a small fraction of the planet's people and was elected by none of them), *unless* he is nevertheless truly a religious figure, in the same sense that Christ could take upon himself the sins of all mankind. In practical terms, all the peoples of Urth would be wiped out by the birth pangs of Ushas, and they were. So Sev was de facto the Epitome of Urth, and I think that's why Wolfe put him in that role.

The Hierogrammates had the power to destroy Urth and create Ushas without bothering with the religious rigmarole that went on in URTH. If they were simply bad guys, they could have skipped all that stuff and gone on to pursue their nefarious ends. What would the consent of the condemned matter to them? But it did matter. I think it mattered because that is the way the Increate wanted it, just as in Christianity people must accept Jesus as Savior in order to be saved. I think the Increate imposed the condition of consent from the people of Urth upon the Hierogrammates, so they had to be working directly for the Increate.

The destruction of Urth was not just a generic natural disaster that resulted in great loss of life. It was a deliberate act that rewrote the Increate's creation. I don't think Wolfe's omnipotent God would have permitted that to happen to mankind's home unless it served some greater purpose, whatever that purpose might have been.

(FWIW, I have a hard time fitting the futuristic Green Man into the prospective Hieros line. He seems to be rather a pacific fellow whose kind will not even kill to eat. It's hard to imagine his kind will produce the cruel men who fashion Hierogrammates in Briah. Maybe he signals the end of the senseless cycles.)

That the Hierogrammates also had their own agenda, lied and manipulated events and people, doesn't change anything. It just shows that they were imperfect beings, as are all beings who are not God in Wolfe's scheme of things, just like the gods in the upper tiers of the Seven Worlds Cosmology in TWK who pursued their own ends.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 14 Jul 2008, 22:38 · in reply to John Watkins

John Watkins wrote:

At least, that's the sense I get from the juxtaposition of "time turns our lies into truths" and "When a demon mimics a god, it can not help in some ways becoming like a god."

This does not mean that I think the Hierogrammates are properly understood as archangels. Despite the name, Tzadkiel seems more sinister than that, and the scheme--genocide to further evolution--seems very morally problematic. But, again, I'd be surprised if the presumably evil Hierogrammates posing as presumably good angelic beings has no significance other than messing with our and Severian's assumptions. There's got to be something more going on than evil aliens manipulating Severian to bring about devastation--I just don't know what it is.

I'm thinking it is intended that the Hieros built the Hierogrammates out of hubris in attempt to make a perfect, godlike creature. They are thus living graven images and as false gods they pose at being God but fall short. Tzadkiel personally aims a bit lower by taking the name of

angel, but is still sorely flawed. The 'Grammates are the BOTNS equivalent of DOORS' Goddess or the deities in the SOLDIER books; beings of real but inferior spiritual power. They can play the roles of God or one of the heavenly host, but eventually limits and conflicts of interest will break down the facade.

In this light, the Hiergrammates may then be more properly considered evil creations than evil beings; they may not have been given the choice to not pursue the Hieros' agenda, or to consider if their mandate may not come from the Increate.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

b sharp — 15 Jul 2008, 01:36 · follows Jeff Wilson

Roy, that was a very good post below and I agree with almost all of it. I also see little justification for Sev to be the Epitome of Urth. If there was a legitimate test he passed it was having the bravery to claim the title when tall, young strapping Zak is there to fill the role and friends and enemies are patting him on the back for playing decoy. Also, I agree that the Green Man does not fit well into the scenario. Seems like he might have been a cool idea Wolfe had that needed to be inserted somehow in the story.

Paul says:

You persist in making unwarranted assumptions.
Tzadkiel says, and I doubt you'll claim he's lying in this case, that he made a probabilistic guess about Severian, which did indeed turn out right.
Ergo, even a Hierogrammate's foresight is not perfect.
If you intend on making unusual claims about various properties of the Hierogrammates, be it angel-hood or omniscience, please substantiate them with some references.

Sorry Paul, it was an egregious error and I promise to do better in the future.

It could be summed up as basically what Dave Tallman said last month about a five-volume heroic epic being turned into a horror story if Ushas was intended by Wolfe to be viewed as a bad thing. I don't think Wolfe would have written such a story, and extra-textual comments he has made suggest that he didn't--the stuff about the "do nothing future" and Severian being, despite his horrific nurturing and obvious character flaws, a man trying to do the right thing.

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Roy C. Lackey — 15 Jul 2008, 05:42 · follows b sharp

Another point about why I think the Hierogrammates worked directly for the Increate that I have mentioned in the past but forgot to mention this time is that business about them being "designated as those who recorded the rescripts of the Increate." (URTH, XIX, 138) How should rescript be defined in this context? The OED lists, in order, (slightly abbreviated):

1) a. Decretal epistle from the Pope in reply to some question or difficulty referred to him; Papal decision, decree or edict.

b. Reply sent by a Roman emperor to a magistrate or other person consulting him on a doubtful point of law or as to the action to be taken in particular circumstances.

2) Any decree, edict, order, or formal announcement made by a ruler or governing body, or having an official character.

3) Something written over again; a rewriting.

I think that, no matter how one defines it, rescript strongly implies that the Hierogrammates were in direct contact with the Increate.

-Roy

b sharp — 15 Jul 2008, 18:20 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Paul B posts:

Any society is comprised of individuals on a continuum of cognitive ability. To let this govern morality is unfair at best, and horrifying at worst.

This is why letting the Hierogrammates off simply on the basis of their superior understanding is an abhorrent idea.

What I think this ignores is that the continuum needn't end at the human with the lowest cognition, it can extend through the range of animals down

to the protozoans (and beyond?). Perhaps Paul is one of that small minority of people who consider all animals to be of equal moral equivalence to human beings, equally able to govern morality as any person. If so, his argument makes sense.

If he is not then I assume he is in the majority and considers there to be a gap which separates animals and humans on a moral basis. This gap means that animals are separated; not on the same cognitive continuum as adult members of human society. Thus we assume the right to kill some populations of animals (mosquitoes), corral others in game preserves (tigers), use fake mating calls to herd and protect them (whales), put some in zoos, eat some of them etc.

If we were discussing the real world, I could see Paul's point. But we are in a fictional world now. In this world Baldanders is above average in perception but still human, still on the human continuum. In BotNS, Hierogrammates are not human. They have powers of perception and travel which dwarf the gap between humans and animals. Wolfe makes sure we readers are given hierodules, hierarchs and green men to know that Hierogrammates are several orders of magnitude greater than human being. Humans judging Hierogrammates carries the weight of lemurs judging the wildlife preservation efforts of the current Madagascar government administration.

I think the view of beings with superior morality to humans is essentially religious. I am not religious but I can at least stretch my brain far enough to join the majority of my fellow humans and understand the principle.

-bsharp

Paul B — 16 Jul 2008, 01:12 · in reply to b sharp

In my mind at least, the putative gap between the Hierogrammates and humans is not much greater than one between a human who knows mathematics and one who doesn't. Hierogrammates are the creation of advanced humans. A creator's making a creation better than itself is questionable, and the Hierogrammates give little indication of being better than high-tech humans at any rate.

After all, humans/aliens with advanced powers like time-travel are a common enough SF idea. Usually these advanced, intertemporal interlopers don't get special moral privileges. Just because this particular variety of the trope claims to be higher beings akin to angels is no reason to believe it.

Fundamentally I believe they're still the same order of beings, just with bells and whistles.

Paul

On Tue, Jul 15, 2008 at 2:20 PM, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

Paul B posts:

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David Duffy — 16 Jul 2008, 02:12 · in reply to Paul B

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special moral privileges. Just because this particular variety of the trope
claims to be higher beings akin to angels is no reason to believe it.

Fundamentally I believe they're still the same order of beings, just with bells and whistles.

No, I think they are a step higher in the hierarchy of the great chain of being(s), ie they are of the order of angels/planets/spirits in the medieval worldview. Because they have "advanced powers like time-travel" they have escaped conventional causation, and are godlike in that sense. I think Wolfe's answer to the paradoxes of FTL/time travel is that you have to have god-like mental abilities to keep it all straight. And as such, they are incomprehensible to creatures like us still bound in time. So why do Abaia and Erebus require subjugation of the humans of Urth when as Severian says, they could eradicate humankind in a day?

One of the ways I see BotNS is as a dialogue with Frank Herbert in *_Dune_* and *_the God Makers_*, Delany's *_Empire Star_*, and Stapledon's *_Star Maker_*. The Autarch **is** the K.H. with safe (cf the Vodalarii) access to a sort of race memory, the hierogrammates **are** fiddling with the evolution from universe to universe both temporally/sequentially and simultaneously, if the hero can attain a multiplex viewpoint, the Empire can be saved. And then, even if they aren't the Increate, they still can "move in mysterious ways" and invoke exactly the same difficulties as we have with the problem of evil etc.

Cheers, David.

| David Duffy (MBBS PhD) , - _ \ |
| email: davidD at qimr.edu.au ph: INT+61+7+3362-0217 fax: -0101 / *
| Epidemiology Unit, Queensland Institute of Medical Research \ _ , - _ /
| 300 Herston Rd, Brisbane, Queensland 4029, Australia GPG 4D0B994A v

Paul B — 16 Jul 2008, 04:00 · in reply to David Duffy

On Tue, Jul 15, 2008 at 10:12 PM, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au> wrote:

No, I think they are a step higher in the hierarchy of the great chain of being(s), ie they are of the order of angels/planets/spirits in the medieval worldview.

Planets?! I'm sorry, I have no idea what on Urth that means.

So why do Abaia and Erebus require subjugation of the humans of Urth when as Severian says, they could eradicate humankind in a day?

I imagine that, much like Typhon (from whom they may be descended if Scylla of BotNS is Scylla of BotLS), it's because they want slaves and worshipers rather than dead bodies. Perfectly comprehensible.

One of the ways I see BotNS is as a dialogue with Frank Herbert in *_Dune_*

You can think whatever you wish, the more important part is whether you can provide evidence that it's true.

While you're mentioning Dune, don't forget that Paul and Leto II's similar powers of imperfect foresight caused them no little moral agony, and Leto's course of action (which Paul didn't take because he thought it too horrible) was roundly condemned by almost all of his human contemporaries, and even Leto himself agreed with its injustice. It's entirely possible that what the Hierogrammates did to Urth was good in the end, but that doesn't justify the way they did it.

Cheers, David.

Paul

brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 04:19 · in reply to Paul B

On Tue, Jul 15, 2008 at 10:12 PM, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au> wrote:

No, I think they are a step higher in the hierarchy of the great chain of being(s), ie they are of the order of angels/planets/spirits in the medieval worldview.

Planets?! I'm sorry, I have no idea what on Urth that means.

The World is alive and every level of the World is also alive, and has an intelligence and a spirit. The planets are the intelligences that rule the planetary level of the World.

.

Paul B — 16 Jul 2008, 04:34 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

What are you referring to? Where does it say that Urth is alive?! I wonder how it'd feel about being drowned, anyway

Paul

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 12:19 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

On Tue, Jul 15, 2008 at 10:12 PM, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au> wrote:

No, I think they are a step higher in the hierarchy of the great chain of being(s), ie they are of the order of angels/planets/spirits in the medieval worldview.

Planets?! I'm sorry, I have no idea what on Urth that means.

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brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 04:51 · in reply to Paul B

I am referring to the hierarchy of the great chain of being, as is David Duffy. This is an underlying assumption of the Christian worldview, although many modern Christians choose to deprecate it.

In this hierarchy, the World is assumed to be a living being, possessing an intelligence and a spirit as are all of the various levels of the World.

.

What are you referring to? Where does it say that Urth is alive?! I wonder how it'd feel about being drowned, anyway

Paul

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 12:19 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

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<David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au>
wrote:

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brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 04:53 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

By the way the World == the Universe (as moderns call it), not Urth.

.

I am referring to the hierarchy of the great chain of being, as is David Duffy. This is an underlying assumption of the Christian worldview, although many modern Christians choose to deprecate it.

In this hierarchy, the World is assumed to be a living being, possessing an intelligence and a spirit as are all of the various levels of the World.

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What are you referring to? Where does it say that Urth is alive?! I wonder how it'd feel about being drowned, anyway

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On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 12:19 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

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intelligence and a spirit. The planets are the intelligences that rule
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planetary level of the World.

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David Duffy — 16 Jul 2008, 05:14 · in reply to Paul B

On Wed, 16 Jul 2008, Paul B wrote:

So why do Abaia and Erebus require subjugation of the humans of Urth when
as Severian says, they could eradicate humankind in a day?

I imagine that, much like Typhon (from whom they may be descended if Scylla
of BotNS is Scylla of BotLS), it's because they want slaves and worshipers
rather than dead bodies. Perfectly comprehensible.

One of the ways I see BotNS is as a dialogue with Frank Herbert in *_Dune_*

You can think whatever you wish, the more important part is whether you can
provide evidence that it's true.

re *Dune*, *_res ipsa loquitur_* -- how many other books have a hero that gets continual access to
his line of forbears following a drug trip and becomes emperor as a result.

re *Empire Star*, the heroine is Sai Severina, time travel...

re *Star Maker*, which other SF writer had multiple universes with iterative refinement of the
inhabitants.

While you're mentioning *Dune*, don't forget that Paul and Leto II's similar
powers of imperfect foresight caused them no little moral agony, and Leto's
course of action (which Paul didn't take because he thought it too horrible)
was roundly condemned by almost all of his human contemporaries, and even
Leto himself agreed with its injustice.

Sure, but the point is that he does make the decision which according to his foreknowledge is
the only long term solution. Again the point is that his vision of the outcomes is certain, and so
his behaviour "right".

It's entirely possible that what the Hierogrammates did to Urth was good in
the end, but that doesn't justify the way they did it.

Well, most of Wolfe's oeuvre is deliberately ambiguous. In *_CotA_*, Severian wonders if the
power of the Claw comes from Abaia, and was part of a diabolical plan to get a torturer in as
Autarch.

David Duffy,

Paul B — 16 Jul 2008, 05:43 · in reply to David Duffy

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 1:14 AM, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au> wrote:

Sure, but the point is that he does make the decision which according to his foreknowledge is the only long term solution. Again the point is that his vision of the outcomes is certain, and so his behaviour "right".

By no means! Only if you're a consequentialist (utilitarian, for example) do ends justify means. And if you are, you've got more problems than it's worth.

Is it truly hard to fathom that though evil can be used to bring about good, it does not itself become good because of it?

Incidentally, many on the other side of this argument have at one point insisted that Hierogrammate foresight is perfect. Please see Roy C. Lackey's post a few days ago for proof that it isn't, and then stop saying it. It only clouds the issue.

David Duffy,

Paul

brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 06:46 · in reply to Paul B

Some people maybe take this stuff a little too seriously....

.

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 1:14 AM, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au> wrote:

Sure, but the point is that he does make the decision which according to his foreknowledge is the only long term solution. Again the point is that his vision of the outcomes is certain, and so his behaviour "right".

By no means! Only if you're a consequentialist (utilitarian, for example) do ends justify means. And if you are, you've got more problems than it's worth.

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Incidentally, many on the other side of this argument have at one point insisted that Hierogrammate foresight is perfect. Please see Roy C. Lackey's post a few days ago for proof that it isn't, and then stop saying it. It only clouds the issue.

David Duffy,

Paul

Jeff Wilson — 16 Jul 2008, 13:33 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

After all, humans/aliens with advanced powers like time-travel are a common enough SF idea. Usually these advanced, intertemporal interlopers don't get special moral privileges.

Except for stories where they war with humanity, my experience is the opposite; they are almost always used as a superior moral example in contrast to humanity's short-term and self-centered morality. This has fairly recently been taken to its ultimate extreme in the second year of the revived "Doctor Who" when The Doctor literally and explicitly

- 1) declares himself the ultimate moral authority of the universe.
- 2) faces and defeats the devil in spiritual, intellectual, and physical contests.
- 3) condemns the Cybermen and the Daleks to fire and brimstone.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 16 Jul 2008, 13:38 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

What are you referring to? Where does it say that Urth is alive?! I wonder how it'd feel about being drowned, anyway

Not drowned, baptised and born again as Ushas with all our sins washed away.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Adam Thornton — 16 Jul 2008, 16:43 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Jul 16, 2008, at 8:38 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

Paul B wrote:

What are you referring to? Where does it say that Urth is alive?! I wonder how it'd feel about being drowned, anyway

Not drowned, baptised and born again as Ushas with all our sins washed away.

I wonder how long it will be until we hear the Bush administration, and perhaps certain other beloved purveyors of fiction with soft spots for torture and torturers, justifying waterboarding as baptism and the washing away of all sins? We could not only be gaining completely-accurate-and-in-no-way-suspect intelligence, we could also be redeeming lost heathen souls for Christ.

Wishing I were completely joking,
Adam

Matthew — 16 Jul 2008, 16:53 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 11:43 AM, Adam Thornton <adam@io.com> wrote:

I wonder how long it will be until we hear the Bush administration, and perhaps certain other beloved purveyors of fiction with soft spots for torture and torturers, justifying waterboarding as baptism and the washing away of all sins? We could not only be gaining completely-accurate-and-in-no-way-suspect intelligence, we could also be redeeming lost heathen souls for Christ.

This is the Gene Wolfe mailing list, not DailyKos or LittleGreenFootballs.

Please to keep the inflammatory political content where it belongs.

Adam Thornton — 16 Jul 2008, 17:07 · in reply to Matthew

On Jul 16, 2008, at 11:53 AM, Matthew wrote:

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 11:43 AM, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

I wonder how long it will be until we hear the Bush administration, and perhaps certain other beloved purveyors of fiction with soft spots for torture and torturers, justifying waterboarding as baptism and the washing away of all sins? We could not only be gaining completely-accurate-and-in-no-way-suspect intelligence, we could also be redeeming lost heathen souls for Christ.

This is the Gene Wolfe mailing list, not DailyKos or LittleGreenFootballs.

Please to keep the inflammatory political content where it belongs.

Hey: is the submerging of Ushas drowning, or baptism?

Seriously: we're supposed to be talking about the writings of someone who is a) famously conservative, and b) famously Catholic, with c) some really nonstandard theology, which d) comes out all over his books, and e) not talk about politics and its intersection with religion?

I think that's....a bit unrealistic.

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 17:17 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Seriously: we're supposed to be talking about the writings of someone who is ... famously Catholic, with ... some really nonstandard theology,

I know Wolfe considers himself to be orthodox. What bits of heresy do you accuse him of? I don't see any that's explicitly in there....

.

Jeffrey Brent McBeth — 16 Jul 2008, 17:25 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 12:07:07PM -0500, Adam Thornton wrote:

Please to keep the inflammatory political content where it belongs.

Hey: is the submerging of Ushas drowning, or baptism?

At least one Christian group believes that Noahs' flood did act as Earth's baptism to be later followed by a baptism by fire (second coming?).

Seriously: we're supposed to be talking about the writings of someone who is a) famously conservative, and b) famously Catholic, with c) some really nonstandard theology, which d) comes out all over his books, and e) not talk about politics and its intersection with religion?

I think that's....a bit unrealistic.

While I didn't find your comment particularly inflammatory (I'm a bit biased against the target, so I'm not a fair judge), I think the claim that the comment was more than tangentially connected to the topic at hand to be a bit more of a stretch than even this group is accustomed to :)

Jeff

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them."

-- Mark Twain

Adam Thornton — 16 Jul 2008, 17:34 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:17 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Seriously: we're supposed to be talking about the writings of someone who is ... famously Catholic, with ... some really nonstandard theology,

I know Wolfe considers himself to be orthodox. What bits of heresy do you accuse him of? I don't see any that's explicitly in there....

The outright rejection of pacifism (which I believe is pretty clear in the interviews) seems to directly repudiate much of the Sermon on the Mount, which I think I am being pretty orthodox in believing to be among the very centralmost of Christian positions (although, yes, of course you can point to the moneychangers, and, yes, then you can point to Christ carrying a scourge...but I think that most orthodox theologians would react pretty violently to the suggestion of Christ-as-Torturer, which is among the fundamental metaphors underlying the New Sun).

I keep getting whiffs of Manicheanism as well, although that is proving much harder to pin down.

Adam

Adam Thornton — 16 Jul 2008, 17:42 · in reply to Jeffrey Brent McBeth

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:25 PM, Jeffrey Brent McBeth wrote:

While I didn't find your comment particularly inflammatory (I'm a bit biased against the target, so I'm not a fair judge), I think the claim that the comment was more than tangentially connected to the topic at hand to be a bit more of a stretch than even this group is accustomed to :)

It's a fair cop.

And, with regard to the Flood....perhaps modern society overly plays DOWN the "death and" aspect of the death-and-rebirth that baptism IS.

That is....maybe baptism is SUPPOSED to make you feel like you're drowning, and, if I were being--just suppose--a reactionary Catholic who really thinks Vatican II was a lousy idea (this is a position I am merely arrantly speculating about, with no indication that Wolfe actually believes it)--I might actually *want* to revisit the idea that my religion was, in fact, a much scarier thing than the smiling- nice-forgiveness-and-bunnies-and-little-tweeting-birds thing that my effete society would like to present it as. (_Pirate Freedom_ certainly takes the position that mealymouthed-niceness-is-corrosive pretty damn explicitly.)

So, let's remind the readers that rebirth means *having to die first*....and, hey, for an encore,

anyone want to talk about the brain feast as Holy Communion? One presumes it's a Black Mass--that is, a ghastly *parody* of Communion--but I wonder if the opposite case can be made?

Adam

John Watkins — 16 Jul 2008, 17:48 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Catholic Christianity neither currently nor historically requires pacifism.

Wolfe is not a heretic. He plays with extra-orthodox but not unorthodox ideas, if that's clear--he believes or seems to believe many things that are permissible but not required for a Catholic, but I've yet to encounter an overt endorsement of some doctrine that Catholics are forbidden to hold in his works.

As for Manicheanism, I don't detect much of that in his works at all. Manicheanism is dualistic, and the cosmology of The Wizard-Knight more or less explicitly rejects dualism, as do a number of bits and pieces throughout the Urth cycle.

On 7/16/08, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:17 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Seriously: we're supposed to be talking about the writings of someone who is ... famously Catholic, with ... some really nonstandard theology,

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I keep getting whiffs of Manicheanism as well, although that is proving much harder to pin down.

Adam

John Watkins — 16 Jul 2008, 17:53 · in reply to Adam Thornton

I read Severian's consumption of Thecla, at least, as another instance of Wolfe's "evil masquerading as good turns out to be good via divine action." To Vodalus and his cronies, the feast is a Black Mass, but to Severian, via the power of the Claw/the New Sun, it is an act akin to the Eucharist, as he really does achieve a mystical communion with a sort of resurrected Thecla.

On 7/16/08, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:25 PM, Jeffrey Brent McBeth wrote:

While I didn't find your comment particularly inflammatory (I'm a bit biased against the target, so I'm not a fair judge), I think the claim that the comment was more than tangentially connected to the topic at hand to be a bit more of a stretch than even this group is accustomed to :)

It's a fair cop.

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That is....maybe baptism is SUPPOSED to make you feel like you're drowning, and, if I were being--just suppose--a reactionary Catholic who really thinks Vatican II was a lousy idea (this is a position I am merely arrantly speculating about, with no indication that Wolfe actually believes it)--I might actually *want* to revisit the idea that my religion was, in fact, a much scarier thing than the smiling-nice-forgiveness-and-bunnies-and-little-tweeting-birds thing that my effete society would like to present it as. (_Pirate Freedom_ certainly takes the position that mealymouthed-niceness-is-corrosive pretty damn explicitly.)

So, let's remind the readers that rebirth means *having to die first*....and, hey, for an encore, anyone want to talk about the brain feast as Holy Communion? One presumes it's a Black Mass--that is, a ghastly *parody* of Communion--but I wonder if the opposite case can be made?

Adam

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 16 Jul 2008, 17:55 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

1. Apologies to all on the list for spam sent from my account yestermorn.

2. On Mon, Jul 14, 2008 at 10:42 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Another point about why I think the Hierogrammates worked directly for the Increate that I have mentioned in the past but forgot to mention this time is that business about them being "designated as those who recorded the rescripts of the Increate." (URTH, XIX, 138) How should rescript be defined in this context? The OED lists, in order, (slightly abbreviated):

I had forgotten this quote. As far as I am concerned it means that Sev, at least, believes that the Hiero-Foos have had a Word.

On the other hand, Sev's been wrong about things before.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I once absend-mindedly ordered Three Mile Island dressing in a restaurant and, with great presence of mind, they brought Thousand Island Dressing and a bottle of chili sauce. -- T. Pratchett

Adam Thornton — 16 Jul 2008, 17:56 · in reply to John Watkins

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:48 PM, John Watkins wrote:

Wolfe is not a heretic. He plays with extra-orthodox but not unorthodox ideas, if that's clear--he believes or seems to believe

many things that are permissible but not required for a Catholic,
but I've yet to encounter an overt endorsement of some doctrine that
Catholics are forbidden to hold in his works.

So--and I mean this less snarkily than it sounds--he's sort of in the Mel Gibson camp then?

Come to think of it, most of the dualisms I can think of are probably anti-Manichean, as they demonstrate that the demiurgic creation is a fatally flawed creation which ends up evilly even with good initial intent. (_Memorare_, here, or indeed the _WK_ cosmology)

Adam

John Watkins — 16 Jul 2008, 18:06 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Oh, no, I don't think he's in the Mel Gibson camp. Some of his non-mainstream views seem to be, if anything, on the other side--he apparently gives great salvific power to faith in non-Christian religions, and even to faith in religions with explicitly false or evil gods, and he believes (or says he believes, of course) that pagan gods were real beings but not demons. So I'd say he's on the broad-minded side of orthodox Catholicism.

I think it's true that Wolfe draws from that Neo-Platonic mess that influenced Gnosticism, the Kabbalah and most of the Western mystical tradition, but I'm not sure how much of that is setting and how much is belief.

On 7/16/08, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:48 PM, John Watkins wrote:

Wolfe is not a heretic. He plays with extra-orthodox but not unorthodox ideas, if that's clear--he believes or seems to believe many things that are permissible but not required for a Catholic, but I've yet to encounter an overt endorsement of some doctrine that Catholics are forbidden to hold in his works.

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Adam

Paul B — 16 Jul 2008, 18:10 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 2:46 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
Some people maybe take this stuff a little too seriously....

Seeing such a spirited defense put up for murder on a planetary scale certainly gets one's hackles up.

brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 18:13 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:17 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Seriously: we're supposed to be talking about the writings of someone who is ... famously Catholic, with ... some really nonstandard theology,

I know Wolfe considers himself to be orthodox. What bits of heresy do you accuse him of? I don't see any that's explicitly in there....

The outright rejection of pacifism (which I believe is pretty clear in the interviews) seems to directly repudiate much of the Sermon on the Mount, which I think I am being pretty orthodox in believing to be among the very centralmost of Christian positions

It's not a position. It's a speech.

(although, yes, of course you can point to the moneychangers, and, yes, then you can point to Christ carrying a scourge...

Also, render unto Caesar what is Caesar's (if called upon to serve in the military, for instance). Pacifism is at best a Christian ideal, I don't even know if it is that, there are so many exceptions for just wars and so on.

but I think that most orthodox theologians would react pretty violently to the suggestion of Christ-as-Torturer, which is among the fundamental metaphors underlying the New Sun).

The ones I have discussed it with didn't think it was too extreme.

I don't think that Wolfe is the first person to point that whole bit out, either.

.

Adam Thornton — 16 Jul 2008, 18:17 · in reply to John Watkins

On Jul 16, 2008, at 1:06 PM, John Watkins wrote:

Oh, no, I don't think he's in the Mel Gibson camp. Some of his non-mainstream views seem to be, if anything, on the other side--he apparently gives great salvific power to faith in non-Christian religions, and even to faith in religions with explicitly false or evil gods, and he believes (or says he believes, of course) that pagan gods were real beings but not demons. So I'd say he's on the broad-minded side of orthodox Catholicism.

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Is it actually a permitted doctrine in Catholicism that faith in non-Christian religions can have salvific power? Doesn't that explicitly contradict John 14:6? Which is *another* of what I--brought up in, admittedly, a faith without, to be kind, much of a formal intellectual tradition--considered to be one of those bedrock passages.

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 18:21 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:48 PM, John Watkins wrote:

Wolfe is not a heretic. He plays with extra-orthodox but not unorthodox ideas, if that's clear--he believes or seems to believe many things that are permissible but not required for a Catholic, but I've yet to encounter an overt endorsement of some doctrine that Catholics are forbidden to hold in his works.

So--and I mean this less snarkily than it sounds--he's sort of in the Mel Gibson camp then?

Does Mel Gibson reject Vatican II? If so, Mel Gibson is a heretic. I believe that Gene Wolfe, in common with the current and the previous popes, subscribes to a conservative interpretation of Vatican II, but a council of the church is a council of the church, you can't pick and choose amongst them and remain an orthodox Catholic.

.

brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 18:29 · in reply to Paul B

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 2:46 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Some people maybe take this stuff a little too seriously....

Seeing such a spirited defense put up for murder on a planetary scale certainly gets one's hackles up.

What is it, one supernova a year, somewhere in the Universe? And common or garden variety novas are much more common, I don't have any idea how common.

I don't see anything to get worked up about, particularly. Everyone dies. Sure, not everyone is ready to go and most people suffer some and flail about some more, but in the end the result is the same and you might as well be calm and cheerful about it. If a bad thing happens, and then you have negative emotions about it, two bad things have happened.

Have you read the Gita?

.

brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 18:34 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Jul 16, 2008, at 1:06 PM, John Watkins wrote:

Oh, no, I don't think he's in the Mel Gibson camp. Some of his non-mainstream views seem to be, if anything, on the other side--he apparently gives great salvific power to faith in non-Christian religions, and even to faith in religions with explicitly false or evil gods, and he believes (or says he believes, of course) that pagan gods were real beings but not demons. So I'd say he's on the broad-minded side of orthodox Catholicism.

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Is it actually a permitted doctrine in Catholicism that faith in non-Christian religions can have salvific power?

Yes. It is the faith that saves, not the religion. Also, if someone is being another religion, it is because that is what God wants them to do. Nothing happens save by the will of God.

Vatican II explicitly states that the other guy's religion is right for him. Judaism is only for Jews: the Jewish ideal is not that everyone should be a Jew, but that everyone should be a good whatever-they-are. Islam (incidentally) declares no coercion in religion, as well as explicitly recognizing various 'religions of the Book' as valid. There are actually a fair number of tolerant religions. Sikhism.....

.

John Watkins — 16 Jul 2008, 18:37 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Yes, it is, and yes, there is some trouble squaring it with John 14:6, which causes trouble with conservative Protestant groups. The Catechism discusses this in less than explicit terms, but (cherry-picking quotes), faith in Judaism is more or less explicitly salvific:

"The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises...for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."329

Islam, too, has some sort of salvific power: "The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day."

Judaism and Islam are "aimed at" the same Being as Christianity, and so partake of its salvific power to some degree. Thus Wolfe treats worship of the Increate and the Outsider, and to some extent, worship of Pas (to the degree that Pas is innocently mistaken as the God of monotheism.)

This sort of teaching is squared with John 14:6 and other proclamations of Christian exclusivism thusly (emphasis mine):

"Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. *Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.* 336

*847 * This affirmation *is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ* *and his Church*: Those who, through no fault of their own,* do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation.*337"

So, yes, there's some wiggle room provided. Catholics can quibble about what counts as "knowing" that the Church is necessary for salvation and what kind of ignorance is "through no fault of one's own"? What counts as "seeking God with a sincere heart"?

I think Wolfe's answers can be found through the Urth cycle.

On 7/16/08, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On Jul 16, 2008, at 1:06 PM, John Watkins wrote:

Oh, no, I don't think he's in the Mel Gibson camp. Some of his non-mainstream views seem to be, if anything, on the other side--he apparently gives great salvific power to faith in non-Christian religions, and even to faith in religions with explicitly false or evil gods, and he believes (or says he believes, of course) that pagan gods were real beings but not demons. So I'd say he's on the broad-minded side of orthodox Catholicism.

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Is it actually a permitted doctrine in Catholicism that faith in non-Christian religions can have salvific power? Doesn't that explicitly contradict John 14:6? Which is *another* of what I--brought up

in, admittedly, a faith without, to be kind, much of a formal intellectual tradition--considered to be one of those bedrock passages.

Adam

Matthew Knight — 16 Jul 2008, 18:40 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 1:17 PM, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:
Whoa, whoa, whoa. Is it actually a permitted doctrine in Catholicism that faith in non-Christian religions can have salvific power? Doesn't that explicitly contradict John 14:6? Which is *another* of what I--brought up in, admittedly, a faith without, to be kind, much of a formal intellectual tradition--considered to be one of those bedrock passages.

Adam

No less a Christian luminary than C.S. Lewis--admittedly an Anglican rather than a Catholic, but one whom I recall Gene Wolfe mentioning as an influence--implied believing that non-Christian religions, while not necessarily possessed of "salvific power" themselves, could have many true believers within their ranks who unconsciously deduced the truth of the Christian religion through the false disguise of their own religion and be saved without explicitly recognizing Christianity. (Stated most explicitly in "The Last Battle", where a kind Calormene soldier and devout believer in Tash is accepted into the Narnian equivalent of heaven.)

Also, as a member of a historically pacifist Christian sect (the Mennonites), I can state unequivocally that pacifism is NOT a "do-or-die" article of the Christian orthodox mainstream. Many Mennonites were tortured, murdered, and otherwise persecuted by the Catholic and Protestant authorities for their "heretical" views in the early 16th century (advocating not only pacifism but the separation of Church and State). And not to stir up a can of worms...but George W. Bush. Need I say more?

Paul B — 16 Jul 2008, 18:48 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Only a condensed version in a Mahabharata translation - what's its purpose here?

Supernovae have nothing to do with it, this is foreknowledge of death resulting from premeditated action, what many would call "murder". The Hierogrammates might be able to bargain it down to manslaughter.

I'm one of those (apparently few) simple, naive souls that believes that murder is evil. Even if it's necessary, it's still evil.

Paul

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 2:29 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 2:46 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Some people maybe take this stuff a little too seriously....

Seeing such a spirited defense put up for murder on a planetary scale certainly gets one's hackles up.

What is it, one supernova a year, somewhere in the Universe? And common or garden variety novas are much more common, I don't have any idea how common.

I don't see anything to get worked up about, particularly. Everyone dies.

Sure, not everyone is ready to go and most people suffer some and flail about some more, but in the end the result is the same and you might as well be calm and cheerful about it. If a bad thing happens, and then you have negative emotions about it, two bad things have happened.

Have you read the Gita?

.

brunians at brunians.org — 16 Jul 2008, 18:57 · in reply to Paul B

Only a condensed version in a Mahabharata translation - what's its purpose here?

!!

Supernovae have nothing to do with it, this is foreknowledge of death resulting from premeditated action, what many would call "murder".

You are assuming that they are all random. What if you could cause them?

Or meteor strikes, directing large rocks at planets inhabited by one's enemies is well within human capability, which the other is not just yet.

The

Hierogrammates might be able to bargain it down to manslaughter.

I'm one of those (apparently few) simple, naive souls that believes that murder is evil. Even if it's necessary, it's still evil.

I agree.

Of course, as sinful creatures, evil is sort of our stock in trade.

I also differentiate between murder and homicide: all murder is homicide, not all homicide is murder.

.

Paul B — 16 Jul 2008, 22:31 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 2:57 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

!!

Come on, don't just "!!" me, explain - I'm genuinely curious.

You are assuming that they are all random. What if you could cause them?

Or meteor strikes, directing large rocks at planets inhabited by one's enemies is well within human capability, which the other is not just yet.

Sure, why not. (Though I could've sworn you were referring to an act of nature - an intentionally caused supernova a year would be a bit much) But if it's wilfully caused and results in death, you've got an ethical problem, and then it is something to get worked up about.

I also differentiate between murder and homicide: all murder is homicide, not all homicide is murder.

Sure, that's why I (jokingly) mentioned manslaughter (less severe than murder). The severity may vary, but purposefully causing death of unwilling souls is uniformly a bad thing.

Throughout this discussion I've tried to establish that it's still a bad thing, even if done by time-traveling aliens from another dimension, and even if it's done for a good cause.

I've been surprised by the resistance to this idea.

Jeff Wilson — 16 Jul 2008, 23:13 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam Thornton wrote:

On Jul 16, 2008, at 8:38 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

Paul B wrote:

What are you referring to? Where does it say that Urth is alive?! I wonder how it'd feel about being drowned, anyway

Not drowned, baptised and born again as Ushas with all our sins washed away.

I wonder how long it will be until we hear the Bush administration, and

I wasn't aware Wolfe was getting into political writing! When did he start?

Several days of extremely high tides doesn't literally drown a planet, though it does drastically change the character of the part that the puny humans use to the point it can be metaphorically drowned.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 16 Jul 2008, 23:22 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

I am referring to the hierarchy of the great chain of being, as is David Duffy. This is an underlying assumption of the Christian worldview, although many modern Christians choose to deprecate it.

In this hierarchy, the World is assumed to be a living being, possessing an intelligence and a spirit as are all of the various levels of the World.

I've been a lifelong Christian, and this is the first I've heard the Great Chain of Being explicitly said to have a place in Christian doctrine. It certainly is not part of the Apostles's, Nicean, or Constantinople Creeds, or any other definitive statement of Christian belief I've seen.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 16 Jul 2008, 23:33 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam Thornton wrote:

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:17 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Seriously: we're supposed to be talking about the writings of someone who is ... famously Catholic, with ... some really nonstandard theology,

I know Wolfe considers himself to be orthodox. What bits of heresy do you accuse him of? I don't see any that's explicitly in there....

The outright rejection of pacifism (which I believe is pretty clear in the interviews) seems to directly repudiate much of the Sermon on the Mount, which I think I am being pretty orthodox in believing to be among the very centralmost of Christian positions (although, yes, of course you can point to the moneychangers, and, yes, then you can point to Christ carrying a scourge...

Did you miss the various Crusades? Or hymns like "Onward Christian Soldiers?" Militarism's been given the imprimatur for a long time.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 16 Jul 2008, 23:38 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam Thornton wrote:

On Jul 16, 2008, at 1:06 PM, John Watkins wrote:

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Whoa, whoa, whoa. Is it actually a permitted doctrine in Catholicism that faith in non-Christian religions can have salvific power? Doesn't that explicitly contradict John 14:6? Which is *another* of what I-brought up in, admittedly, a faith without, to be kind, much of a formal intellectual tradition--considered to be one of those bedrock passages.

You can google "anonymous Christianity" and read all about it.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Jul 2008, 00:17 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

The people who came up with Christianity, way back when, thought the World was like this. Everybody did, more or less, irregardless of religion.

They did right up through about 1500 or so, in the West. Maybe even a little later. Then the whole thing got thrown out and the terminology reinvented.

There may have been people in the old days, epicureans and so forth, who held minority views about how the World was made up, but they were just that.

.

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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In this hierarchy, the World is assumed to be a living being, possessing

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--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 17 Jul 2008, 00:23 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 2:46 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Some people maybe take this stuff a little too seriously....

Seeing such a spirited defense put up for murder on a planetary scale certainly gets one's hackles up.

What is it, one supernova a year, somewhere in the Universe? And common or garden variety novas are much more common, I don't have any idea how common.

1 supernova per 50 years in the milky way, billions per year in the observable universe. Nova events are more common, but that because of repeat occurrences, the objects that produce them are less common.

Sun-like stars are too small for either to happen on their own, and any sort of intervention to cause one would be grossly obvious.

I don't see anything to get worked up about, particularly. Everyone dies. Sure, not everyone is ready to go and most people suffer some and flail about some more, but in the end the result is the same and you might as well be calm and cheerful about it. If a bad thing happens, and then you have negative emotions about it, two bad things have happened.

Have you read the Gita?

Sounds a bit more Bardo Thodol.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 17 Jul 2008, 00:33 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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cite please?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Jul 2008, 00:43 · in reply to Paul B

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 2:57 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

!!

Come on, don't just "!!" me, explain - I'm genuinely curious.

Arjuna saw his uncles, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, and comrades. (1.26)

Seeing fathers-in-law, all those kinsmen, and other dear ones standing in the ranks of the two armies, (1.27)

Arjuna was overcome with great compassion and sorrowfully said: O Krishna, seeing my kinsmen standing with a desire to fight, (1.28)

My limbs fail and my mouth becomes dry. My body quivers and my hairs stand on end. (1.29)

The bow, Gandeeva, slips from my hand and my skin intensely burns. My head turns, I am unable to stand steady and, O Krishna, I see bad omens. I see no use of killing my kinsmen in battle. (1.30-31)

I desire neither victory nor pleasure nor kingdom, O Krishna. What is the use of the kingdom, or enjoyment, or even life, O Krishna? (1.32)

Because all those, for whom we desire kingdom, enjoyments, and pleasures, are standing here for the battle, giving up their lives and wealth. (1.33)

Teachers, uncles, sons, grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other relatives. (1.34)

I do not wish to kill them, who are also about to kill, even for the sovereignty of the three worlds, let alone for this earthly kingdom, O Krishna. (1.35)

...

Lord Krishna, as if smiling, spoke these words to the despondent Arjuna in the midst of the two armies. (2.10)

The Supreme Lord said: You grieve for those who are not worthy of grief, and yet speak the words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. (2.11)

There was never a time when I, you, or these kings did not exist; nor shall we ever cease to exist in the future.

-- Gita

I don't know where to begin, really. But basically, Krishna explains why it's all OK, at least under the right circumstances, He experiences it all and doesn't get worked up about it. Arjuna argues with him (good man!) and it goes back and forth for a while and finally Krishna shows Arjuna himself in his God form, and Arjuna stops arguing.

It's not really that long: that's not an excerpt, in the Mahabharata, that's the whole thing.

<http://eawc.evansville.edu/anthology/gita.htm>

You are assuming that they are all random. What if you could cause them?

Or meteor strikes, directing large rocks at planets inhabited by one's enemies is well within human capability, which the other is not just yet.

Sure, why not. (Though I could've sworn you were referring to an act of nature - an intentionally caused supernova a year would be a bit much)

Oh no, the one supernova a year is the total number of supernovas. I was speculating maybe an occasional one happened less than by pure chance. And supernovas are huge events, clearing out big chunks of galaxies. Plain old novas happen about three and a half times a year in just this galaxy (according to <http://www.springerlink.com/content/h0661351216h1326/>) and are sufficient to wipe out a stellar system. It's not inconceivable that intelligent beings might learn how to make one happen.

I also differentiate between murder and homicide: all murder is homicide, not all homicide is murder.

Sure, that's why I (jokingly) mentioned manslaughter (less severe than murder). The severity may vary, but purposefully causing death of unwilling souls is uniformly a bad thing.

There have been, historically, a number of dissenting opinions. I can't really say that I agree with them, though certain of them (like those of the Aztecs) I find sort of esthetically pleasing.

Throughout this discussion I've tried to establish that it's still a bad thing, even if done by time-traveling aliens from another dimension, and even if it's done for a good cause.

Sure.

I've been surprised by the resistance to this idea.

So why do bad things happen? Both YHWH and Krishna cheated when someone got to argue with them. Tell me.

.

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Jul 2008, 00:50 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

We're talking about the stuff that's in Aristotle, right?

Aristotle was not making stuff up: he was recording what people thought.

For a specifically Christian reference there's "Dionysius the Areopagite" (pseudo-Dionysius): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudo-Dionysius_the_Areopagite

.

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

The people who came up with Christianity, way back when, thought the World was like this. Everybody did, more or less, irregardless of religion.
cite please?

--

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Paul B — 17 Jul 2008, 00:55 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 8:43 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

So why do bad things happen? Both YHVH and Krishna cheated when someone got to argue with them. Tell me.

Damned if I know. At the outset of this argument I mentioned in passing that the Problem of Evil doesn't have a satisfying solution. It's just that it's not the immediate problem at hand when we're talking about the Hierogrammeters, who aren't gods or even angels. It's perfectly reasonable that they'd commit an evil act.

Paul

Jeff Wilson — 17 Jul 2008, 00:56 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Oh no, the one supernova a year is the total number of supernovas. I was speculating maybe an occasional one happened less than by pure chance. And supernovas are huge events, clearing out big chunks of galaxies.

Where on earth did you study Astronomy?! Supernovas actually increase the number of stars in a galaxy when their shockwaves cause nearby nebulas to clump and collapse into new stars.

Plain old
novas happen about three and a half times a year in just this galaxy
(according to <http://www.springerlink.com/content/h0661351216h1326/>) and
are sufficient to wipe out a stellar system. It's not inconceivable that
intelligent beings might learn how to make one happen.

Since a nova involves a post-red giant stellar remnant, the solar system is already destroyed except for the close companion star necessary to supply mass for the nova events. There won't be any naturally habitable planets left, and anyone resettling the system will be able to see what they could be in for.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

John Smith — 17 Jul 2008, 01:37 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

I won't try to defend the Crusades but you're giving the hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers" a bad rap. The hymn does not promote militarism. The "Christian soldiers" are not military men who are waging war on heathens. They are Christians who are urged to advance Christian ideals LIKE soldiers going into battle. Listen to the words and I think you'll agree.

Jack

--- Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
Adam Thornton wrote:

On Jul 16, 2008, at 12:17 PM,
brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Seriously: we're supposed to be talking about the writings of someone who is ... famously Catholic, with ... some really nonstandard theology,

I know Wolfe considers himself to be orthodox.

What bits of heresy do you
accuse him of? I don't see any that's explicitly
in there....

The outright rejection of pacifism (which I
believe is pretty clear in
the interviews) seems to directly repudiate much
of the Sermon on the
Mount, which I think I am being pretty orthodox in
believing to be among
the very centralmost of Christian positions
(although, yes, of course
you can point to the moneychangers, and, yes, then
you can point to
Christ carrying a scourge...

Did you miss the various Crusades? Or hymns like
"Onward Christian
Soldiers?" Militarism's been given the imprimatur
for a long time.

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Lane Haygood — 17 Jul 2008, 01:46 · in reply to John Smith

What about "Praise God and Pass the Ammunition?"

(I know it's not a hymn; I'm just making a joke.)

Lane

On Jul 16, 2008, at 8:37 PM, John Smith wrote:
I won't try to defend the Crusades but you're giving
the hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers" a bad rap.
The hymn does not promote militarism. The
"Christian soldiers" are not military men who are
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"Onward Christian
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--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Jul 2008, 01:51 · in reply to Paul B

I don't have a problem with that.

But then, I don't have a problem with God doing evil either. Everything that occurs being the
will of God, and evil things occurring....

.

On Wed, Jul 16, 2008 at 8:43 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

So why do bad things happen? Both YHWH and Krishna cheated when someone
got to argue with them. Tell me.

Damned if I know. At the outset of this argument I mentioned in passing
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that

it's not the immediate problem at hand when we're talking about the
Hierogrammates, who aren't gods or even angels. It's perfectly reasonable
that they'd commit an evil act.

Paul

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Jul 2008, 01:55 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

What happens in the volume of space around a supernova when the radiation wave goes
through it? Would anything living here survive if Sirius went supernova? Perhaps some
thousands or millions of years something else will arise....

.

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Oh no, the one supernova a year is the total number of supernovas. I was speculating maybe an occasional one happened less than by pure chance. And supernovas are huge events, clearing out big chunks of galaxies.

Where on earth did you study Astronomy?! Supernovas actually increase the number of stars in a galaxy when their shockwaves cause nearby nebulas to clump and collapse into new stars.

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--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson@io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 17 Jul 2008, 03:08 · follows brunians at brunians.org

In all this crap about morality and who is fit to look down his nose at whom, why is it that no one has thought to mention two scenes involving the holy slaves Barbatus, Famulimus and Ossipago? In the first scene, at Baldanders' castle, all three Hierodules knelt to Severian. Barbatus and Famulimus did it again in Apu-Punchau's tomb, and Famulimus even kissed the floor before him.

This was right after Severian complained of being an eidolon and wanted to know why Tzadkiel hadn't just brought him back to life, as Severian had brought Zama back to life.

As Barbatus said: "What makes you think Tzadkiel wields such power? Famulimus and Ossipago and I are nothing before him, but we're not _his_ slaves; and great though he is, he's not the head of his race and its savior." (URTH, L, 360)

Earlier, on the Ship, Famulimus had said: "_Hierodule_ is 'holy slave.' How could Hierodules be holy, did we not serve the Increate? Our master is he, and he only." (V, 36)

Yet they knelt to Severian. I'm sure this must say something about the moral pecking order. One doesn't usually make obeisance to one's moral inferior.

-Roy

Adam Thornton — 17 Jul 2008, 03:29 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Jul 16, 2008, at 10:08 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:
One doesn't usually make obeisance to one's moral inferior.

At the risk of being really snarky, have you ever held a real job?

Adam

Lane Haygood — 17 Jul 2008, 03:31 · in reply to Adam Thornton

No kidding. This is essentially how just about every government has played out in the history of the world.

Lane

On Jul 16, 2008, at 10:29 PM, Adam Thornton wrote:

On Jul 16, 2008, at 10:08 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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Adam_____

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Jul 2008, 03:33 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

It's also reminiscent of the bit in the Quran where God creates Adam and orders the angels to bow to him (all do except Satan and his people).

.
In all this crap about morality and who is fit to look down his nose at whom, why is it that no one has thought to mention two scenes involving the holy slaves Barbatus, Famulimus and Ossipago? In the first scene, at Baldanders' castle, all three Hierodules knelt to Severian. Barbatus and Famulimus did it again in Apu-Punchau's tomb, and Famulimus even kissed the floor before him.

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For a specifically Christian reference there's "Dionysius the Areopagite" (pseudo-Dionysius):
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudo-Dionysius_the_Areopagite

I don't see anything about the world having a literal persona distinct from God, and I don't recall seeing anything like that in Aristotle's elementalism, either.

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 17 Jul 2008, 06:14 · in reply to John Smith

John Smith wrote:
I won't try to defend the Crusades but you're giving the hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers" a bad rap. The hymn does not promote militarism. The "Christian soldiers" are not military men who are waging war on heathens. They are Christians who are urged to advance Christian ideals LIKE soldiers going into battle. Listen to the words and I think you'll agree.

II Timothy 2:3 (KJV): "Thou shalt endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

It doesn't have to be literal military action, using martial similes and metaphors for correct behavior is still an approval of militarism. You don't see hymns that say, "onward Christian harlots" or "onward Christian usurers" do you?

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 17 Jul 2008, 06:33 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:
What happens in the volume of space around a supernova when the radiation wave goes through it? Would anything living here survive if Sirius went supernova? Perhaps some thousands or millions of years something else will arise....

Kills all life above ground on the Sirius-facing hemisphere and poisons the atmosphere. But this won't happen until you see 40% of the sun's mass flow from Sirius A to Sirius B.

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

David Duffy — 17 Jul 2008, 06:39 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Thu, 17 Jul 2008, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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A more recent SFnal realization is in CS Lewis's Space Trilogy. Earth is (or has :) a silent planet.

David Duffy.

Jeff Wilson — 17 Jul 2008, 07:32 · in reply to David Duffy

David Duffy wrote:

On Thu, 17 Jul 2008, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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A more recent SFnal realization is in CS Lewis's *_Space Trilogy_*. Earth is (or has :)) a silent planet.

Keep fishing, guys.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Jul 2008, 08:19 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Good for you, I say.

Arguments are down the hall.

.

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

We're talking about the stuff that's in Aristotle, right?

Aristotle was not making stuff up: he was recording what people thought.

For a specifically Christian reference there's "Dionysius the Areopagite"

(pseudo-Dionysius):

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudo-Dionysius_the_Areopagite

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Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Jul 2008, 08:21 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

John Smith wrote:

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It doesn't have to be literal military action, using martial similies

and metaphors for correct behavior is still an approval of militarism.
You don't see hymns that say, "onward Christian harlots" or "onward
Christian usurers" do you?

Actually, a hymn called 'Onward Christian Harlots' has real potential.

.

John Watkins — 17 Jul 2008, 12:03 · in reply to David Duffy

Are we talking about a literal personality for the Earth, or for the universe?

Lewis actually explicitly notes in *The Discarded Image* that the Earth was not classically given a guiding intelligence. This is because, in the Ptolemaic system, the Earth is stationary while the heavens move. Being stationary, the Earth obviously needs no intelligence guiding its movement. According to Lewis, the first person to propose that the Great Chain of Being including the Earth possessing a distinct "persona" in the sense that Saturn and Jupiter do was Dante (*Discarded Image* 139, if anyone has it), who proposed that the governing intelligence of Earth was Fortune. Lewis tweaked that idea to make the governing intelligence of Earth a Satan analogue in the *Space Trilogy*.

Nevertheless, despite the (very debatable) commonality of "great chain of being" theories (and conflating them all into a single system is kind of sloppy), the "people who came up with Christianity" did not typically ascribe some sort of "literal persona" to the planet Earth. The Great Chain most just posited that there must be a bunch of interesting spiritual beings "higher" than man and "lower" than God.

As for the universe as a whole, the closest thing the ancients and medievals had to such a concept was the *Primum Mobile*. It's true that philosophers tended to talk about the *Primum Mobile* as though it had a persona, but Lewis is quick to point out that that's just how people spoke back then--to say "the *Primum Mobile* revolves because it loves God" is no more literal than to say "water desires to run downhill," which is exactly how medievals (and Tzadkiel, for that matter) did in fact talk. Lewis actually mocks moderns for taking this literally by pointing out that we use an even more personalizing metaphor--"Water runs downhill because it must obey the laws of physics."

So I'm far from convinced that the ancients or medievals as a rule ascribed a "personality" to the "World." A necessary obedience to what we'd now call metaphysical laws, sure.

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 2:39 AM, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au> wrote:

On Thu, 17 Jul 2008, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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A more recent SFnal realization is in CS Lewis's *_Space Trilogy_*. Earth is (or has :) a silent planet.

David Duffy.

John Smith — 17 Jul 2008, 12:13 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Maybe I'm trying to split a hair. I agree that the hymn approves the bravery and other admirable conduct of soldiers. But it asks us to use martial virtues in a good cause. I just don't see this as an endorsement of "militarism."

Perhaps my disagreement is with the word "militarism", which I take to mean a reliance on aggressive military force. You're right to say most Christians in most eras have supported just wars.

Jack

--- Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
John Smith wrote:

I won't try to defend the Crusades but you're giving the hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers" a bad rap.

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--
Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Jul 2008, 13:53 · in reply to John Watkins

The concept of 'the planet Earth', is very new. Planets are lights that wander around in the sky. Earth is either the ground or the plane of the ecliptic (cf "Hamlet's Mill" for this last one). Celestial objects are thought of as having intelligences and spirits, which are integrated into the pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy.

What are we arguing about? Since the ancients didn't have a concept of 'the planet Earth' I don't have any problem admitting that they did not attribute the characteristics of a celestial body to it.

Are we talking about a literal personality for the Earth, or for the universe?

Lewis actually explicitly notes in *The Discarded Image* that the Earth was not classically given a guiding intelligence. This is because, in the Ptolemaic system, the Earth is stationary while the heavens move. Being stationary, the Earth obviously needs no intelligence guiding its movement.

According to Lewis, the first person to propose that the Great Chain of Being including the Earth possessing a distinct "persona" in the sense that

Saturn and Jupiter do was Dante (*Discarded Image* 139, if anyone has it), who

proposed that the governing intelligence of Earth was Fortune. Lewis tweaked that idea to make the governing intelligence of Earth a Satan analogue in the *Space Trilogy*.

Nevertheless, despite the (very debatable) commonality of "great chain of being" theories (and conflating them all into a single system is kind of sloppy), the "people who came up with Christianity" did not typically ascribe some sort of "literal persona" to the planet Earth. The Great Chain

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A more recent SFnal realization is in CS Lewis's *_Space Trilogy_*. Earth is

(or has :)) a silent planet.

David Duffy.

John Watkins — 17 Jul 2008, 15:28 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

I think we're just discussing the finer points of the role of planetary intelligences in Ptolemaic cosmology. It's pretty far afield from the original point about the nature of the Hierogrammates.

While I think it's obvious that the Hierogrammates occupy a position "higher" than human beings, it's also fairly clear that they are not literally angels, unlike Lewis's eldila or Tolkien's Ainur or even Wolfe's own inhabitants of Kleos--they are not spirits, they are not direct creations of God, they are not eternal, etc. As such, I don't think they have the innate moral authority to bring the cataclysm of the New Sun. The mere fact that Christianity in most of its forms assumes the existence of angelic beings doesn't establish that the Hierogrammates are such beings anymore than it establishes that the Overcyns or gods of Latro's world are.

On 7/17/08, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

The concept of 'the planet Earth', is very new. Planets are lights that wander around in the sky. Earth is either the ground or the plane of the ecliptic (cf "Hamlet's Mill" for this last one). Celestial objects are thought of as having intelligences and spirits, which are integrated into the pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy.

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wrote:

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from God, and I don't recall seeing anything like that in Aristotle's
elementalism, either.

A more recent SFnal realization is in CS Lewis's *_Space Trilogy_*. Earth
is
(or has :) a silent planet.

David Duffy.

Dave Tallman — 17 Jul 2008, 15:54 · follows John Watkins

I've been holding back on this discussion because of time constraints, but I would like to weigh in. I think that the bringing of the New Sun was a good thing, but I can't agree with b sharp's argument. It seems like a victory by definition: the Hierogrammates are good because they are so smart that we cannot judge them. C. S. Lewis once said that a cat cannot judge between a vivisectionist and a surgeon trying to save its life, since both cause it pain. But the cat's lack of ability to judge doesn't make the vivisectionist good.

It seems like the more we ascribe unlimited knowledge and power to the Hierogrammates the more difficulties we have. Perhaps the problem can be resolved by humanizing them a bit, and allowing them short-term as well as long-term goals. Master Ash said that even time-travellers cannot know the future for certain. Tzadkiel cannot be sure that Sev will succeed, just that it is probable.

If the Hierogrammates are more like humans, then their actions don't have to be absolutely good, just the lesser of two evils. Humans take actions all the time that we know could cause the death of others: invasion of other countries, economic sanctions, even passing or not passing laws. Almost every action and every inaction can have such consequences. By Paul B's standard of murder none of us have clean hands.

We could start back with putting the black hole in the Sun, which caused Typhon to lose his grip on power. This short-term goal could have been the purpose. Suppose Ymar or one of his immediate successors had been able to restore the Sun. Then there would have been very little loss of life. Instead, the autarchs chickened out for millenia after Ymar's failure. They embraced the do-nothing future, sitting tight until the energy ran out.

Restoring the Sun remained a good goal in itself. All the living systems of Urth, Lune, and Verthandi were at stake. Even today, people argue for "saving the Earth" and propose drastic measures that could well cost lives. Eons of life and evolution were enabled by rekindling the Sun, especially for marine life (and other life that went extinct could be re-seeded from space or by time travel).

Paul B argued that a mass evacuation of Urth was feasible in the time of Severian the Lame. I see no evidence for that. It was feasible in the time of Master Ash, but that was centuries later, after the population was desperate and greatly reduced by freezing and famine. Even so, some could not be found, some refused to go, and for some no place could be found. An attempted mass evacuation in Sev's time could produce panic, possibly costing more lives than allowing those with boats and airships to evacuate themselves.

The Hierogrammates had the additional long-term goal of creating the Hieros. Even the Ascians agreed that humans had behaved terribly in the universe in the old days, and that something needed to change the next time out. "We shall not go to the stars again until we go as a divinity," the aquastor Malrubius said. Admittedly, the Hieros will themselves cause massive suffering in their quest to raise other potentially-intelligent species to the level of companions or higher, but that is arguably superior to the war, looting and pillaging that humanity did before. (By the way, I think the Green Man is quite plausible as a step on the way to the Hieros. He was not a total pacifist: he stood by while Agia killed three sentries in order to save Sev).

Wolfe, as the God of this fictional world, chose to "bless" the Hierogrammate's action in two ways. He granted Severian miraculous powers, beyond what the Hierogrammates and Tzadkiel could do. He also chose to write this story as an epic. This is either a hero's journey or a horrific deconstruction of the whole idea of a hero's journey, which ends with evil triumphant. I think he invites us to see the ending as both tragic in some ways and hopeful in others.

Paul B — 17 Jul 2008, 16:12 · in reply to John Smith

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 8:13 AM, John Smith <jsmith2627@att.net> wrote:
You're right to say most Christians in most eras have supported just wars.

Except maybe the crusades (I'm sure it didn't seem just to those who'd been living in the Levant previous).

And the wars fought in Europe before the 20th century (with Christians on both sides, can both sides in a war be just?)

And the colonial wars of the 19th-20th century. (See crusades)

Jack

Paul

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 17 Jul 2008, 16:34 · in reply to Paul B

It isn't that the wars were necessarily just, only that their leaders told them that they were. That's all most people need.

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 9:12 AM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 8:13 AM, John Smith <jsmith2627 at att.net> wrote:

You're right to say most Christians in most eras have supported just wars.

Except maybe the crusades (I'm sure it didn't seem just to those who'd been living in the Levant previous).

And the wars fought in Europe before the 20th century (with Christians on both sides, can both sides in a war be just?)

And the colonial wars of the 19th-20th century. (See crusades)

Jack

Paul

Paul B — 17 Jul 2008, 16:40 · in reply to Dave Tallman

A few issues with this, and some inaccuracies.

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 11:54 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

By Paul B's standard of murder none of us have clean hands.

Is there a problem with this, even if true? I know some religions that consider everyone to be a sinner.

We could start back with putting the black hole in the Sun, which caused Typhon to lose his grip on power. This short-term goal could have been the purpose. Suppose Ymar or one of his immediate successors had been able to restore the Sun. Then there would have been very little loss of life.

Even considering the physical implications of your suggestion, you make a preposterous claim here without any evidence. Presumably a white hole is the only way to remove the black one. What would it matter how much time passes? The physical anomalies produced by the New Sun don't care, unless the black hole got a lot bigger after a few hundred years. Given that it's just had the sun to feed on, which it didn't even consume, it's unlikely.

Incidentally, it's curious that the introduction of the black hole didn't have similar effects on Urth as that of the white one.

As for the suggestion that Hierogrammates went to stellar engineering just to depose Typhon, it sounds like swatting a fly with a Buick.

Restoring the Sun remained a good goal in itself. All the living systems of Urth, Lune, and Verthandi were at stake.

No. The Hierogrammates definitively say that Urth is all that matters.

Paul B argued that a mass evacuation of Urth was feasible in the time of Severian the Lame. I see no evidence for that. It was feasible in the time of Master Ash, but that was centuries later, after the population was desperate and greatly reduced by freezing and famine.

You seem to conveniently forget that Hierogrammates do possess foresight, in addition to tech that allows creation of black holes. These two alone should suggest they can do pretty much any "mundane" thing (here, building large ship(s) - [if Typhon could do it, they could too] and sending it to point Urth) at pretty much any time, no?

When you can see probable futures, "feasibility" takes on a new meaning.

Paul

Thomas Bitterman — 17 Jul 2008, 16:49 · in reply to Paul B

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 12:12 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 8:13 AM, John Smith <jsmith2627 at att.net> wrote:

You're right to say most Christians in most eras have supported just wars.

Except maybe the crusades (I'm sure it didn't seem just to those who'd been living in the Levant previous).

Who didn't it seem just to? The Muslims, whom had slightly earlier conquered the place during the Fatah?

Jack

Paul

Enamel

John Watkins — 17 Jul 2008, 16:57 · in reply to Paul B

I'm not convinced that the Hierogrammates put the black hole in the sun in the first place.

On 7/17/08, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

A few issues with this, and some inaccuracies.

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 11:54 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

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When you can see probable futures, "feasibility" takes on a new meaning.

Paul

Dave Tallman — 17 Jul 2008, 18:02 · follows John Watkins

Paul B wrote:

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Incidentally, it's curious that the introduction of the black hole didn't have similar effects on Urth as that of the white one.

As for the suggestion that Hierogrammates went to stellar engineering just to depose Typhon, it sounds like swatting a fly with a Buick.

There are two possible mechanisms for the white hole to disrupt earth: thermal and gravitational. I believe the gravitational effects were practically nothing: Baldanders only expected them to ring bells. He predicted the Urth would have problems due to rising sea levels (ice plus energy gives water) and to the heat causing shifts in the earth's crust. The latter is hard to understand, but I suppose some unstable faults could be triggered by changes in heat.

If the gravitational effects were really severe for either the white or the black hole, then the Earth's orbit would be perturbed. We have no hint that this was the case, and if it were it would cause even more severe problems for Ushas.

Near Typhon's time, the Sun hadn't lost that much heat, so the sea level hadn't dropped much due to increased ice at the poles. People would not have settled in the new low-lying areas. (It's

interesting that the Citadel was usable in Typhon's time. Was the wall perhaps a sea-wall, and the river changed course to flow through later?)

The stellar engineering to depose Typhon was huge in its technological power but subtle in its immediate effects. It might be thought of as an economic sanction. Coming in with guns blazing would wipe out more innocents in the short term.

Is there a problem with this, even if true? I know some religions that consider everyone to be a sinner.

It allows us to consider the Hierogrammates as imperfect but doing the best they could, like the rest of us, instead of absolutely good or absolutely evil, as we have tended to go in this discussion.

You seem to conveniently forget that Hierogrammates do possess foresight, in addition to tech that allows creation of black holes. These two alone should suggest they can do pretty much any "mundane" thing (here, building large ship(s) - [if Typhon could do it, they could too] and sending it to point Urth) at pretty much any time, no?

I'll allow that they could get together a lot of ships, especially if they only needed to get people off-planet temporarily and then dropped them back when Ushas had settled down. But there's still the issue of panic, and of people's willingness to go on the say-so of cacogens. I don't think it would have been as easy as you think.

b sharp — 17 Jul 2008, 20:08 · follows Dave Tallman

A nice, thoughtful post Dave Tallman, I'll debate a couple points. You say:

I can't agree with b sharp's argument. It seems like a victory by definition: the Hierogrammates are good because they are so smart that we cannot judge them.

That is not quite right. I would say, (as always, trying to advocate what I think are Wolfe's intentions not my own philosophy) that because the Hierogrammates are so smart, we cannot judge their ACTIONS.

Trying to use what I think is Christian theologic principles, one does not have to be a great intellect to follow God. All you need are two things: 1. a basic ability all sane, adult humans have: the intuition to know God (and His goodness) from Satan (and his evil). Once you have that, all you need is simply...2. faith. A good Christian faithfully follows and believes the word of God without the need for deep philosophical ponderings on whether God is acting good or bad at a particular moment. He is always acting good.

Likewise with angels. If the debate is whether Hierogrammates are intended by Wolfe to be like angels or devils that's a different issue. I will suggest that those readers who find the Hierogrammates to be evil would also find the philosophy of Christians (and Gene Wolfe) to be steeped in evil.

But, as most seem to do here, accept that the Hierogrammates are intended to be good then our judgement must cease (I think Gene Wolfe would say). We are supposed to have faith that such beings, so much closer to God than we, have actions which will always be for the good. Perhaps they are capable of making mistakes but we do not have the ability to detect them. No more than a cat has the ability to recognize when a veterinary surgeon has made a medical error.

The cat analogy is funny actually. I can imagine many people who would consider the

vivisectionist the good person for trying to save human lives with medical research while the cat surgeon is mildly evil for wasting medical time, skill and facilities on an animal when many humans must do without.

But, anyway, as your post recognizes, the only way we can attempt to understand and judge Hierogrammates is to humanize them. But they are not human. It would be like cats trying to felinize two doctors in judging their morality.

-bsharp

Jeff Wilson — 17 Jul 2008, 22:27 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

You seem to conveniently forget that Hierogrammates do possess foresight, in addition to tech that allows creation of black holes.

Where is it written that they make black holes?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 17 Jul 2008, 22:45 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

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If the gravitational effects were really severe for either the white or the black hole, then the Earth's orbit would be perturbed. We have no hint that this was the case, and if it were it would cause even more severe problems for Ushas.

Urth's orbit is already perturbed by the process of moving of Lune closer to it. The White Fountain could be of similar mass to the moon, which produces the majority of tides on the earth, and approach much more closely to create much more violent tides, but still not alter the overall orbit of the earth as much, because it is only about 1/80 of the earth's mass, like the moon is.

While direct gravitational force drops off as the inverse square of distance and irrespective of size, the derived tidal forces drop off with the inverse cube of distance, making distance much more important, but increase with in proportion to the size of the object, making bells tinkle, mountains buckle, and planets sunder. You can see for your self here

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tidal_force

where the final equation plainly has a total of 3 powers of R (distance radius) in the denominator, and delta r (the radius of the far object) in the numerator.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

John Watkins — 17 Jul 2008, 23:55 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

My wild theory as to the origin of the black hole in the sun is the panther from *Soldier of Sidon*. Of course, it's far from established that the Latro books take place in the same universe as the Urth books, but this is tantalizing:

"We call him Angra Manyu. He has but one name among us, but many others among other peoples. *He is the thing that eats the stars.*" (Sidon 155, emphasis mine.)

On 7/17/08, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

Paul B wrote:

You seem to conveniently forget that Hierogrammates do possess foresight, in addition to tech that allows creation of black holes.

Where is it written that they make black holes?

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Jul 2008, 00:35 · in reply to John Watkins

Angra Manyu, or Ahriman, is the Zoroastrian (the Persian) Devil.

.

My wild theory as to the origin of the black hole in the sun is the panther from *Soldier of Sidon*. Of course, it's far from established that the Latro books take place in the same universe as the Urth books, but this is tantalizing:

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Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

John Watkins — 18 Jul 2008, 02:51 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

I'm aware of that, though the identity of the panther is problematic. Wolfe simply calls him the "All-Beast" in the chapter title. Qanju, the speaker in the passage I quoted may be somewhat confused. He identifies the panther with Angra Manyu, but immediately thereafter, Thotmaktef

identifies Angra Manyu with Set.

Later on, Sahuset, the magician, suggests that the panther is not Set, but his servant. The panther seems to confirm this--he calls himself a god on p. 152 but refers to a "master" on p. 153. Later bits on Set seem to make it clear that he is not the Devil.

From this I take it that the panther is not literally Satan but is some kind of evil principle temporarily serving Set--but the kind of evil principle that eats stars. When Wolfe tells us about an evil spirit explicitly associated with blackness that eats stars, it's on purpose.

On 7/17/08, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
Angra Manyu, or Ahriman, is the Zoroastrian (the Persian) Devil.

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My wild theory as to the origin of the black hole in the sun is the panther from *Soldier of Sidon*. Of course, it's far from established that the Latro books take place in the same universe as the Urth books, but this is tantalizing:

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Where is it written that they make black holes?

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Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 15:31 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

Who didn't it seem just to? The Muslims, whom had slightly earlier conquered the place during the Fatah?

During the what?! The only "Fatah" I know is a Palestinian faction, my good anachronistic, sir. Seriously now.

Paul

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Jul 2008, 15:36 · in reply to Paul B

The Fatah was the extremely rapid spread of Islam out of Arabia and throughout the middle east in the generation or two following Muhammed. The Muslim conquest, more or less.

Who didn't it seem just to? The Muslims, whom had slightly earlier conquered the place during the Fatah?

During the what?! The only "Fatah" I know is a Palestinian faction, my good anachronistic, sir. Seriously now.

Paul

Jeff Wilson — 18 Jul 2008, 15:49 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B wrote:

Who didn't it seem just to? The Muslims, whom had slightly earlier conquered the place during the Fatah?

During the what?! The only "Fatah" I know is a Palestinian faction, my good anachronistic, sir. Seriously now.

The faction is named after the earlier period, partly because it has connotations of the "good old days".

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah>

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 16:02 · in reply to John Watkins

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 12:57 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04@gmail.com> wrote:

I'm not convinced that the Hierogrammates put the black hole in the sun in the first place.

It's true enough, they don't come out and say it. Nevertheless, the case is fairly strong for it.

Firstly, the Hierogrammates are the only race of powerful aliens who may be expected to be able to do something like this. Typhon as a candidate is unlikely not only due to his lack of other high tech like FTL, but also due to a lack of obvious motive. The possible providers of the black hole are thus either nature (or Increate, which is much more likely of those two), or the Hierogrammates.

The Urthlings believe they are being punished by the black hole, while the Hierogrammates admit the white hole's meaningful purpose is for Urth alone (not Mars or Venus). These, especially the latter, would be unlikely if it occurred by accident.

A possible alternative might be that the Increate created the hole as a miracle and then had the Hierogrammates undo it later, which only works if you buy into the theory that they're his direct helpers. At that point though, it doesn't matter much who does what, does it?

Paul

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 16:10 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 2:02 PM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

Baldanders only expected them to ring bells.

I'm sorry, this is dead wrong. The actual phrase was "[the bells] toll the deaths of continents". Baldanders knew perfectly well what would happen, and he explains that "waves of gravity" are the cause.

Is there a problem with this, even if true? I know some religions that consider everyone to be a sinner.

It allows us to consider the Hierogrammates as imperfect but doing the best they could, like the rest of us, instead of absolutely good or absolutely evil, as we have tended to go in this discussion.

I've actually been advocating for putting them on an equal moral footing with humans, not demonizing them outright. That comes later! Killing the vast majority of a planet's population of your moral equals reflects badly on you. As I've insisted, a responsible moral framework (deontology) doesn't much care what the outcome of your actions is.

Paul

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 16:30 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Hm. Well, that phrase "The word Fatah is prominently used for the Islamic expansion in the first centuries of Islamic history, and so has strongly positive connotations for Muslims" certainly appears often enough on blogs and Wikipedia as Google finds. No "established" sources corroborate it though, and it's worrying that it's always the same exact phrase.

I'd never heard of it before, so I'm still skeptical, but I now know what was meant.

In that case, I amend my reply about the justice of the crusades to "It is not a sensible moral response to say that injustice following other injustice is somehow more just". Yes, the Muslims were certainly invaders, but does it mean that another, wholly unrelated conqueror is somehow more justified in conquering them in turn? This is different from a punishment for past moral wrongs, that wasn't the purpose here.

Paul

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 11:49 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
Paul B wrote:

Who didn't it seem just to? The Muslims, whom had slightly earlier conquered the place during the Fatah?

During the what?! The only "Fatah" I know is a Palestinian faction, my good anachronistic, sir. Seriously now.

The faction is named after the earlier period, partly because it has connotations of the "good old days".

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah>

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> <<http://www.io.com/%7Ejwilson>> >

Dave Tallman — 18 Jul 2008, 17:04 · follows Paul B

Paul B wrote:

I'm sorry, this is dead wrong. The actual phrase was "[the bells] toll the deaths of continents". Baldanders knew perfectly well what would happen, and he explains that "waves of gravity" are the cause.

We had different interpretations of the same text, it seems. Baldanders also said "... a white fountain has been drawn across the void for millennia. It spins as it flies, and in its motion it emits waves of gravitation.... These waves are too slight to render us giddy. Yet Ocean feels them and breeds new tides and fresh currents. ... Bells feel them the same way. Like Ocean, their mass is delicately poised. ... The force that made your bells sound has warmed the cold heart of Urth once more. Now they toll the death of continents."

I read that the gravitational forces were weak, and so mistakenly concluded that the primary effects on Urth were caused by heating. I see now that Jeff Wilson is correct and that tidal forces caused by gravitation will cause dramatic changes in sea level and also distort the earth's crust, bringing volcanos and earthquakes.

I still don't understand the bit about the fountain spinning and why this would cause it to emit "waves of gravitation." Is the white fountain supposed to be something like a quasar?

I've actually been advocating for putting them on an equal moral footing with humans, not demonizing them outright. That comes later! Killing the vast majority of a planet's population of your moral equals reflects badly on you. As I've insisted, a responsible moral framework (deontology) doesn't much care what the outcome of your actions is.

Even deontologists don't apply that standard absolutely. I've read that Kant argued it is always wrong to lie, even to a murderer asking for the location of his victim, but most say that the consequences of telling the truth require a lie in this case. The alternative to the New Sun was the Ragnarok future, in which the whole solar system dies and a pitiful remnant of humanity is evacuated. Is that the lesser of two evils?

Thomas Bitterman — 18 Jul 2008, 17:52 · in reply to Paul B

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 12:30 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:
In that case, I amend my reply about the justice of the crusades to "It is not a sensible moral response to say that injustice following other injustice is somehow more just".

This puts self-defense in a difficult position.

Yes, the Muslims were certainly invaders, but does it mean that another, wholly unrelated conqueror is somehow more justified in conquering them in turn?

Yes. In short, see World War 2. In a little more depth, the Crusades were just another in a long line of wars between countries. There is nothing especially heinous about them that sets them apart from many other wars. The idea that the big bad Christians sucker-punched the peace-loving natives is not based in reality.

Paul

Enamel

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 17:55 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 1:04 PM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

Even deontologists don't apply that standard absolutely. I've read that Kant argued it is always wrong to lie, even to a murderer asking for the location of his victim, but most say that the consequences of telling the truth require a lie in this case. The alternative to the New Sun was the Ragnarok future, in which the whole solar system dies and a pitiful remnant of humanity is evacuated. Is that the lesser of two evils?

That's not a relevant question. The heart of the matter is that an evil course of action was chosen, lesser or not. Thus, it's impossible to consider the Hierogrammates to be untainted.

As far as other possible courses of action, speculation about evacuation not being useful due to panic is weak at best. In more mundane evacuations panic was seen as an acceptable alternative to mass death.

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Jul 2008, 18:01 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

Thomas Bitterman writes:

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 12:30 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

In that case, I amend my reply about the justice of the crusades to "It is not a sensible moral response to say that injustice following other injustice is somehow more just".

This puts self-defense in a difficult position.

Self defense is an immediate response to aggression. It can include a pre-emptive attack. However, if someone attacks you and does whatever it is he is going to do and then some centuries pass and you attack him, it may be revenge and it may be justified but self-defense it is not.

.

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 18:05 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 1:52 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 12:30 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

In that case, I amend my reply about the justice of the crusades to "It is not a sensible moral response to say that injustice following other injustice is somehow more just".

This puts self-defense in a difficult position.

Of course not, you're being silly. Self-defense is just. The crusades had nothing to do with self-defense.

Yes, the Muslims were certainly invaders, but does it mean that another, wholly unrelated conqueror is somehow more justified in conquering them in turn?

Yes. In short, see World War 2.

You persist in silliness. The factions that are considered "just" in that war were not after conquest.

In a little more depth, the Crusades were just another in a long line of

wars between countries. There is nothing especially heinous about them that sets them apart from many other wars. The idea that the big bad Christians sucker-punched the peace-loving natives is not based in reality.

Now you're making things up and pretending I said them, for which I applaud your imagination. What I did say was that conquest is unjust.

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 18:09 · in reply to Paul B

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 2:05 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

Of course not, you're being silly. Self-defense is just. The crusades had nothing to do with self-defense.

Incidentally, you might have better luck talking about the Reconquista, in which the Spanish were indeed fighting for their captured land. Though it happens alongside the crusades, it's seldom referred to by that term, and I certainly didn't intend it above. (It seems I'll have to be careful about precisely what I do not say)

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 18 Jul 2008, 18:19 · in reply to Paul B

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 10:55 AM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

That's not a relevant question. The heart of the matter is that an evil course of action was chosen, lesser or not. Thus, it's impossible to consider the Hierogrammates to be untainted.

So you apply Rorschach's standard?

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I once absend-mindedly ordered Three Mile Island dressing in a restaurant and, with great presence of mind, they brought Thousand Island Dressing and a bottle of chili sauce. -- T. Pratchett

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 19:06 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Well, the only two Rorschachs I know are the psychologist and the Watchman. (Trailer recently came out - topical, hey?) If we're talking about the latter, as far as morality goes, sure I do - he's a posterboy deontologist. I just don't couple that with the expectation that everyone be moral in everything they do, and with the demand that all wrongs be brutally punished.

For example, if futuristic humans kill a bunch of aliens in order to uplift the survivors, I wouldn't be surprised, even though I'd think their action immoral and wrong. They'd have to have a pretty solid track record of doing shady things before I'd call them evil, even. I just wouldn't stand for their calling themselves angels, either.

Paul

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 2:19 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 10:55 AM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

That's not a relevant question. The heart of the matter is that an evil course of action was chosen, lesser or not. Thus, it's impossible to consider the Hierogrammates to be untainted.

So you apply Rorschach's standard?

--

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

Thomas Bitterman — 18 Jul 2008, 19:16 · in reply to Paul B

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 2:05 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 1:52 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 12:30 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

In that case, I amend my reply about the justice of the crusades to "It is not a sensible moral response to say that injustice following other injustice is somehow more just".

This puts self-defense in a difficult position.

Of course not, you're being silly. Self-defense is just. The crusades had nothing to do with self-defense.

I never said that self-defense was unjust (or just), simply that your maxim implies that self-defense is unjust.

Yes, the Muslims were certainly invaders, but does it mean that another, wholly unrelated conqueror is somehow more justified in conquering them in turn?

Yes. In short, see World War 2.

You persist in silliness. The factions that are considered "just" in that war were not after conquest.

The analogy I was after was this:

- country A conquers country B
- unrelated country C conquers country B, thus wresting it from country A

In WW2 we could have A=Germany, B=France, C=United States, whereas in the Crusades we could have A=Muslims, B=Holy Land, C=Christians. The big difference being that the U.S. gave France back to the French, while the Christians looked to set up their own kingdoms. Of course, at that point there were not really all that many "natives" to hand over the Holy Land to, so the parallel becomes inexact.

In a little more depth, the Crusades were just another in a long line of

wars between countries. There is nothing especially heinous about them that sets them apart from many other wars. The idea that the big bad Christians sucker-punched the peace-loving natives is not based in reality.

Now you're making things up and pretending I said them, for which I applaud your imagination. What I did say was that conquest is unjust.

My imagination rocks!

What you said, originally, was, "Except maybe the crusades (I'm sure it didn't seem just to those who'd been living in the Levant previous). " To which my (summarized) reply was, "Conquerors have no reason to feel they are being treated unjustly when they are in turn conquered".

To come back to Wolfe, perhaps the Hieros have a right to drown Urth. The analogy is to a

causus belli - what humanity did to them in the past was so horrible that they are justified in their present actions. Or, alternatively, that at some point humanity entered into an agreement with them, knowing the possible consequences, and we are still bound by that agreement.

Enamel

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 19:38 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 3:16 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

I never said that self-defense was unjust (or just), simply that your maxim implies that self-defense is unjust.

What on earth are you talking about? I said "It is not a sensible moral response to say that injustice following other injustice is somehow more just", along with "Conquest is unjust". Following simple logic, we can get "conquest following other conquests is not somehow more just". Self-defense isn't an attack, and reconquest (as I pointed out) isn't a conquest. Your logical proof for the above assertion is not only absent, but hard to imagine.

The analogy I was after was this:

- country A conquers country B
- unrelated country C conquers country B, thus wresting it from country A

In WW2 we could have A=Germany, B=France, C=United States, whereas in the Crusades we could have A=Muslims, B=Holy Land, C=Christians. The big difference being that the U.S. gave France back to the French, while the Christians looked to set up their own kingdoms. Of course, at that point there were not really all that many "natives" to hand over the Holy Land to, so the parallel becomes inexact.

Right. Conquest=unjust. The western allies gave Europe back to the Europeans (except the parts needing "re-education"), and were therefore just. The Christians made their own kingdoms on captured land.

My imagination rocks!

What you said, originally, was, "Except maybe the crusades (I'm sure it didn't seem just to those who'd been living in the Levant previous). " To which my (summarized) reply was, "Conquerors have no reason to feel they are being treated unjustly when they are in turn conquered".

Your imagination is poor, as is your apparent grasp of moral reasoning. Even the above, questionable as it is, doesn't suggest what you said about "big bad Christians" - an attempt to pass off the criticism as a stereotype.

If conquest is wrong uniformly, the morality of the conquered doesn't matter. If, on the other hand, conquest (not just an attack, but seizure!) can be justified by anyone depending solely on the perceived (because where are you going to get the objective?) morality of the target, then you can't have a rights-based society. Or a decent one, for that matter.

To come back to Wolfe, perhaps the Hieros have a right to drown Urth. The analogy is to a causus belli - what humanity did to them in the past was so horrible that they are justified in their present actions.

An eye for an eye! That's advanced moral reasoning.

Or, alternatively, that at some point humanity entered into an agreement with them, knowing the possible consequences, and we are still bound by that agreement.

Pure speculation. You'd think that Apheta might have mentioned that instead of the rationale she _did_ give.

Roy C. Lackey — 18 Jul 2008, 19:40 · in reply to Paul B

Paul B. quoted and wrote:

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 12:57 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:

I'm not convinced that the Hierogrammates put the black hole in the sun in the first place.

It's true enough, they don't come out and say it. Nevertheless, the case is fairly strong for it.

Apheta to the Ship's crew at Yesod:

"You know that we have condemned the peoples of Urth, and why." (URTH, XVI, 112)

-Roy

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 19:43 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Hot damn! Thank you, I had to give UotNS back to the library almost a year ago.

Paul

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 3:40 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Paul B. quoted and wrote:

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 12:57 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com>

wrote:

I'm not convinced that the Hierogrammates put the black hole in the sun in the first place.

It's true enough, they don't come out and say it. Nevertheless, the case is fairly strong for it.

Apheta to the Ship's crew at Yesod:

"You know that we have condemned the peoples of Urth, and why." (URTH, XVI, 112)

-Roy

b sharp — 18 Jul 2008, 19:47 · follows Paul B

The discussion would become quite interesting if Paul B was a Christian. Are you Paul?

I really have no quarrel with a person who accepts no entity as a moral superior and who holds God and angels to the highest standards of his own morality. In the real world.

But this is fiction. Do Wolfe's intentions matter at all? Paul, if you are arguing that the Hierogrammates are of questionable morality by your standards I think your point is made,

very, very clearly.

If you are arguing that the Hierogrammates are of sub-angelic status by Wolfe's standards I think you need to use a lot more text quotes to support that.

But either way, answering that simple question would clarify this entire discussion:

Are you judging the Hierogrammates by your moral standards or Wolfe's?

-bsharp

Russell Wodell — 18 Jul 2008, 19:51 · in reply to b sharp

I don't think this debate is specifically about Christian and/or Catholic dogma. I do think that Gene Wolfe is a devout Catholic, and that by infusing his work with careful moral ambiguity, thus triggering this debate, he believes that he is encouraging his readers to do God's work.

2008/7/18 b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com>:

The discussion would become quite interesting if Paul B was a Christian.
Are you Paul?

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But this is fiction. Do Wolfe's intentions matter at all? Paul, if you are arguing that the Hierogrammates are of questionable morality by your standards I think your point is made, very, very clearly.

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-bsharp

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http://www.windowslive.com/messenger/connect_your_way.html?ocid=TXT_TAGLM_WL_Refresh_messenger_video_072008

Paul B — 18 Jul 2008, 20:18 · in reply to b sharp

I'm curious why you think it'd be more interesting - is it because then I'd have to solve the Problem of Evil? I already said I didn't have a solution for it.

As for a hypothetical Wolfe-view of the Hierogrammates, I suspect his moral worldview is certainly Christian-influenced. Christianity is a very deontological religion, I think, more so than

say Judaism (the latter permits exceptions to things that are uniformly forbidden in Christianity). God (somehow - Wolfe solved this one in private) gets an exception from the moral duties the rest of us have, and the Christian angels - whom I've never heard to act in self-interest - can be privy to whatever exception God is granted as his tools. Everyone else has to play by the rules, unless God personally grants them an exemption (Abraham).

However, the Hierogrammates are quite different from Christian angels, if you'd like I'll restate the textual references I suggested earlier, and which were strengthened by Roy, me being without UotNS.

- 1.) Hierogrammates are human creations. (Apheta, UotNS)
- 2.) They are acting in avowed self-interest, so that the future Hieros will recreate them. (Apheta again)
- 3.) They are mortal. (Tzadkiel's son dies)
- 4.) Their foresight is imperfect - they do not have certainty of the outcome of their actions. (Tzadkiel at the trial)

This simply doesn't add up to an angelic nature. They might pass for Biblical prophets (except for the human creation and self-interest parts), but those were never under any moral exemption. If God came down and literally told them they must drown Urth as such was his will, Apheta or Tzadkiel probably would have mentioned that as a much more compelling and palatable reason than what they gave (worked for Isaac, sorta). As mortal free agents, however, they have to obey all the deontological principles the framework of Wolfe's religion imposes on them.

Thus, even in this perspective, they aren't blameless.

Paul

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 3:47 PM, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Are you Paul?

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John Watkins — 18 Jul 2008, 20:18 · in reply to b sharp

I don't know about Paul, but I'd be more interested if we focus on the question of whether the Hierogrammates are intended to be (unfallen) angels by Gene Wolfe. Without my books at hand, the argument for this appears to be:

- 1) "Holy" is part of their name.
- 2) Tzadkiel has a winged form that Severian identifies as an angel.
- 3) Severian thinks Hierogrammates serve the Increate.
- 4) Wolfe referred to Tzadkiel as an "angel" in an interview.

The argument against the Hierogrammates being angels, as I understand it, is

- 1) Catholic theology posits that angels are perfectly moral, but the Hierogrammates frequently engage in morally dubious if not outright evil behavior.
- 2) Hierogrammates, unlike angels, are not direct creations of God.
- 3) Most of the arguments that Hierogrammates are angels are hearsay.

I think these are both colorable arguments, but I come down on the "not" side. The Hierogrammates are obviously *spoken of* as angels, but they are just as obviously not two things that are *essential* to the meaning of the word "angel."

On 7/18/08, b sharp <bsharpoflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

The discussion would become quite interesting if Paul B was a Christian.
Are you Paul?

I really have no quarrel with a person who accepts no entity as a moral superior and who holds God and angels to the highest standards of his own morality. In the real world.

But this is fiction. Do Wolfe's intentions matter at all? Paul, if you are arguing that the Hierogrammates are of questionable morality by your standards I think your point is made, very, very clearly.

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John Watkins — 18 Jul 2008, 20:27 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Well, um, I'm an idiot. That's about as clear as it's going to get. I could quibble that Apheta might be lying, but I have no idea why she'd care to. I wish we knew the "why," however.

On 7/18/08, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Paul B. quoted and wrote:

On Thu, Jul 17, 2008 at 12:57 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com

wrote:

I'm not convinced that the Hierogrammates put the black hole in the sun in the first place.

It's true enough, they don't come out and say it. Nevertheless, the case is fairly strong for it.

Apheta to the Ship's crew at Yesod:

"You know that we have condemned the peoples of Urth, and why." (URTH, XVI, 112)

-Roy

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 18 Jul 2008, 20:52 · in reply to Paul B

I was referring to the Watchman, who insists on his view of morality in the face of Armageddon.

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 12:06 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

Well, the only two Rorschachs I know are the psychologist and the Watchman. (Trailer recently came out - topical, hey?) If we're talking about the latter, as far as morality goes, sure I do - he's a posterboy deontologist. I just don't couple that with the expectation that everyone be moral in everything they do, and with the demand that all wrongs be brutally punished.

For example, if futuristic humans kill a bunch of aliens in order to uplift the survivors, I wouldn't be surprised, even though I'd think their action immoral and wrong. They'd have to have a pretty solid track record of doing shady things before I'd call them evil, even. I just wouldn't stand for their calling themselves angels, either.

Paul

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 2:19 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 10:55 AM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

That's not a relevant question. The heart of the matter is that an evil course of action was chosen, lesser or not. Thus, it's impossible to consider the Hierogrammates to be untainted.

So you apply Rorschach's standard?

--

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

b sharp — 20 Jul 2008, 04:27 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

John Watkins:

a nice and clever rebuttal to my post! Still, because of key omissions, I sense it is a rebuttal, that is a debate tactic, rather than part of a fact finding or insight raising endeavor. But I'll do my best to address your issues.

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In my list of genocides you take pains to note the ones done by God without angelic help while ignoring the ones (10th plague for example) that were the specific work of angels. I'm unclear on the point of that argument anyway. Are you suggesting that the Biblical God and angels are sometimes working independently of each other? Also, I don't see how an invincible angel leading Hebrews in battle is much different than the flood of one of many human worlds in BotNS. A population of people is wiped out in both cases.

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A much nicer interpretation is a mainstream Christian interpretation: that Gene Wolfe sees that genocide was a part of Biblical human history, sees that it has continued on through to the present day and knows that somehow it must be part of God's plan no matter how awful it appears and we must have faith that all is leading to a better future for humanity.

-bsharp

Jeff Wilson — 20 Jul 2008, 19:14 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

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By Moses, do you mean Abraham?

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I'm unclear on the point of that argument anyway. Are you suggesting that the Biblical God and angels are sometimes working independently of each other?

This is the generally accepted as the case in the OT; Satan ("The Adversary") remains a heavenly presence but takes the adversarial position of proving mankind or a particular man, like Job, is unworthy of G-d's favor, and may even command subordinate angels to help him accomplish this.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

John Watkins — 20 Jul 2008, 20:51 · in reply to b sharp

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the Hebrews are "a race contaminated" in absolutely antithetical to the contemporary Catholic Church, and the notion that the Hebrews are "a race contaminated" due to the actions the God of the Old Testament is a notion that has ALWAYS been condemned by orthodox Christianity. The Gnostic heretics may have viewed the Old Testament deity as an evil demiurge, but the orthodox Christian faiths do not and never have. This doesn't mean that Wolfe didn't use the idea of a demiurge, of course, and the question of whether that's exactly what Tzadkiel is is a worthy one. Pas certainly takes that role.

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http://www.windowslive.com/family_safety/overview.html?ocid=TEXT_TAGLM_WL_family_safety_072008

brunians at brunians.org — 20 Jul 2008, 20:55 · in reply to John Watkins

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John Watkins — 20 Jul 2008, 21:26 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

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brunians at brunians.org — 20 Jul 2008, 23:20 · in reply to John Watkins

No. I am suggesting that genocide is just one of the things God does, at least according to the books. Who is it who is destroying the World in Revelations? Is it evil genocidal aliens?

That's quite a remarkable assumption, by the way, about the left behind. I find it safer not to make too many assumptions about what people are saying without evidence.

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John Watkins — 20 Jul 2008, 23:47 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

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John Watkins — 20 Jul 2008, 23:57 · in reply to John Watkins

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brunians at brunians.org — 21 Jul 2008, 00:05 · in reply to John Watkins

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brunians at brunians.org — 21 Jul 2008, 00:08 · in reply to John Watkins

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I'm not debating whether it sucks equally for the person dying; I'm debating whether the morality of the person doing the killing is the same.

Another way to put it--the moral authority of an angel derives from the fact that the angel is doing God's will, not from the angel's superior position to man on the Great Chain of Being--demons are equally "above" man but act immorally because their actions do not conform with God's will.

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human worlds in BotNS. A population of people is wiped out in
both
cases.

But the biggest omission, I think, is an answer to my (now
rephrased)
question: How are
Hierogrammates disqualified as angel equivalents because of
their
immoral killing of human
beings when the Biblical God and angels routinely practice
genocide,
territorial warfare and
individual murders of humans for transgressions such as refusing
to
impregnate one's
sister-in-law (Onan) and looking over one's shoulder (Lot's
wife)?

You've read the James Jordan interview so there is no way you
can
think
that Gene Wolfe is a
secular humanist who rejects the Bible and Christianity. Are you
perhaps
thinking that Gene

Wolfe considers the angry, jealous, genocidal Old Testament and Cabalistic God and angels to be akin to evil aliens? That the Hebrews were (are?) a race contaminated by these evil aliens while the New Testament God and angels are something different- better and more pure? I don't think you are suggesting this but it is an interesting idea anyway though not particularly flattering to Mr. Wolfe.

A much nicer interpretation is a mainstream Christian interpretation: that Gene Wolfe sees that genocide was a part of Biblical human history, sees that it has continued on through to the present day and knows that somehow it must be part of God's plan no matter how awful it appears and we must have faith that all is leading to a better future for humanity.

-bsharp

Keep your kids safer online with Windows Live Family Safety.
http://www.windowslive.com/family_safety/overview.html?ocid=TXT_TAGLM_WL_family_safety_072008

Jeff Wilson — 21 Jul 2008, 03:47 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:
You don't have to know the details, you just have to know that everything is OK. Since nothing happens save by the will of God, everything that happens is OK.

It works for me.

Free furniture and books at brunians' house!

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 21 Jul 2008, 03:56 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

A foolish person attempting to rob me may be the will of God.

So may my shooting him.

If you attack the Persians you will destroy a great empire.

.

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

You don't have to know the details, you just have to know that everything is OK. Since nothing happens save by the will of God, everything that happens is OK.

It works for me.

Free furniture and books at bruninans' house!

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Adam Thornton — 21 Jul 2008, 05:19 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Jul 20, 2008, at 10:56 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
A foolish person attempting to rob me may be the will of God.

So may my shooting him.

Free bullets at Brunians' house!

Adam

Jeff Wilson — 21 Jul 2008, 07:07 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:
A foolish person attempting to rob me may be the will of God.

So may my shooting him.

your "OK with that" is not like our earth "OK with that"

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

hammstu at sbcglobal.net — 21 Jul 2008, 07:21 · follows Jeff Wilson

Not sure how this latest thread helps me appreciate GW's writing...sure makes me understand religion a lot less

someone please get a hold of "Alamut" and comment....well worth it

-----Original Message-----

From: Jeff Wilson

Sender: urth-bounces at lists.urth.net

To: The Urth Mailing List

ReplyTo: The Urth Mailing List

Sent: Jul 21, 2008 7:07 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) What's So Great About Ushas?

brunians at brunians.org wrote:
A foolish person attempting to rob me may be the will of God.

So may my shooting him.

your "OK with that" is not like our earth "OK with that"

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 21 Jul 2008, 12:16 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Mine works.

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

A foolish person attempting to rob me may be the will of God.

So may my shooting him.

your "OK with that" is not like our earth "OK with that"

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 21 Jul 2008, 12:26 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Mine works.

Except for reducing your credibility to a level below the cosmic microwave background, you mean? When you say you believe X is always true, then X might be true, and then that you will oppose X with deadly force in the space of a couple messages, I can't agree that "works" means what you think it means, I have to find "mine" suspect as well, and frankly I'm not entirely comfortable with your use of punctuation either.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

brunians at brunians.org — 21 Jul 2008, 12:42 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

What is your problem?

Everything that happens is the will of God.

Everything that actually happens.

This is a necessary concomitant of God being both omnipotent and omniscient.

It does not mean I do not have free will.

It means that any actions that I (or anyone else) actually accomplish - note well - are also the will of God.

Anything that I (or anyone else) attempt to do but does not actually get done is not.

Thus if a foolish person decides that it is a good idea to go rob me, and for whatever reason is able to do so, then him robbing me would be the will of God. If, on the other hand, I shot him and fed him to the pigs or whatever, then it would be the will of God that he be dead and eaten by the pigs.

I really don't understand your problem with this, but it is perhaps not necessary that I understand. I am certainly becoming tired of arguing it with you, and will probably give up here soon if not now.

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Mine works.

Except for reducing your credibility to a level below the cosmic microwave background, you mean? When you say you believe X is always true, then X might be true, and then that you will oppose X with deadly force in the space of a couple messages, I can't agree that "works" means what you think it means, I have to find "mine" suspect as well, and frankly I'm not entirely comfortable with your use of punctuation either.

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 21 Jul 2008, 12:56 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:
What is your problem?

Everything that happens is the will of God.

Everything that actually happens.

This is a necessary concomitant of God being both omnipotent and omniscient.

I forgot that you leave off the omnibenevolent, sorry.

If God's will encompasses good and evil, how do you distinguish them, again?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Ranjit Bhatnagar — 21 Jul 2008, 13:45 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

I'd like to ask the participants in this particular discussion thread to desist - it's drifted too far from the core topic. Feel free to continue by email if you like.

- Ranjit, list administrator

brunians at brunians.org — 21 Jul 2008, 14:15 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

What is your problem?

Everything that happens is the will of God.

Everything that actually happens.

This is a necessary concomitant of God being both omnipotent and omniscient.

I forgot that you leave off the omnibenevolent, sorry.

If God's will encompasses good and evil, how do you distinguish them, again?

On a case by case basis. It's usually pretty obvious.

If it involves raping babies it is normally evil, for instance.

.

Thomas Bitterman — 21 Jul 2008, 14:23 · in reply to Paul B

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 3:38 PM, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

On Fri, Jul 18, 2008 at 3:16 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

I never said that self-defense was unjust (or just), simply that your maxim implies that self-defense is unjust.

What on earth are you talking about? I said "It is not a sensible moral response to say that injustice following other injustice is somehow more just", along with "Conquest is unjust".

Following simple logic, we can get "conquest following other conquests is not somehow more just". Self-defense isn't an attack, and reconquest (as I pointed out) isn't a conquest.

Your logical proof for the above assertion is not only absent, but hard to imagine.

I think we have some language problems. Here is the way I see things:

war = unjust

war + spoils = unjust (conquest)

war + survival = just (self-defense)

war + spoils + survival = just (conquest + self-defense)

And I think situations can occur that fall in the fourth group. So although I think conquest (in a vacuum) is unjust, there are situations which justify it.

The analogy I was after was this:

- country A conquers country B
- unrelated country C conquers country B, thus wresting it from country A

In WW2 we could have A=Germany, B=France, C=United States, whereas in the Crusades we could have A=Muslims, B=Holy Land, C=Christians. The big difference being that the U.S. gave France back to the French, while the Christians looked to set up their own kingdoms. Of course, at that point there were not really all that many "natives" to hand over the Holy Land to, so the parallel becomes inexact.

Right. Conquest=unjust. The western allies gave Europe back to the Europeans (except the parts needing "re-education"), and were therefore just. The Christians made their own kingdoms on captured land.

I still find this strange. Had the Germans killed all the French, so there was nobody to give France back to, would the Allies have been unjust in invading it, knowing that they would have to occupy it later?

My imagination rocks!

What you said, originally, was, "Except maybe the crusades (I'm sure it didn't seem just to those who'd been living in the Levant previous). " To which my (summarized) reply was, "Conquerors have no reason to feel they are

being treated unjustly when they are in turn conquered".

Your imagination is poor, as is your apparent grasp of moral reasoning. Even the above, questionable as it is, doesn't suggest what you said about "big bad Christians" - an attempt to pass off the criticism as a stereotype.

If conquest is wrong uniformly, the morality of the conquered doesn't matter.

Given the nature of the world it's not clear conquest is always unjust. See above.

If, on the other hand, conquest (not just an attack, but seizure!) can be justified by anyone depending solely on the perceived (because where are you going to get the objective?) morality of the target, then you can't have a rights-based society. Or a decent one, for that matter.

People resort to what would otherwise be unjust acts every day based on the (perceived) morality of the target. That's what self-defense is. And in the society of nations there is no police force to call when your neighbor acts badly. Nations must, to get along, follow certain rules and punish those who won't. Conquest is a form of punishment.

To come back to Wolfe, perhaps the Hieros have a right to drown Urth. The analogy is to a *causus belli* - what humanity did to them in the past was so horrible that they are justified in their present actions.

An eye for an eye! That's advanced moral reasoning.

It was good enough for Yahweh: Deuteronomy 19:21. And it is hardly unknown in our current justice system. Paying a fine, for example.

Or, alternatively, that at some point humanity entered into an agreement with them, knowing the possible consequences, and we are still bound by that agreement.

Pure speculation. You'd think that Apheta might have mentioned that instead of the rationale she did give.

My copy is at home, but I seem to remember something about forging humanity between hammer and anvil. And that humanity knew this going into it.

Enamel

Gwern Branwen — 21 Jul 2008, 14:52 · in reply to John Watkins

On 2008.07.20 16:51:26 -0400, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> scribbled 6.5K characters: ...

Here's another way to put my point. When a group of beings claim to be angels, shouldn't the burden of proof be on them? Especially when they concede that:

- 1) They are artificial lifeforms created/bred by humans
- 2) They are not in direct contact with God
- 3) They are not eternal
- 4) They appear to exercise free will
- 5) They, in fact, appear to possess none of the qualities accorded to angels by Roman Catholic theologians (check out Thomas Aquinas on the topic) except time-travel, a degree of immortality, and a mysterious agenda.

In fact, if I called Dan Simmons's character, the Shrike, a name ending in "-el" it would be just as good a match for an angel as

Tzadkiel. And Simmons is Roman Catholic, so, by your argument, that fact that the Shrike spends most of the first Hyperion book butchering people isn't a sign that he's not an angel. I like this new theory. It puts Hyperion in a fun and entertaining new light. The Shrike Church is actually doing the will of God.

Well, actually, since you brought it up...

I always understood the Shrike Church as doing the will of the Human God/FAI in the Cantos. After all, the whole sequence of events leading up to the events at the Time Tombs in *The Fall of Hyperion* couldn't've occurred without the Shrike Church. (To cite just one of many examples, Brawne Lamia probably wouldn't've reached the Tombs alive if not the good agencies of the Shrike Church).

The Shrike itself is more ambiguous of course, but the only interpretation I've seen that makes sense is that there are 2 or 3 Time Tombs each assigning the Shrike tasks (or 2 or 3 different Shrikes); no doubt you could try to shoehorn that into an angel/demon framework, but given that Simmons constantly invokes Teilhard de Chardin's heresies, any attempt at making Cantos theology orthodox is doomed. :)

gwern
Cornflower N Dateline Z-200 chosen SURSAT Unit spies DST GII

b sharp — 21 Jul 2008, 17:35 · follows Gwern Branwen

Aside from the recent snippiness I think this thread had been interesting and productive. A lot of ideas have come out I never would have predicted when I started it last month. I give credit to John Watkins; I haven't heard his approach before; sorry I impugned his motives.

It makes sense that some secular humanists might find BotNS a (did Dave Tallman call it a..) cosmic horror story where evil triumphs in the end. It makes sense because many consider Christianity and the Bible to be a cosmic horror story. But John Watkins seems to be taking a different approach, finding this story a triumph of evil within aspects of Roman Catholic theology. (sorry not familiar with The Shrike).

I have harped on ancient mythological gods and monsters as antagonists or at least competitors to modern Judeo-Christianity but I guess Gnosticism could also fall into the category? It seems surely relevant that Father Inire's area is marked by teratoid (monstrous) symbols while the witches' and Cumaeon's tower is marked with gnostic symbols. Not being a religious scholar I don't know how those might relate to Kabbalism and Tzadkiel and Yesod and Ushas. But it makes me wonder if John Watkins is onto something or not.

Still I'm not ready concede this as a horror story. Other Wolfe stories have left me with a feeling of horror and dread but not this one. Have I been fooled by The Great Deceiver into a toleration of genocide? Or is this really meant to be a story about a Christ-like character who helped humanity approach heavenly divinity?

-bsharp

Time for vacation? WIN what you need- enter now! http://www.gowindowslive.com/summergiveaway/?ocid=tag_jlyhm

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 21 Jul 2008, 20:02 · in reply to b sharp

On Mon, Jul 21, 2008 at 10:35 AM, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:
(sorry not familiar with The Shrike).

Then I suggest you run-don't-walk to your favorite bookseller and get copies of Dan Simmons' HYPERION and THE FALL OF HYPERION, two of the finest SF novels not by Wolfe in the past twenty years.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I once absend-mindedly ordered Three Mile Island dressing in a restaurant and, with great presence of mind, they brought Thousand Island Dressing and a bottle of chili sauce. -- T. Pratchett

Matthew King — 21 Jul 2008, 20:13 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

On Mon, Jul 21, 2008 at 3:02 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

On Mon, Jul 21, 2008 at 10:35 AM, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

(sorry not familiar with The Shrike).

Then I suggest you run-don't-walk to your favorite bookseller and get copies of

Dan Simmons' HYPERION and THE FALL OF HYPERION, two of the finest SF novels not by Wolfe in the past twenty years.

Unless you don't like gory horror novels, which these are, notwithstanding their SFnal milieu. This is not to gainsay Dan'I, just to warn you what you're signing up for.

Lane Haygood — 21 Jul 2008, 20:44 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

And in all fairness, one should as well pick up "Endymion" and "The Rise of Endymion" to round out the series, although the first two Hyperion Cantos are superior.

But "gory horror novels?" Really? I could see pseudo-cyberpunk (the first two), homage to Chaucer and Keats, and mystic fantasy (the last two), but I don't recall there being a whole lot of gore. The descriptions of the Tree of Pain were not pleasant, but were hardly gory, at least as I am imagining "gore."

Lane

On Jul 21, 2008, at 3:02 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

On Mon, Jul 21, 2008 at 10:35 AM, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

(sorry not familiar with The Shrike).

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I once absend-mindedly ordered Three Mile Island dressing in a restaurant and, with great presence of mind, they brought Thousand Island Dressing and a bottle of chili sauce. -- T. Pratchett

David Duffy — 21 Jul 2008, 23:03 · in reply to b sharp

On Mon, 21 Jul 2008, b sharp wrote:

Aside from the recent snippiness I think this thread had been interesting and productive. A lot of ideas have come out I never would have predicted when I started it last month. I give credit to John Watkins; I haven't heard his approach before; sorry I impugned his motives.

It makes sense that some secular humanists might find BotNS a (did Dave Tallman call it a..) cosmic horror story where evil triumphs in the end.

Still I'm not ready concede this as a horror story. Other Wolfe stories have left me with a feeling of horror and dread but not this one. Have I been fooled by The Great Deceiver into a toleration of genocide?

I haven't read it, but isn't this the thesis of _Attending Dedalus_?

If you look at _Pirate Freedom_ and _Cerberus_ and perhaps _Peace_, Wolfe does write quite extended horror stories, and the former two seem to imply that kind of bootstrapping via technology is a bad thing.

But Wolfe has explicitly said, and shown esp in UotNS, that Severian is an imitatio christi, so he is "good" in as far as he can be. Using Tolkien's terminology, Wolfe has a subcreation that isn't the best of possible worlds, like ours is ;). That is, the Hierogrammates and their actions are the best that can possibly be in this iteration, and so Severian should fall in with their plans.

David Duffy.

Russ Allbery — 22 Jul 2008, 02:12 · in reply to Matthew King

"Matthew King" <automatthew at gmail.com> writes:

Unless you don't like gory horror novels, which these are, notwithstanding their SFnal milieu. This is not to gainsay Dan'I, just to warn you what you're signing up for.

Er... well, I sort of see where you're getting that if I squint, but there's way, way more gory stuff out there, and I don't think the Hyperion books can really be classified as horror.

Heart-rending, yes. The Scholar's Tale gets me every time.

Simmons is a much more straightforward writer than Wolfe, and Hyperion is more of a traditional space opera.

Russ Allbery (rra at stanford.edu) <<http://www.eyrie.org/~eagle/>>