

The argument for Intractability

The Urth list — 22 messages, 8 voices, 22 Dec 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5289>

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Dave Tallman — 22 Dec 2008, 18:43

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Intractable time loops imply no free will -- everything happens as it does because that's the way it has always happened. Chains of events that are built up from multiple iterations, carrying back knowledge from future to past, can be done with free will intact. In "The Book of the New Sun" we have an agency that can keep things on track -- the Hierogrammates and Hierodules are time-traveling through history and fixing things. They can create place-holders like a Conciliator-like religion, the autarchy, and the Guild, if they deem them necessary as preconditions for the emergence of the New Sun. Once a good candidate appears, they can fix up his life as much as desired and splice him back into history to replace their earlier bootstraps.

The trickiest thing is his birth. Even if the Hierodules ensured the meeting of Ouen and Catherine under similar conditions, the odds are millions to one that the exact genetic combination will be re-created. Thus it seems likely that Catherine was sent back in time already pregnant with a cloned embryo of Sev1. (I believe Catherine is the woman we see under guard in UotNS on the day of the deluge).

Son of Witz — 22 Dec 2008, 18:50 · in reply to Dave Tallman

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Jordon Flato — 22 Dec 2008, 19:16 · in reply to Son of Witz

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Craig Brewer — 22 Dec 2008, 22:39 · in reply to Jordon Flato

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I'm personally with Jordon on this. The "time is like an ocean" idea allows you take both of the above ideas at once and have them overlap. You have the linearity of Sev's experience, but you also have the meta-temporal perspective in which the Hierodules can manipulate things (for the Increate?).

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Jordon Flato — 22 Dec 2008, 23:34 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Yeah, craig, I hear ya. I find a lot of resonance in the Cock and Angel story. One of the things I keep coming back to is that while there may indeed be some 'horizontal level' manipulation going on with the Hierodules, there is a sense I get that it doesn't matter whether they know if they are doing the will of the Increate or not: The will of the Increate will be done. I don't know why, but two things stick out to me: One, that Sev turns water into wine. There is no reason for this to happen. It doesn't fit the other miracles, and it doesn't fit into the scheme of what the Hierodules need to accomplish, as far as I can tell. Yet, it is an echo of a miracle performed by a True agent of the Increate, Jesus. As if the resonance of the role of Logos is manifested through Severian. It could just be a 'literary' device on Wolfe's part, but I don't think that's true.

Also, when the Wonder Triples Ossipago, Fumulimus and Barbatos metion to Sev that even Tzadkiel doesn't posses the power that Sev used to reshape Declan, or physically raise of the

dead as something other than an Aquestor or Ediolon. Sev has become, in a sense, more than the Hierogrammates. Something in this speaks to the will of the Increate coming through Sev in spite of/because of the intervention of the Hierogrammates.

Two people get together and fuck. A child is born. That child grows up to be the savior of mankind, in a fashion. Is the will of the increate involved in the meeting of those two people, or was it random chance? What if there were forces manipulating those two people so they would meet, would those doing the manipulation be doing the will of the increate? What if the people doing the manipulation were setting up, on a cosmic scale, the correlation of the two people fucking and making a child (i.e., the Hierogrammatte manipulation is all about engendering the next generation of Hiero's who will in turn create the next generation of Hierogrammates, etc...it is a Macrocosmic parallel to two people meeting and having a baby, just on a much much larger scale). Somewhere, the question of scale has to be forgotten, and one has to just wonder whether the increate is at all involved in the universe of Severian (which the Long Sun books seem to answer to some degree), or whether he is not. If he is, then it's hard not to see that 'his will' be done through Severian and the Hierodules, and that it doesn't matter, in a sense, whether the Hierodules know they are doing the will of the Increate or not.

And I see the idea of Severian learning to give his obedience to the 'highest' power not one of giving into the manipulation of the Hierodules, as some seem to think, but rather a discovery of the singular man's proper relationship to God (in a catholic or at least Christian sense), as opposed to Baldanders who wants to storm the gates of heaven. In the end, even Baldanders serves the will of the increate, as by destroying the claw, he sets up Severian to discover that its power is within him all along.

There is much more to this....

On Mon, Dec 22, 2008 at 2:39 PM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:
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If the Hierodules are like the angel, how "holy" are their designs in the end?

From: Jordon Flato <jordonflato at gmail.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Monday, December 22, 2008 1:16:44 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) The argument for Intractability

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David Stockhoff — 23 Dec 2008, 02:30 · follows Jordon Flato

I doubt the question of free will vs intervention (by whoever) is entirely binary, however. I'd guess a more important point is that neither can be dismissed.

Message: 1

Date: Mon, 22 Dec 2008 14:39:22 -0800 (PST)

From: Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The argument for Intractability

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <973085.82301.qm at web37606.mail.mud.yahoo.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

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Son of Witz — 23 Dec 2008, 17:39 · follows David Stockhoff

yeah, I really don't think it's an either-or situation regarding Free Will and Intervention. I have a hard time putting it into words, but it doesn't cause any schism for me. It is hard to comprehend time from an "It's all happened already" perspective without feeling like we're just going through some motions. I liken it to a book. it's already finished, yet we have to read our way through it.

That being said, I'm not trying to make an ironclad argument that it "MUST" be intractable, just that, from what's given in the text, I can't imagine it any other way, and it does seem to work

well metaphorically.

I just realized, given the scene in Urth with the Chilliarch and the Smilodon, and Severian's mercy to the Chilliarch and friendliness with the Smilodon would SURELY have ended up in the Conciliator myth. As Christ is sometimes represented as a lion, or as various sun gods are posed with a Lion, the Conciliator would probably be sometimes pictured with the smilodon.
too cool.

~witz

-----Original Message-----

From: David Stockhoff [mailto:dstockhoff at verizon.net]

Sent: Monday, December 22, 2008 06:30 PM

To: urth at lists.urth.net

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Virus Database (VPS): 081222-0, 12/22/2008
Tested on: 12/22/2008 9:30:27 PM
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David Stockhoff — 23 Dec 2008, 23:27 · follows Son of Witz

Thematically, each is meaningless without the other.

Yes, there's a lot of material to mine there. You could illustrate these three series for the rest of your life---make a career of it, as people have done with Tolkien!

Incidentally, I was reading the messages about AEG and realized that Lancelot is the Arthurian hero Severian reminds me of. He has dealing with water spirits, he is a toy of otherworldly and higher powers, and he returns after a long absence with the faerie folk. Time with the fairies often runs funny. And Lancelot heals.

Message: 2
Date: Tue, 23 Dec 2008 17:39:51 +0000
From: "Son of Witz" <sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org>
Subject: Re: (urth) The argument for Intractability

Son of Witz — 23 Dec 2008, 23:57 · follows David Stockhoff

Yes, there's a lot of material to mine there. You could illustrate these three series for the rest of your life---make a career of it, as people have done with Tolkien!

Holy Cow, my head is reeling with ideas right now. I've got a decent amount of crude sketching done, though nowhere as much as I'd like. I hope to get some drawing done over next week, which I'm taking off. The ideas I've already had will take years to work out. I was drawing what will not be a plot illustration, but an esoteric exegesis illustration, yesterday when I had the insight I wrote in "The Significance of Apu Punchau" post I wrote today.

Currently, I'm toying with conciliator imagery, and trying to flesh out what some of that might have looked like. Which is essentially trying to illustrate Canog's BotNS, rather than Severian's BotNS.

there is a daunting amount of territory to cover, but I like to sink my teeth into huge projects. Plus I need to map out a project and chip away at it. If I come to my drawing board after a workday, with no plan, I end up with a mess of abstract expressionism. If I have an agenda, I can apply myself with my odd chances to work.

I have to admit I'm a sucker for Tolkien illustrations. There is so much great stuff out there. I just bought an old used Illustrated Middle Earth Encyclopedia. Great stuff in there. I also really love Tolkien's own illustrations for The Hobbit. I was unaware that he drew until seeing those a few weeks ago. It would be great to have a gig like Alan Lee.

/nuff about me.

~witz

Jeff Wilson — 24 Dec 2008, 03:42 · in reply to Son of Witz

Son of Witz wrote:

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This is correct, as far as we know. Napoleon had free will, despite the existence of records in our time that detail every major and many minor decisions he made. However not all the circumstances of those decisions are known, and the presence of a time traveler or indirect meddling could change the circumstances, so that Napoleon could very well deviate from the historical Napoleon's choices.

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A female Severian (50% likelihood) would not be raised as a torturer, and would thus have a very different mentality.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Dave Tallman — 24 Dec 2008, 11:55 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote:

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I'm glad that someone caught my point. In general, time-travelers would have to be very careful about changing the conception circumstances of anyone important. I don't think Sev's conception could be left to chance (it had to happen by chance the first time, but once it did...).

Son of Witz — 24 Dec 2008, 16:45 · follows Dave Tallman

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From: Jeff Wilson [mailto:jwilson at io.com]

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To: 'The Urth Mailing List'

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I read Severian as some sort of cosmic principle. some sort of deity. As such, any manifestation of him would be appropriate to him. but hey, that's just my whacked out take.

Jeff Wilson — 24 Dec 2008, 17:01 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

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On the other hand, the author may not have subscribed to the chaotic model of parallel universes, or of human development. The Corridors of Time might be organized in some way that the closest parallels are grouped together and more readily accessible to time travelling meddlers than others. Likewise, there could be some dogma in play like the Well of Souls that implies some part of Severian's persona exists independently of his fleshy chromosomal crapshoot.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
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Son of Witz — 24 Dec 2008, 17:21 · follows Jeff Wilson

Likewise, there could be some dogma in play like the Well

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This is what I'm saying.

Severian's bodies come and go, but Severian is constant.

Severian is a consciousness in a body (as we all are) but he goes through a bunch of bodies. Re-Read everything after The Trial in Urth. From Leaving Yesod, to the flooding of Urth, he realizes that his consciousness is in the star, and his body is a puppet. But what kind of stars have consciousness? That's not a question that science can answer. I can think of one way that resolves it while being true to the plot and to the symbology. His Consciousness is wearing a star like it wears a fleshy body. We're then left with his spirit/consciousness, which gets back to the sort of idea I've been saying all along, that he is a Deity that incarnates in various times as a Sun God.

I think Deity is the only level of Being mentioned in the New Sun Series that could fit this bill. I'm told that God is posited as a literal fact in Long Sun, so I think, at this level, people have to sort of let go of the idea that this story is "merely" Hiero manipulation. It seems pretty clear that God(s) exist in the framework of the story.

~witz

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There's a problem in that deities by definition transcend the physical world, but Sev's first-person narrative remains largely linear and divided from that of "other Severians" from which he is separated in space and time, both Urthly and Yesodi time. A certain amount of this separation has to be in order for his mortal incarnations to be valid, but there's no enduring union of mortal and divine identities, just a few short flashes of insight of the former into the nature of the latter. This doesn't make Severian a deity any more than a really good reception at Karaoke makes me Elvis, just someone who for a moment can experience a tiny piece of Elvishood.

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

b sharp — 24 Dec 2008, 18:15 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson writes:

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Does this perhaps depend on your definition of a deity? Was/is Jesus a deity? Seems to me he had flashes of it, e.g. predicting his own death. But he had mostly human moments, growing up, eating, socializing, getting angry at the money changers and at the end wondering why his Father had forsaken him.

Deity or not, I've felt Severian is meant to be the Urth analog of Earth's Jesus. He is darker, more sinful, not as bright as Jesus..but the same might be said comparing all of Urth to Earth.

-bsharp

Son of Witz — 24 Dec 2008, 18:28 · follows b sharp

Jeff Wilson writes:

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-bsharp

I'm with you bsharp.

I don't really follow your reasoning Jeff.

How do you account for his consciousness residing in a star?

or the power of a freaking star raising the dead, healing tumors, etc, etc.

There is no rational explanation for that, based on science and logic, that I can imagine explaining that. anyone?

It seems a completely obvious metaphor. Severian's body is a puppet, and his consciousness is a "heavenly body"

I don't understand this line "Sev's first-person narrative remains largely linear and divided from that of "other Severians" from which he is separated in space and time"

I suppose you mean Apu Punchau. That's the only instance where there are two conscious Severians. both are eidolons. There can be multiple instances of the same eidolon. Mold and molded.

~witz

Jeff Wilson — 25 Dec 2008, 04:44 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

Jeff Wilson writes:

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Right, however Jesus did have/has enduring union with the divine, post-Ascension. Severian seems to *lose* union with the divine, taking up once again mortal habits like sleeping in his bower on Ushas.

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

Jeff Wilson — 25 Dec 2008, 05:08 · in reply to Son of Witz

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The link between his body and the power of the White Fountain is blocked on at least one occasion but his point of awareness remains in his body, puzzled about why the miracle is not working this time. He might

feel his consciousness is inside a star, but in that case who is making his body walk and talk until the link is restored? Is this some kind of cut-rate mechanistic divinity where the avatar needs to find a place with more bars before the high-bandwidth miracles are available?

I don't understand this line "Sev's first-person narrative remains largely linear and divided from that of "other Severians" from which he is separated in space and time"

I suppose you mean Apu Punchau.

No, I mean Severian muses about "other Severians" that he has deduced preceeded him in narrative time, but overlapped in calendar time. If he were divine, why would he not know these parts of himself with more certainty?

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

Andrew Dubbeld — 25 Dec 2008, 14:03 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote:

Right, however Jesus did have/has enduring union with the divine, post-Ascension. Severian seems to *lose* union with the divine, taking up once again mortal habits like sleeping in his bower on Ushas.

At very least, he seems to have retained his ability to travel to different periods, etc.

I'm halfway through a re-read of Urth: from memory, I got the impression that he lost his communion with the divine by the end, but he writes as if he still has the ability to go anywhere / do anything.

i.e. revisiting the inn with the resurrected dead man, and fancying that he is three or four of the people who aided him in the night.

Jeff Wilson — 25 Dec 2008, 17:20 · in reply to Andrew Dubbeld

Andrew Dubbeld wrote:

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That would conflict with the duplicate implosion problem, wouldn't it?

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

David Stockhoff — 29 Dec 2008, 23:34 · follows Jeff Wilson

There is that point in the story where Severian heals (I forget whom he heals, perhaps Declan) and he tells us very precisely what it is like to cram one's consciousness into a human mind when one is a god. I think it's in New Sun ...

I like the idea of a star as a body. At any rate, the body of Severian is indeed hardly divine, nor is his mind. That's the point. The god who inhabits him (Severian, not Severian's body) IS divine.

Message: 10

Date: Wed, 24 Dec 2008 11:55:03 -0600

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The argument for Intractability

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <49527777.5030309 at io.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1; format=flowed

Son of Witz wrote:

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