

The Two Severians, a Second Look, with mantic asides.

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 01 May 1998

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David_Lebling — 01 May 1998, 17:05

Back in January we got ourselves into some serious knots over the question of how many Severians there were, and which did what, and to whom. This went on for several weeks (you could look it up).

I was looking at this today and chanced upon a remark of mantis's that wasn't elaborated on:

"Of course you don't have to believe me, but if the first Severian
=didn't= bring the New Sun, then what is powering the Claw ... ?"

I didn't have an answer to that one at the time, but I'd like to propose one.

I think that Severian gets his power from the White Fountain throughout his career. He has that power because he ultimately succeeded in creating it, but of course it was created in his own past as it needed the intervening time to traverse the distance to the Old Sun and incidentally power the Claw so Severian could work his miracles and bring the White Fountain in the first (last?) place. Following so far?

A simple additional comment would be that this is commonly how time travel paradoxes work in SF. A more interesting overlay is that this has the property of adding the ideas of predestination (which mantis mentions) and free will to the mixture. That is, in some sense Severian is predestined to bring the New Sun because (a) he prophesied it in his incarnation as the Conciliator, (b) he already succeeded in bringing it as it's there powering the Claw. But, in another view, free will enters in because he might still perform actions that would make the New Sun not come, which is why we can see time travellers from the two alternate futures meet him. (Again, this is another common way of looking at time travel paradoxes. I recall in [maybe?] Poul Anderson's Time Patrol stories, a case where the bad guys did somethat that wiped out the future in which the Time Patrol existed, but the the change propagated through time slowly enough that the good guys still had time to fix it before they were paradoxed out of existence. This is not unlike mantis's "probability futures.") I think Ash comes from a future in which only the first Severian, who I argue didn't bring the New Sun, existed. That future, in the tangled web of Severian's worldlines, is still possible when Severian meets him at the Last House, but becomes impossible in the meeting's denouement, and Ash fades away.

There are several instances in the five books where future actions create effects in the past which then go on to create the actions which created them in the present. (The whole story of Gunny / Burgundofara is one of these.) mantis brings up different "probability futures," and it's really all pretty quantum mechanical, dead cats and all. This view presupposes a particular idea of how time travel works (e.g., no _Worlds of the Imperium_, no many-worlds, branching time-lines). It's more like the way precognition worked in Dick's _The World Jones Made_, with future events becoming more certain as you approach them.

Looking back at the archives is fun.

--viz

(david_lebling at avid.com)

C R Culver — 02 May 1998, 02:22 · follows David_Lebling

Viz said:

<(b) he already succeeded in bringing it as it's there powering the Claw.>

I've always thought that the Claw was powered, not by the White Fountain, but by the will of the Pancreator, as hinted in Severian's absolutely stunning elucidation in the Sand Garden: "What struck me on that beach, and it struck me indeed.."

Christopher R. Culver <crculver at aol.com>

<http://members.aol.com/crculver/index.html>