

PEACE/NYRSF, Sev7

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 02 May 1998

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m.driussi — 02 May 1998, 15:45

William Ansley,

"The New York Review of Science Fiction" ran a detailed timeline (by William Schuyler, Jr.) along with Damien Broderick's PEACE piece a while back (IIRC). Check their backlist for this and other PEACE articles (I think one or two issues before the timeline one they ran an article by Schuyler).

vizcacha,

More responses for you: right, the Urth timeline situation is less like Laumer's WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM (where every parallel universe has equal validity/reality) or Moorcock's multiverse (ditto) than it is like Zelazny's Amber set-up: Amber is the real reality, Courts of Chaos is its antithesis, and all the realities between these two poles are just shadows.

While the Urth situation is more like Amber, it isn't a tight fit. Yet we do have glimpses of "shadow" timelines: the adventures of Sev1 who did the quest without any special help or hindrance exists as a shadow timeline riding in the future (oh, maybe ten years?) from the subjective lifetime experienced by Sev2 in TBOTNS (again, maybe this defines the Real Present?); the reigns of Vodalus and Baldanders on the Phoenix Throne (note that just as O, B, and F are backtracking Sev1's rise to the throne through time, helping here and there, they are doing exactly the same with Baldanders; i.e., Baldanders and Severian are two horses in the same race, and O, B, and F are betting upon the winner that results in the win that they like best); the shadow realities of Ushas and Ragnarok.

This "effect of the future upon the present," while a paradoxical mirroring of the effect of the past upon the present, is a point that Wolfe brings up about the Urth Cycle in the text itself as well as in many interviews and articles. Time and again he says that Earth may have received wonders from Urth; not in the sense that Urth is located in our past, thus restoring the "natural" cause/effect sense of "the past shaping the present," but in this paradoxical sense of seemingly going against the timeflow. (The shadow of Baldanders has caused Mary Shelley to write FRANKENSTEIN rather than Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN inspiring/causing Baldanders to recreate himself as a giant monster; etc.)

Here, to put it in another way, prosaic and mundane: let's say that what Wolfe is talking about, the future altering the present, is really just this--people get the future they have in mind, the goal they are working toward. Just to crank this idea up and give enough contrast to make it clear, I'll cast it into a starkly religious mode that Wolfe never uses: If people have God in hearts and mind, then they are heading towards the future of rebirth by the timeline warping behavior they exhibit; If people do not have God in hearts and mind, then they are heading towards the future of final death via the timeline shifting behavior they exhibit (killing Dodos, raping the Earth, etc.).

Okay, enough of that.

Now then, what are the qualities that makes Sev1 the keyman for the doomsday device? Thinking in mundane skiffy stuff, here, like THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN. The guy with the key for the End of the World has to be: unmarried, no children, firm in resolve to push the button if he receives the order. No spouse, no kids--that's so that keyman doesn't get all weepy and hesitant at the end. "Firm in resolve" so that keyman doesn't suddenly find a distracting religion or philosophy on the way to the keyhole.

Right. So here we have Sev1, a slightly special torturer. Okay, so he has no spouse, no kids, no family of elders; he is firm in resolve and is indifferent to suffering, death, torture.

Sev2 is tested. He is given a wife with a father-in-law and a son. He allows the woman and man to be killed. He grows fond of the son; the son is killed. He is offered the Urth; he refuses. His firmness of resolve softens to the point that he breaks with the guild.

Seems to me that the point is: there is precious little difference between Sev1 (that is to say, an untested-by-trial Sev2) and Baldanders for the role of keyman, except for the fact that Baldanders wouldn't do it at all (wouldn't leave the throne, get on the ship, go to Yesod, take the test, etc.). If that is the only difference, then the one who will go (Sev1) must then be optimized in his own past.

=mantis=