

# Plausibility

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 12 Nov 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5512>

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David Stockhoff — 12 Nov 2009, 01:59

That makes sense. Does it explain why Abel is so hard to follow? Certainly his material is bound to be looser, less subject to "modern" analysis. I was struck by Abel's lack of interest in his surroundings---it's very American in a way, and yet it fits the milieu.

I think Severian's narrative is strengthened by a couple of other factors that tie into the plausibility principle but are separate from it. Mainly, he's Autarch, with a very clear place in the world and a biography that is more like a history or a hagiography. Every detail counts, as we know, and he knows it too. Wolfe may well have precise knowledge of Abel's comings and goings, but we don't necessarily need to.

However, I can't argue that Severian has a better sense of the structure of his universe than Abel does. He may be better read, and probably learned a lot more as Autarch than he knew during his travels. But both characters have a distinctly medieval point of view. Severian attempts to explain what happened to him. Does Abel?

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Message: 1

Date: Tue, 10 Nov 2009 23:23:56 +0100

From: adamattman <adamattman at gmail.com>

To: urth at lists.urth.net

Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 63, Issue 5

Message-ID: <4AF9E7FC.30607 at googlemail.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-15; format=flowed

that's plausible.

and it reminds me of this: (taken from:  
<http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/wolfeint.html>)

Q: What is the difference between science fiction and fantasy?

GW: Plausibility, really. Science fiction is what you can make people believe; fantasy is what people have to suspend disbelief for. Many physicists believe that there will never be a faster-than-light drive -- it's impossible. But you can make people believe in one, since they don't know much physics. And there are some physicists who believe it is possible. If you talk about somebody genetically engineering unicorns, it's probably fantasy, because people don't believe in it. But it's so close that you can almost touch it; we're almost at the point where we can make a unicorn.

So it's all a matter of plausibility. Do people think, "The future might be like this?" If so, it's science fiction. If they think, "This could never happen," that's fantasy.

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Scott Wowra — 12 Nov 2009, 13:26 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Able (not Abel) is a young teenager transformed into the body of a man. Think about how well you wrote as a teenager. Did you understand all of your motivations and have perfect insight into your actions? I know I didn't. In contrast, Severian has the wisdom of multitudes. Given that, Sev certainly has more book-smarts and insight into his motivations...he can view his behavior from 1000s of different perspectives. Comparing their abilities to self-reflect is a stretch and ultimately will make Able look like a dunce.

Someone commented that Able was a "brute and a bully." Not sure that characterization holds water by the end of "The Wizard." He seems to be fairly mature and certainly not a bully like he was early in The Knight. His ultimate choice of desire over duty may not be heroic, but I tend to think many of us would have made the same choice.

On Wed, Nov 11, 2009 at 8:59 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:  
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David Stockhoff — 12 Nov 2009, 18:23 · follows Scott Wowra

True, but I was more struck by Able's rather flat interpretation of his universe---where is he, WHEN is he, the sequence of events that make up the plot---than his interpretation of his feelings. That's what I found hard to follow.

At any rate, while Severian does have those advantages (he is Autarch, as I said), Able does very well for himself despite, I think, lacking a strong analytical component to his personality, or a desire to understand or explain (or excuse).

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Message: 5

Date: Thu, 12 Nov 2009 08:26:16 -0500

From: Scott Wowra <swowra at gmail.com>

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

Subject: Re: (urth) Plausibility

Message-ID:

<78918eac0911120526v31d6b3c6le77c839414e8ae6a at mail.gmail.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

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