

started my second read of New Sun

The Urth list — 45 messages, 15 voices, 05 May 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5598>

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Cliff Judge — 05 May 2010, 16:00

Forgive me for, inevitably I am sure, rehashing things that were probably well-hashed on this list before the millenium. I've done my searching. A lot of these points feel familiar but I haven't found the threads that talk about them.

1) Sev introduces himself to Vodalus, and there is a sentence that would make sense if spoken by Vodalus ("I am a Vodalarii..." etc) but is in the same paragraph as Severian's utterance. Is Severian introducing himself to Vodalus as a follower of Vodalus?

2) Severian actually brings Triskele back to life the first time they meet, doesn't he?

3) Is the House Azure actually part of the House Absolute? Something about the way that the Thecla khaibit talks about being amused by clients who say they have been to the House Absolute, seems like she could mean "They believe they are lying, when in reality, they are in the House Absolute right here in this room." I am given to wonder if Severian's descriptions of the fake columns and the cheap cloth the Thecla khaibit wears are not factual, he is either just lying to us or he is seeing what he has to believe. Also, the khaibit claiming to be brought to the House Azure on a carriage, and Severian going "oh, really she must have walked here through the snow, the carriage is a lie to make her seem like more than she is" seems funny if you assume that she probably hasn't gone anywhere at all, that the House Azure is a storefront in Nessus and has a mirror to the Autarch's actual harem. The illusion lowers the reality, rather than raises it. I think there is a lot of that going on in this chapter - I think the clincher is when the khaibits says that she is just as truly Thecla as the Thecla Severian carries in his mind.

4) What might have actually been going on during the ceremony at the Feast of Holy Katharine? Did he actually behead the woman and then resurrect her? Masters Gurloes and Paleamon and the maid herself - who if I recall correctly may have been Severian's mother - must have been in on it basically...which would mean they all knew he was likely the bringer of the New Sun and had the whole thing planned out as a test. And the Autarch was probably involved. I found Sev's comment that he was tired after the ceremonial beheading to be interesting, I will need to watch carefully for him seeming like he has exerted himself when exercising his godly powers.

5) The theory that he killed her and resurrected her also makes some sense when, extremely hung over to the extent that it might not just be alcohol later - he has a visitation by a Malrubius eidolon, as well as Triskele.

6) Then there is that lingering scent of perfume he detects in his cabin. He says "the Thecla khaibits had been by to visit." But it seems that this might have been a convenient time for Thecla to have visited his bed. The very next day she was to be excruciated...but perhaps that was part of her excrutiations? Perhaps Thecla was involved in the whole "plot" to catalyze Severian's exegesis as the Conciliator?

Anyway it's all very interesting on second read. I did not expect so much to jump out at me after

having not picked the books up in 6 years.

Fred Kiesche — 05 May 2010, 16:06 · in reply to Cliff Judge

Doing a re-read as well, but have not gotten as far as you. Only reading a chapter a night, and if it has been a bad day or the joints are aching too much, I may not get through a whole chapter.

(1) I interpreted this to mean as you say, Sev is saying he is a follower. It is a bit jarring at this point, as you don't have much backstory and it seems like he makes it up on the spot.

(2) Not necessarily. Sev found Triskele during winter. Wounded, the cold could have both slowed the bleeding and slowed the life processes. Cleaning and warming Triskele might have saved the dog. And he got to put his "surgical skills" (learned as a apprentice torturer) to some good use.

On Wed, May 5, 2010 at 12:00 PM, Cliff Judge <transentient at gmail.com> wrote:
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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 05 May 2010, 16:07 · in reply to Cliff Judge

On Wed, May 5, 2010 at 9:00 AM, Cliff Judge <transentient at gmail.com> wrote: Forgive me for, inevitably I am sure, rehashing things that were probably well-hashed on this list before the millenium. I've done my searching. A lot of these points feel familiar but I haven't found the threads that talk about them.

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Yes.

2) Severian actually brings Triskele back to life the first time they meet, doesn't he?

Yes.

3) Is the House Azure actually part of the House Absolute?

Arguably, yes.

4) What might have actually been going on during the ceremony at the Feast of Holy Katharine? Did he actually behead the woman and then resurrect her?

No, this seems to be smoke and mirrors.

Masters Gurloes and Paleamon and the maid herself - who if I recall correctly may have been Severian's mother -

There is a rather vocal contingent who believes this, yes.

must have been in on it
basically...which would mean they all knew he was likely the bringer of the New Sun and had the whole thing planned out as a test.

Unlikely. He has seen elevations to journeyman before and would have noticed if his was different somehow.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Lane Haygood — 05 May 2010, 16:28 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

It seems unlikely to me that the Guild would have set up a test for Severian where someone was killed needlessly; they abstain from unjust and unnecessary violence. I think perhaps Gurloes has some idea of Severian's greater destiny (b/c it is Gurloes that gives him TE and

sends him out into the world with the hint that he might one day return) and might be in on some plot to put Severian on the Phoenix Throne, but... and this is the big problem with this theory... if you were hinging the hopes of your entire planet on surreptitiously guiding a young man to the throne so that he might travel to Yesod and complete the trial, why expose him to the dangers inherent in the journey itself?

One could argue that Severian's life is a series of Dickensian coincidences machinated by powers beyond his knowledge to fulfill a certain role, but if those powers are as truly omnipotent as such a scheme would suggest, why the rigmarole of the New Sun at all?

yvt,
LH

brunians at brunians.org — 05 May 2010, 16:40 · in reply to Lane Haygood
Palaemon.

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Josh Caswell — 13 May 2010, 09:32 · follows brunians at brunians.org

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I would not be so quick to disregard this; for example we can address the issue of a danger to the Severian who is a mortal entity insomuch as anyone on Urth. It was addressed near the end of the series in a reflection of Severian himself that the very history of his world made him such

a likely candidate to undertake the dangerous things that he has seen to in the course of his journey (don't have the line, but you may remember the bit about all the boys that had died in training over the years and how the bones made up much of the dust of the soil). Second there is the matter of Severian's training as a torturer that proved invaluable in the journey itself, something of a deus ex machina in itself.

One could argue that Severian's life is a series of Dickensian coincidences machinated by powers beyond his knowledge to fulfill a certain role, but if those powers are as truly omnipotent as such a scheme would suggest, why the rigmarole of the New Sun at all?

This is something that must be considered with the time traveling, dead raising, miracle preforming, karate chopping Severian we all know and love in mind. Perhaps it has something to do with the twin Severian's at Apu Punchau, but that could just be Wolfe being Wolfe or some of Severian's influence on the tale. What I am getting at is that it was not an issue of destiny or fulfillment at all, but eventuality. Think on the things that the Aquastor said or the Hierodules or the talk about the Hierogrammates. There is a certain cyclical implication in some of what they say and at points in the books we are shown clones of people or on the ship of Tzadkiel we are shown a dead Severian, this is not the chosen one or a prophesy being played out this is like I said an eventuality, this is not what must happen this is what happens or arguably what happened and will happen again in much the same way.

I hope that all makes sense I haven't slept in some 27 hours.

J

Lee Berman — 13 May 2010, 18:32 · follows Josh Caswell

From Kurt Vonnegut's cartoonish Tralfamadorians to Frank Herbert's mystical Atreides guys, SF authors have struggled to convey the difficulty for a being who can simultaneously perceive multiple points in time to communicate with such limited beings as ourselves who can only directly perceive one moment at a time.

I think Severian's dealings with Tzadkiel and various Hiero-dudes are Gene Wolfe's attempt to tackle the problem God has in accurately and understandably conveying His message to humanity.

Lee Berman — 13 May 2010, 18:50 · in reply to Lee Berman

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 13 May 2010, 18:53 · in reply to Lee Berman

Lee,

I believe that Wolfe would say, rather than "the problem God has in ... conveying His

message to humanity," "the difficulty we have in understanding God's message."

--Dan'l

On Thu, May 13, 2010 at 11:50 AM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Hotmail has tools for the New Busy. Search, chat and e-mail from your inbox.

http://www.windowlive.com/campaign/thenewbusy?ocid=PID28326::T:WLMTAGL:ON:WL:en-US:WM_HMP:042010_1

Josh Caswell — 13 May 2010, 19:05 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

This is a valid argument Lee, but it being Wolfe I have to ask myself does he mean it to be God (probably) or is he speaking more of the Hierogrammates themselves; if only an allegory for a theological truth as Wolfe sees it then we can simply count it as such and simply file it away (as if anything with Wolfe is ever that simple. However if the message comes from the divine, the Hierogrammates, I think it could be that their message is a means to *their* own end in their existence as an end result, more cyclical thinking.

Jeff Wilson — 14 May 2010, 18:21 · in reply to Lane Haygood

On 5/5/2010 11:28 AM, Lane Haygood wrote:

One could argue that Severian's life is a series of Dickensian coincidences machinated by powers beyond his knowledge to fulfill a certain role, but if those powers are as truly omnipotent as such a scheme would suggest, why the rigmarole of the New Sun at all?

Time travel. Once causality begins to loop back, there are no coincidences, no probability in the chain of events. What determines the chain of events is that it requires the least intervention by the time travellers.

And time travel happens because it is an allegory for G-d's eternal nature outside of Creation, even though G-d himself also appears in the story to remind us that the instruments of that intervention are flawed but their employer is not.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Lane Haygood — 14 May 2010, 18:32 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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It would still be more efficient for Tzadkiel/Hierogrammates/whomever to send the White Fountain without the need for the test or maneuvering Severian on the throne. While we might argue that God (or other such omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent being) must work through intermediaries because his nature prevents direct intervention, Tzadkiel and the Hieros have no such restrictions. Or do they just mirror their reflections in the universe above Yesod and act by circumspect means because in their image are they created?

(Aside, and literary connection, complete with spoilers for those who have not read Anathem: this is somewhat akin to Neal Stephenson's faux-Platonic idea of "propagation along the wick," where the Daban Urnood travels through successive iterations of Earth backwards along a chain of ever-worsening reflections of the Platonic ideal Earth. Although it is interesting to note that Man of Science Stephenson sees traveling toward "more perfect" universes as moving backward, while for Man of Faith Wolfe doing so is traveling "upward.")

Anyway, I'm overstressed at work and probably seeing things and connections where none should be. Have a wonderful Friday everyone!

John Watkins — 14 May 2010, 18:41 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Re: Anathem.

I'm not sure that the metaphor is actually that different--Stephenson has just cloaked his religious allusion in one more degree of obscurity. "Backward" is still "backward toward" something, a world that various characters do call "higher."

On Fri, May 14, 2010 at 2:32 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:
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Lane Haygood — 14 May 2010, 18:50 · in reply to John Watkins

The "HTW" or Heaven of the Forms from Plato/neoplatonism and Wolfe's good-natured piracy of kabbalistic terminology share a common cultural source and still crop up in more modern philosophy (Leibniz, Plantinga, David Lewis, etc.). It's all very interesting, at least to a philosophy geek like me.

I always like it when very different authors mine the same ideas and come up with different-sounding though very similar in form plot points.

LH

John Watkins — 14 May 2010, 19:15 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Sure, the melting point is Plotinus, right?

By the way, Plantinga is a top-five person I've ever met in terms of smarts. Just a really, really keen mind.

On Fri, May 14, 2010 at 2:50 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:
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Lane Haygood — 14 May 2010, 19:20 · in reply to John Watkins

Yes, but he looks like a demented gargoyle. And I'll never forgive him for transworld depravity. I still have flashes of horror regarding long tutoring sessions with my sophomore philosophy of religion TA trying to understand that.

John Watkins — 14 May 2010, 19:26 · in reply to Lane Haygood

I almost literally ran into him once when he was out jogging--they had to take me to that place in Hogwarts where they turn people back from stone to flesh.

On Fri, May 14, 2010 at 3:20 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:
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Jeff Wilson — 15 May 2010, 00:30 · in reply to Lane Haygood

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I think they interfere as little as possible both because they are at base moral creatures who know they constantly risk catastrophic changes in their "client" civilizations and because of limited resources, as each group of islands on Yesod is responsible for an entire galaxy in Briah. Tzadkiel needs Severian's coming to confirm when his personal attention will be needed and where along the timeline to aim the Fountain, so he is available to supervise the other worlds in his territory.

(Aside, and literary connection, complete with spoilers for those who have not read *Anathem*: this is somewhat akin to Neal Stephenson's faux-Platonic idea of "propagation along the wick," where the Daban Urnood travels through successive iterations of Earth *backwards* along a chain of ever-worsening reflections of the Platonic ideal Earth. Although it is interesting to note that Man of Science Stephenson sees traveling toward "more perfect" universes as moving backward, while for Man of Faith Wolfe doing so is traveling "upward.")

I think this could be an artifact of the borrowing from Plato; wasn't the Hellenic cultural view of time as if they stood by a river looking downstream as it carried figures of the past into the distance while those of the unknowable future are behind them, only the largest foreshadowed by ripples if at all?

Lane Haygood — 15 May 2010, 01:21 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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Interesting theory.

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Yes; the idea of successive "worlds" with higher levels of existence is common in many belief systems, but the unique confluence of Hellenistic philosophy with the emerging Judaic religions (including some the syncretic ones) was a major development on early Christianity. Since learned men in the first few centuries AD would've studied what we know consider classical Greek philosophy, all of the Church fathers were well-versed in it, and consequently it has

become something of a part of the Christian folk ideas about heaven and hell. But even in other mythic sources (like Norse mythology) we get the idea of successive levels of reality up and down the world tree... and Wolfe drew this exact parallel in TWK.

It's a case of nothing new under the sun; really... every "great idea" we have goes back to these very early ideas. All we can say is that our new learnings seem more like clarifications of what we've found out before. Which of course Plato would agree with and say, "Duh, modernity. See what I wrote in the _Meno_? I got this covered."

John Watkins — 15 May 2010, 02:41 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Plato to modernity: "Thanks for the footnotes."

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aaron — 15 May 2010, 05:50 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Actually, Palaemon gave Severian Terminus Est and advice about his journey to Thrax. When he is doing this, he becomes confused and tells Severian the wrong direction, which made me think that Palaemon had gone South (whereas Sev is sent North) himself as a younger man. Gurloes is the strange and slightly creepy master who uses the powder and the metal phallus. Umm, what a weirdo.

On Wed, May 5, 2010 at 12:28 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:
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yvt,
LH

brunians at brunians.org — 15 May 2010, 06:31 · in reply to aaron

Gurloes is a very unhappy man.

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yvt,
LH

Lane Haygood — 15 May 2010, 15:15 · in reply to aaron

Yeah, I realized that after I wrote it. I typically only respond at work when I'm away from my books.

LH

On May 15, 2010, at 12:50 AM, aaron wrote:

Actually, Palaemon gave Severian Terminus Est and advice about his journey to Thrax. When he is doing this, he becomes confused and tells Severian the wrong direction, which made me think that Palaemon had gone South (whereas Sev is sent North) himself as a younger man. Gurloes is the strange and slightly creepy master who uses the powder and the metal phallus. Umm, what a weirdo.

On Wed, May 5, 2010 at 12:28 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:

It seems unlikely to me that the Guild would have set up a test for Severian where someone was killed needlessly; they abstain from unjust and unnecessary violence. I think perhaps Gurloes has some idea of Severian's greater destiny (b/c it is Gurloes that gives him TE and sends him out into the world with the hint that he might one day return) and might be in on some plot to put Severian on the Phoenix Throne, but... and this is the big problem with this theory... if you were hinging the hopes of your entire planet on surreptitiously guiding a young man to the throne so that he might travel to Yesod and complete the trial, why expose him to the dangers inherent in the journey itself?

One could argue that Severian's life is a series of Dickensian coincidences machinated by powers beyond his knowledge to fulfill a certain role, but if those powers are as truly omnipotent as such a scheme would suggest, why the rigmarole of the New Sun at all?

yvt,
LH

Jerry Friedman — 16 May 2010, 03:47 · in reply to aaron

Gurloes doesn't use the powder and the dildo that we see (as far as I remember). He just has them in case he needs them, but in the situation Severian mentions, Gurloes manages without them.

He has a job where he's sometimes required to rape people. I think any way he deals with that has to be creepy--except quitting, which probably wouldn't work out well for him, especially since nobody's looking after his destiny.

Jerry Friedman

Lee Berman — 17 May 2010, 18:16 · follows Jerry Friedman

I believe that Wolfe would say, rather than "the problem God has in ... conveying His message to humanity," "the difficulty we have in understanding God's message."

but it being Wolfe I have to ask myself does

he mean it to be God (probably) or is he speaking more of the Hierogrammates

My interpretation of the subtext of the Sun series is this- There is not a vast, empty gap between humanity and God (the Increate/Outsider etc.). Just as there are lower creatures than human, there are higher ones, in a succession increasingly closer to God. We see an illustration of the progression in the rapid evolution of Zak from shapeless blob to mammal to primate to man to superman to archangel Tzadkiel.

I think there is the implication that Tzadkiel and her race are not the final stage...there are many beings more advanced still. But these beings are so far advanced from humanity that meaningful communication is impossible. Thus communication from God/Increate must be imperfectly imparted to humanity by such imperfect (yet still superior) beings such as angels.

My further guess (in part from Wolfe interviews) is that he thinks that humanity was in some fashion in closer contact with these superhuman beings in the past. Thus the origin of our mythologies of angels, ancient pantheons of gods, demigods, etc. Furthermore, those superior beings who diverged from the path of evolution toward God became our mythological demons and monsters, vampires, etc. Of course, ultimately they serve the purpose of the Increate also.

I'm not sure, but, going out on a limb, it might be that Wolfe considers the evolutionary path toward the Increate to be a circular one. Thus the problem of communication between Man and God is simultaneously a problem for Him and for His ultimate successor, ourselves.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 17 May 2010, 18:21 · in reply to Lee Berman

On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 11:16 AM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:
I'm not sure, but, going out on a limb, it might be that Wolfe considers the evolutionary path toward the Increate to be a circular one. Thus the problem of communication between Man and God is simultaneously a problem for Him and for His ultimate successor, ourselves.

For Wolfe as a Catholic, this idea would be very deep heresy.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Jeff Wilson — 17 May 2010, 18:39 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 11:16 AM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Unless you dress it up real fancy, Teilhard de Chardin-style.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 17 May 2010, 18:41 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

While de Chardin has not been officially denounced as a heretic, severe "warnings" are attached to his work by the Roman Catholic Church.

On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 11:39 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 11:16 AM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Unless you dress it up real fancy, Teilhard de Chardin-style.

Lane Haygood — 17 May 2010, 19:01 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 1:41 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:
While de Chardin has not been officially denounced as a heretic, severe "warnings" are attached to his work by the Roman Catholic Church.

Which has not, of course, kept Roman Catholic authors from utilizing his philosophy and theology as the basis for their stories.

I think Wolfe, unlike Simmons, might stop short of saying that man will surpass God as the Hieros surpassed Man. The idea of man creating his superior is not foreign to sf; robotics (and more recently) genetic manipulation have produced many such stories. The trope of the created surpassing the creator, the student defeating the master, etc., is a very common one.

But Wolfe (who loves to f\$%! with tropes) might be stopping this one up a bit short. Maybe the evolution isn't so much circular as it is spiral-shaped... ever increasing but always falling short of the true majesty of the Increate because no matter how great the successive lower-universe iterations get, all the way from protozoa to Hierogrammates to angels or whatever, they are all still bounded by temporality and being subject to this notion of change from one thing to the other, of growth. The very potential for change and becoming greater necessarily acts as a self-imposed limit by making such creatures subject to the flow of time. The Increate, by being outside time proper (whence a name like "Outsider?") is therefore in no danger of ever changing or becoming "better." Such commonplace relational notions as "better" or "worse" do not apply to such a being.

The very possibility of evolution, then, the great strength of mortality, is also a limiting a condition that would prevent the Teilhardian "final evolution."

LH

Jeff Wilson — 17 May 2010, 19:07 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

While de Chardin has not been officially denounced as a heretic, severe "warnings" are attached to his work by the Roman Catholic Church.

True, but he has recently been given a +1 by the Holy Father:

<http://ncronline.org/news/ecology/pope-cites-teilhardian-vision-cosmos-living-host>

John Watkins — 17 May 2010, 19:16 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

It's heresy to say that man will "replace" God.

It would not be heresy to suggest that the purpose of divine grace is for mankind to gradual become more like God. In fact that is orthodoxy (there's even a cool word for it, theosis, the process of becoming like God). And given infinite time and God's own infinity, mankind will infinitely *divinize
*without reaching *divinity.*

On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 3:07 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
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"warnings" are attached to his work by the Roman Catholic Church.

True, but he has recently been given a +1 by the Holy Father:

<http://ncronline.org/news/ecology/pope-cites-teilhardian-vision-cosmos-living-host>

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 17 May 2010, 19:28 · in reply to John Watkins

All that is true.

On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 12:16 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:
It's heresy to say that man will "replace" God.

It would not be heresy to suggest that the purpose of divine grace is for mankind to gradual become more like God. In fact that is orthodoxy (there's even a cool word for it, theosis, the process of becoming like God). And given infinite time and God's own infinity, mankind will infinitely divinize without reaching divinity.

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David Stockhoff — 17 May 2010, 19:34 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

This is perhaps the best description/explanation for what Wolfe "seems" to be doing in NS as I have seen. I've had a difficult time grasping the Increate's purpose in all the hugger-mugger of BOTNS. Treating this idea as an existing SF trope to which Wolfe formulates a penetrating response makes it work for me, and it fits Wolfe's interest in the "wrong" path being just as good as the "right" path if it takes one to the same place. Also, there is the (Platonic? Older?) idea of all matter in the universe striving to purge itself and rejoin God/become divine, which if considered a basic material force in the universe makes much more sense as the basis for such a vast "conspiracy" than some deistic tinkerer creating and destroying universes in succession with absolute inefficiency when he could just as well ... not create anything at all. If every race, every atom experiences this "Uplift" effect then it is clearly something inherent in all things. The mechanism by which this occurs for each race becomes

less important to work out. There remains a certain cheesiness to the whole scheme, but I take that as comedy, as well as a celebration of pulp SF. ----- Message: 7 Date: Mon, 17 May 2010 14:01:45 -0500 From: Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net> Subject: Re: (urth) started my second read of New Sun Message-ID: <AANLkTikyCYMmZMW8sPXESpu9wXcxAYDHYmS70Dt86wdF at mail.gmail.com> Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1 On Mon, May 17, 2010 at

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The very possibility of evolution, then, the great strength of mortality, is also a limiting a condition that would prevent the Teilhardian "final evolution."

LH

Gwern Branwen — 17 May 2010, 21:20 · in reply to Lane Haygood

On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 3:01 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:
On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 1:41 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

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Spiral-shaped? Come on, this isn't R.A. Lafferty or _Tengen Toppen Gurren Lagann_. :)

gwern

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 17 May 2010, 21:39 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 2:20 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:
Spiral-shaped? Come on, this isn't R.A. Lafferty or _Tengen Toppen Gurren Lagann_. :)

A, yes, Lafferty ... another fine Catholic SF writer ...

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Adam Thornton — 18 May 2010, 01:13 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I believe that Wolfe would say, rather than "the problem God has in ... conveying His message to humanity," "the difficulty we have in understanding God's message."

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he mean it to be God (probably) or is he speaking more of the Hierogrammates

My interpretation of the subtext of the Sun series is this- There is not a vast, empty gap between humanity and God (the Increate/Outsider etc.).

Based on the Cock and the Eagle, I'd have to say there is such a gap.

It just doesn't start immediately above humanity.

Adam

Lee Berman — 18 May 2010, 12:36 · follows Adam Thornton

In regard to Gene Wolfe as heretic, I'm not sure he'd reject that label. Perhaps he'd embrace it. From the Larry McCaffery interview:

GW- "I am a practicing Catholic, although I don't think that designation would give people much of an idea about what my beliefs are. People tend to have a very limited, stereotyped view of what it means to be a Catholic....I certainly don't dismiss religious or other mystical forms of speculation out of hand. I read it and try to make my own judgments about it. And in The Book of the New Sun I tried to work out some of the implications of my beliefs.

Moving beyond established religious dogma seems to be an important part of both Severian's and Silk's journeys.

I too liked Lane Haygood's post and perhaps Wolfe does view spiritual evolution as an asymptotic spiral, approaching but never reaching ultimate divinity. I certainly didn't mean to suggest the Sun series implies Man would replace God.

Still, I'm willing to consider circularity as a possibility. I think the section which describes the attachment to the person of the monarch as both the lowest and highest basis for governance is a partial inspiration. It reminds me of God declaring he is Alpha and Omega. This always struck me as a circular rather than linear alphabetic statement. The most elegant way to be both the beginning and the end is to be a circle. So Man is God, just at an earlier point in spiritual evolution.

Part of Tzadkiel's semi-divine nature is the ability to traverse a universe and perceive multiple points in time simultaneously. I think the natural progression from that would be the ability to traverse multiple universes and perceive all points in time simultaneously. As Lane posits, a way to accomplish this would be to exist outside all time and space.

But perhaps what David Stockhoff hints at is another path to ultimate divinity. Instead of being outside the whole shebang, a being could gain multi-universal presence and perception by becoming one with all the substance of all universes. Thus God would not be outside creation and evolution but the very essence of it, simultaneously the beginning and end and everything in between. To me, that feels more like Wolfe's Increate than a remote, external entity does.

But I qualified as being out on a limb from the beginning on this and I freely admit it could be a projection of my own spiritual leanings rather than those of Gene Wolfe's.

brunians at brunians.org — 18 May 2010, 12:45 · in reply to Lee Berman

He's orthodox.

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John Watkins — 18 May 2010, 12:52 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

I think the clear meaning of his statement in the Larry McCaffery interview is that there's a bit more room for intellectual play within the confines of orthodox Catholicism than stereotypes would suggest. I'm fairly sure he can say all three Creeds without lying.

On Tue, May 18, 2010 at 8:45 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
He's orthodox.

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brunians at brunians.org — 18 May 2010, 12:57 · in reply to John Watkins

That's right.

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http://www.windowslive.com/campaign/thenewbusy?ocid=PID28326::T:WLMTAGL:ON:WL:en-US:WM_HMP:042010_1

Craig Brewer — 18 May 2010, 13:38 · in reply to David Stockhoff

This idea reminds me of (the decidedly UN-Catholic) Milton's notion of a spectrum of purity among levels of existence in Paradise Lost. The angel Raphael explains this to Adam:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not deprav'd from good, created all
Such to perfection, one first matter all,
Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
But more refin'd, more spirituous, and pure,

As nearer to him plac'd or nearer tending
Each in thir several active Spheres assign'd,
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
Proportion'd to each kind. So from the root
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the
leaves
More aery, last the bright consummate flow'r
Spirits odorous breathes: flow'rs and thir fruit
Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
To intellectual, give both life and sense,
Fancy and understanding, whence the Soul
Reason receives, and reason is her being,
Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse
Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,
Differing but in degree, of kind the same. (5.
469-490)

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

From: David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>
To: urth at lists.urth.net
Sent: Mon, May 17, 2010 2:34:35 PM
Subject: Re: (urth) started my second read of New Sun

This is perhaps the best description/explanation for what Wolfe "seems" to be doing in NS as I have seen. I've had a difficult time grasping the Increate's purpose in all the hugger-mugger of BOTNS. Treating this idea as an existing SF trope to which Wolfe formulates a penetrating response makes it work for me, and it fits Wolfe's interest in the "wrong" path being just as good as the "right" path if it takes one to the same place. Also, there is the (Platonic? Older?) idea of all matter in the universe striving to purge itself and rejoin God/become divine, which if considered a basic material force in the universe makes much more sense as the basis for such a vast "conspiracy" than some deistic tinkerer creating and destroying universes in succession with absolute inefficiency when he could just as well ... not create anything at all. If every race, every atom experiences this "Uplift" effect then it is clearly something inherent in all things. The mechanism by which this occurs for each race becomes less important to work out. There remains a certain cheesiness to the whole scheme, but I take that as comedy, as well as a celebration of pulp SF. ----- Message: 7 Date: Mon, 17 May 2010 14:01:45 -0500 From: Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net> Subject: Re: (urth) started my second read of New Sun Message-ID: <AANLkTikyCYMmZMW8sPXESpu9wXcxAYDHYmS70Dt86wdF at mail.gmail.com> Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1 On Mon, May 17, 2010 at 1:41 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

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The very possibility of evolution, then, the great strength of mortality, is also a limiting a condition that would prevent the Teilhardian "final evolution."

LH

Jeff Wilson — 18 May 2010, 14:01 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On 5/17/2010 8:13 PM, Adam Thornton wrote:

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Based on the Cock and the Eagle, I'd have to say there is such a gap.

If you mean the cock and the angel, that's the angel's opinion. However, the angel turns out to be wrong about the fundamental moral of the story, and IIRC the angel makes his statement about the Increate's separation while he is without his angel-nature; having removed that, he has placed himself that much further from the Increate.

It's ambiguous, I'm jus sayin'

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

David Stockhoff — 18 May 2010, 21:56 · follows Jeff Wilson

Of course, the great thing about a "spiral" evolutionary scheme is that is it both circular AND linear and can easily be asymptotic as well. "Circular" and "linear" answer the question of human relation to God too neatly and put an end to further questions ...

----- Message: 5 Date: Tue, 18 May 2010

08:36:19 -0400 From: Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> To: <urth at lists.urth.net> Subject: (urth) started my second read of New Sun Message-ID: <SNT123-W8B0F26407B3B44D111DC0CFE10 at phx.gbl> Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1" ...

I too liked Lane Haygood's post and perhaps Wolfe does view spiritual evolution as an asymptotic spiral, approaching but never reaching ultimate divinity. I certainly didn't mean to suggest the Sun series implies Man would replace God.

Still, I'm willing to consider circularity as a possibility. I think the section which describes the attachment to the person of the monarch as both the lowest and highest basis for governance is a partial inspiration. It reminds me of God declaring he is Alpha and Omega. This always struck me as a circular rather than linear alphabetic statement. The most elegant way to be both the beginning and the end is to be a circle. So Man is God, just at an earlier point in spiritual evolution.

Part of Tzadkiel's semi-divine nature is the ability to traverse a universe and perceive multiple points in time simultaneously. I think the natural progression from that would be the ability to traverse multiple universes and perceive all points in time simultaneously. As Lane posits, a way to accomplish this would be to exist outside all time and space.

...

Jeff Wilson — 30 May 2010, 08:51 · in reply to Lane Haygood

On 5/14/2010 8:21 PM, Lane Haygood wrote:

I think they interfere as little as possible both because they are at base moral creatures who know they constantly risk catastrophic changes in their "client" civilizations and because of limited resources, as each group of islands on Yesod is responsible for an entire galaxy in Briah. Tzadkiel needs Severian's coming to confirm when his personal attention will be needed and where along the timeline to aim the Fountain, so he is available to supervise the other worlds in his territory.

Interesting theory.

If you see a flaw, I'm open to criticism.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

brunians at brunians.org — 30 May 2010, 09:05 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

I see no specific flaw.

I am not looking for any, really.

I am sure I could find one, or make one up.

But I won't, this once.

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On 5/14/2010 8:21 PM, Lane Haygood wrote:

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Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
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