

Urth Digest, Vol 76, Issue 173

The Urth list — 13 messages, 6 voices, 21 Dec 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5849>

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Andrew Mason — 21 Dec 2010, 18:18

James Wynn wrote:

. (We know of Catherine only through Ouen; and Ouen only

seems significant because of his similarity to Severian, both physically and in powers of memory, ?so if they're not Severian's biological parents, that whole episode becomes pointless.)

It's not pointless. It connects Severian to Dorcas.

I'm feeling lost here. How does it connect Severian to Dorcas? It can do so only through Ouen, but what reason is there to connect Severian with Ouen if he is not his biological father? He sets out to look for Ouen purely because he has worked out that he is Dorcas's son, and he thinks Dorcas needs a protector. Then the innkeeper mentions that they look alike, and his brain starts whirring. If he's not actually Ouen's son, this is just a mistake - there's no reason to think he's connected with Dorcas at all.

But Severian helping

his biological father find his mother, but never finding his his biological mother strikes me as really weird story-telling. Wolfe thinks the The Book of the Short Sun would be "lame" if, once we know the Rajan can travel to Urth, he does not meet with Severian. But it seems fine to him that his mother is just a name? I don't buy it. If people are suspicious, they should be.

Of course they should be. But I think that suspicion should lead us to find out more about Catherine. The connection with the names of Holy Katharine and Contessa Carina, the connection with the Pelerines, who keep turning up throughout the series, the link with the story of Frog, whose mother was also a virgin priestess - these all make her significant. There is probably a clue, which Wolfe considers very obvious, that tells us exactly who she was, but no one has spotted it yet.

If Severian is understood as somehow directly associated with the myths in the Brown Book, it restores a scattered unfocused unedited brain dump back to a comprehensible narrative.

He is associated with the myths of the brown book; but they are not, as I read them, straightforward reports of his ancestry; they are myths, and he is their fulfilment.

That he's the father of Typhon is not problematic in the same way (though it would have to be reconciled somehow with Typhon's claim that he he was not born).

I'm curious why you think this would not "mess the story up" as well.

Because it would not conflict with what the narrative seems to tell us about his parentage. (It would have to be a time-travelling Severian who becomes Typhon's father, of course. I've no attachment to this theory; I'm just saying it produces less of an obvious conflict.) And I didn't

say 'the story'; I said 'this story'. I proposed a specific story about Severian's ancestry and its significance; I think it helps to make the work a coherent one; it shows how the world is being guided - whether by an actual conspiracy or by the Increate - towards the birth of the New Sun. This story is spoiled by making him a clone.

Son of Witz — 21 Dec 2010, 18:44 · in reply to Andrew Mason

I have "aesthetic blowback" to the idea of Severian as a clone as well.

Here is an idea:

Spring Wind and Bird of the Wood have a sort of tryst, a brief encounter when he comes to Urth. If S.W. Is Typhon, couldn't BotW be Catherine the tim travelling Contessa, shuttered back to Typhon's era for an engineered tryst, then she is back through the corridors of time, or the mirrors, to birth in Severian's era.

Fish and Frog are set adrift on a STREAM. I think thys is a metonymic relation to The Brook Madrigot, and the story reads, "Far that basket sailed..." perhaps the womb-basket sailed up the stream of time.

All I'm saying is the potential exists for Severian to be Typhon's son without cloning, and without needing to be Typhon's father. I'm not suggesting that this IS what happened. Just an idea that came to me that seems to fit within the given limitations.

On Dec 21, 2010, at 10:18 AM, Andrew Mason <andrew.mason53 at gmail.com> wrote:

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James Wynn — 21 Dec 2010, 19:17 · in reply to Andrew Mason

Andrew Mason-

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James Wynn-

It's not pointless. It connects Severian to Dorcas.

Andrew Mason-

I'm feeling lost here. How does it connect Severian to Dorcas? It can do so only through Ouen, but what reason is there to connect Severian with Ouen if he is not his biological father?

Severian knew Dorcas before he knew Ouen. They might have even been lovers before he met Ouen. So why bring up Ouen at all? Well, appearance suggests they /are/ connected. But another answer to your question might be that Dorcas is the /only/ one who is important, and Ouen is her son. And in some sense by reuniting the two of them, Severian is reuniting himself to Dorcas. Again, that's an off-hand supposition. It is worth noting that false familiar ties is a staple of Wolfe. The Rajan calls Hoof, Hide, and Sinew his sons. He warns Hide that Jahlee (in soul travel and bearing the soul of Chenille) could be his "sister or aunt". Resurrected Horn accepts an inhumu bearing Sinew's soul as his son. Number Five calls Matre his father. This is all very mythological in that gods become the children and relatives of each other as told by mythographers although historically they were unrelated.

James Wynn-

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the The Book of the Short Sun would be "lame" if, once we know the Rajan can travel to Urth, he does not meet with Severian. But it seems fine to him that his mother is just a name? I don't buy it. If people are suspicious, they should be.

Andrew Mason-

Of course they should be. But I think that suspicion should lead us to find out more about Catherine. The connection with the names of Holy Katharine and Contessa Carina, the connection with the Pelerines, who keep turning up throughout the series, the link with the story of Frog, whose mother was also a virgin priestess - these all make her significant. There is probably a clue, which Wolfe considers very obvious, that tells us exactly who she was, but no one has spotted it yet.

I take it differently. I take Catherine's absence as evidence of a feint. EITHER: She has been sitting in plain view all the time (for example, she's Dorcas or Jolenta -- I'm not saying that's the case, I'm saying that's the sort of thing I expect if she's been in plain view). This is common for Wolfe. I remember getting to the end of "Peace" and say "Wha???" Then I thought about it for two days and realized most of my biggest questions had already been answered.

OR

For some reason, she's not really as important as we naturally thought she would be.

James Wynn-

If Severian is understood as somehow directly associated with the myths in the Brown Book, it restores a scattered unfocused unedited brain dump back to a comprehensible narrative.

Andrew Mason-

He is associated with the myths of the brown book; but they are not, as I read them, straightforward reports of his ancestry; they are myths, and he is their fulfilment.

In what way? Remember that the myths are very detailed. And if Severian fulfills them, I expect a detailed fulfillment.

James Wynn-

That he's the father of Typhon is not problematic in the same way (though it would have to be reconciled somehow with Typhon's claim that he he was not born).

Andrew Mason-

I'm curious why you think this would not "mess the story up" as well.

Because it would not conflict with what the narrative seems to tell us about his parentage. (It would have to be a time-travelling Severian who becomes Typhon's father, of course. I've no attachment to this theory; I'm just saying it produces less of an obvious conflict.) And I didn't say 'the story'; I said 'this story'. I proposed a specific story about Severian's ancestry and its significance; I think it helps to make the work a coherent one; it shows how the world is being guided - whether by an actual conspiracy or by the Increate - towards the birth of the New Sun. This story is spoiled by making him a clone.

I agree it complicates matters regarding Ouen. But Time-traveling is worse in some ways. You put your finger on probably the most unsavory aspect of the Clone Solution. It makes the story not just Deterministic, but Super-Deterministic. Severian is not just destined to be the New Sun. He was existentially designed for it. That's probably the aspect of the The Book of the New Sun

that I like the least: The entire race of the Hierogrammates. But Time-traveling over-determines, and /incestuates/ the story in the same way. And even when I understand that the H's are always behind the curtain --nudging Severian like NASA nudging Voyager around Jupiter, and even rebooting him when he catastrophically dies-- I'm still left with the feeling of something going on just beyond my field of vision. I'm not so attached to the Clone Solution. It's just the simplest path to get there. If there were evidence of a more complicated solution --if it answered an open question for me-- I'd probably go for that solution.

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Lee Berman — 21 Dec 2010, 19:46 · follows James Wynn

Both time travel and cloning are invoked in BotNS but time travel is explored in far more detail and in connection to Severian. So I'd lean toward time travel for explanations but I think maybe we aren't really supposed to know. What is more important is whether he was there, not how he got there.

James Wynn: The Rajan calls Hoof, Hide, and Sinew his sons. He warns Hide that Jahlee (in soul travel and bearing the soul of Chenille) could be his "sister or aunt". Resurrected Horn accepts an inhumu bearing Sinew's soul as his son.

In your theory, Horn also becomes enjoined with a Neighbor named Greenbuck? In conjoining all these ungulate animal parts and humans, inhumu and Neighbors into his family, what exactly is the Narrator creating?

Parke in Festivals of the Athenians describes a women-only midwinter festival, the Lenaia, which honored Dionysos. On this night, Graves calls it the Lenaea, the Festival of Wild Women. He says a bull, representing Dionysus, was cut into nine pieces, with one piece being burned and the rest consumed raw by the worshippers. Dionysus was born in winter, crowned with serpents, became a lion in the spring and was sacrificed as a bull (stag or goat) in the summer...

<http://www.schooloftheseasons.com/celsolstice.html>

Perhaps..The Outsider?

James Wynn — 21 Dec 2010, 20:23 · in reply to Lee Berman

James Wynn:

The Rajan calls Hoof, Hide, and Sinew his sons. He warns Hide that Jahlee (in soul travel and bearing the soul of Chenille) could be his "sister or aunt". ResurrectedHorn accepts an inhumu bearing Sinew's soul as his son.

Lee Berman-

In your theory, Horn also becomes enjoined with a Neighbor named Greenbuck? In conjoining all these ungulate animal parts and humans, inhumu and Neighbors into his family, what exactly is the Narrator creating?

Well, he /was/ a greenbuck. I don't know his name or whether such concepts are valid for Neighbors. The Not Horn becomes the father of the Not Sinew. But in a sense, they were father and son. The connection was there.

I think Wolfe is, again, exploring the nature of identity. He destroys and refabricates Pas through Jerboa and Sand (and Oreb, says I), he refabricates Chenille through Jahlee, refabricates Horn in the pit and then through Silk, he refabricates Silk in a variety of ways. I think he refabs several other characters throughout the books but lets not get into that. He obliterates these identities and restores them to see how they react like some evil scientist in

his tower.

What what am I beyond my memories? What are we to God? I could see this being a very important personal question to Wolfe. Additionally, familial titles are a key theological/mythological issue. The Christ is called The Son of God (a concept systematically described by the early first century Jewish philosopher Philo), but it is a mistake to think of him as God Jr. By the same token we call God our Father; Roman Catholics make free use of the terms Father, Mother, Sister, Brother; Evangelical Christians call each other Brother and Sister. What are the values of such relationships (real or titular) to one stripped of physicalities such as memory.

In short, Wolfe has many angles. He is accomplishing many different things.

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Adam Thornton IO — 21 Dec 2010, 21:52 · in reply to Son of Witz

On Tue, 21 Dec 2010 10:44:24 -0800, Son of Witz

<Sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org> wrote:

All I'm saying is the potential exists for Severian to be Typhon's son without cloning, and without needing to be Typhon's father. I'm not suggesting that this IS what happened. Just an idea that came to me that seems to fit within the given limitations.

Since we have time-travel and reincarnation, we could just take this to the logical conclusion and posit that everyone in UotNS--male, female, cacogen--is one incarnation or another of Severian.

From there it's only a short step to say that he's everyone in all Wolfe's stories.

Well, except Mr. Million. That'd be weird.

Adam

James Wynn — 21 Dec 2010, 22:17 · in reply to Adam Thornton IO

Son of Witz-

All I'm saying is the potential exists for Severian to be Typhon's son without cloning, and without needing to be Typhon's father. I'm not suggesting that this IS what happened. Just an idea that came to me that seems to fit within the given limitations.

Adam Thornton-

Since we have time-travel and reincarnation, we could just take this to the logical conclusion and posit that everyone in UotNS--male, female, cacogen--is one incarnation or another of Severian.

That's not a logical conclusion by any stretch of what I've said or anyone I've read. Nor it is anything like what I've posited. By the same token, I could take your sarcasm to the "logical conclusion" and reductio ad absurdum suppose you are really saying "The New Sun" is about nothing but the affirmation of sadism or only about descriptions of pretty ponies .

From there it's only a short step to say that he's everyone in all Wolfe's stories. Well, except Mr. Million. That'd be weird.

Carried to it's logical conclusion, you seem to be constantly only one short step away from saying something ridiculous.

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Adam Thornton IO — 21 Dec 2010, 22:20 · in reply to James Wynn

On Tue, 21 Dec 2010 16:17:40 -0600, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
Carried to it's logical conclusion, you seem to be constantly only one short step away from saying something ridiculous.

Damn Zeno and his paradoxes! I can never quite get there!

James Wynn — 21 Dec 2010, 22:41 · in reply to Adam Thornton IO

Carried to it's logical conclusion, you seem to be constantly only one short step away from saying something ridiculous.

Damn Zeno and his paradoxes! I can never quite get there!

Ha ha! I wouldn't worry about it. You can take a load off and sit here next to me. Your journey has ended.

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Jeff Wilson — 22 Dec 2010, 03:23 · in reply to James Wynn

On 12/21/2010 1:17 PM, James Wynn wrote:

I agree it complicates matters regarding Ouen. But Time-traveling is worse in some ways. You put your finger on probably the most unsavory aspect of the Clone Solution. It makes the story not just Deterministic, but Super-Deterministic. Severian is not just destined to be the New Sun. He was existentially designed for it. That's probably the aspect of the The Book of the New Sun that I like the least: The entire race of the Hierogrammates. But Time-traveling over-determines, and /incestuates/ the story in the same way. And even when I understand that the H's are always behind the curtain --nudging Severian like NASA nudging Voyager around Jupiter, and even rebooting him when he catastrophically dies-- I'm still left with the feeling of something going on just beyond my field of vision. I'm not so attached to the Clone Solution. It's just the simplest path to get there. If there were evidence of a more complicated solution --if it answered an open question for me-- I'd probably go for that solution.

It's still a struggle for Severian, though...and as it gradually becomes apparent he is being manipulated, and the manipulation crescendos into being part of an entire manipulated world, and the manipulated world crescendos into a play being put on for the benefit of forces yet more mysterious, and so on...it's still a valid story of how Sev handles all this. And I think the meta-meta-metafictional subtext is useful because we really can say how likely a given explanation is based at least somewhat on how successfully it makes an entertaining story, because we represent the mysterious audience.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

James Wynn — 22 Dec 2010, 04:19 · in reply to Son of Witz

Son of Witz-

Here is an idea:

Spring Wind and Bird of the Wood have a sort of tryst, a brief encounter when he comes to Urth. If S.W. Is Typhon, couldn't BotW be Catherine the tim travelling Contessa, shuttered back to Typhon's

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Fish and Frog are set adrift on a STREAM. I think thys is a metonymic relation to The Brook Madrigot, and the story reads, "Far that basket sailed..." perhaps the womb-basket sailed up the stream of time.

I like the idea of the stream as Brook Madrigot. In fact, that interpretation seems obvious now. If Catherine were a time traveller, it explains where she's got to. But if Sev's followers kill his brother, that event should be easy to identify.

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James Wynn — 22 Dec 2010, 16:12 · in reply to James Wynn

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I just remembered that there IS cloning in tBotNS. The House Azure, right?

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Son of Witz — 22 Dec 2010, 17:30 · in reply to James Wynn

On Dec 22, 2010, at 8:12 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

Son of Witz-

Here is an idea:

Spring Wind and Bird of the Wood have a sort of tryst, a brief encounter when he comes to Urth. If S.W. Is Typhon, couldn't BotW be Catherine the tim travelling Contessa, shuttered back to Typhon's era for an engineered tryst, then she is back through the corridors of time, or the mirrors, to birth in Severian's era.

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James Wynn-

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Yes, the Khaibits (sp?) and the soldiers with faces more akin than brothers.

The stream seems obvious when now, but I hadn't even thought to connect this story to Typhon and Severian.