

Spiritual and Ecological Sucession

The Urth list — 25 messages, 9 voices, 11 Jan 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5889>

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Lee Berman — 11 Jan 2011, 20:22

Feeling at a loss of plain textual (plowman's) explanation of why Urth was flooded to Ushas I've long thought the Bible was the place to find the answer- that being that here on Earth, we had a time period when our planet was over-run with demonic beings/pagan gods too powerful for humanity to control/resist. The Flood did not eliminate all evil/false gods but reduced them to levels at least manageable by human judgement and willpower. Same for Urth/Ushas.

From the beginning I had the sense in reading Short Sun that Blue, Green (and Whorl) represented an ecosystem. And so somehow the mystery/big picture had to be ecologically related. There is a principle in ecology called "succession". The basic idea is that when a virgin patch of land appears, the first living things to colonize it will be the mobile-seed fast growing plant types (weeds). Later, slower growing but more competitive shrubby growth will crowd out the weeds.

Later still, small trees, then mature "climax" or "old growth" larger trees will complete the succession. And so it will remain.

That is until some natural disaster occurs which is so great as to completely decimate the old growth forest, leaving a virgin patch of land and allowing the process to start anew. Such disasters might be earthquakes, extended drought and, of course, a major flood.

I am wondering if perhaps Wolfe intended to intertwine the principles of spiritual and ecological succession with Urth/Ushas and Blue/Green.

Many have discussed the Megatherians on Urth as simply, "in the ocean". I find this to be a bit simplistic, along the lines of "God is in heaven". There is evidence that these great beasts can be found elsewhere. Beneath the man-ape cave, in Lake Diuturna, in a volcano in the antarctic, in the Amazon River ("Ouroboros" sometimes refers to the great river in the north and sometimes is described as a snake-type giant than can swallow people alive).

What I'm thinking is that these great creatures have gotten so big and so intertwined with the planet that they may be considered almost as much geological as biological entities. Perhaps with The Mother on Blue and maybe the Giant Trees on Green there is something similar going on there.

It is for this reason that a planetary upheaval (with "waves of gravity") is necessary to enact both a spiritual and ecological succession on all these planets.

I know this isn't what Marc is looking for but perhaps when Wolfe says "Urth is Green" (implying Ushas is Blue) it is like comparing Africa and Asia and saying "Sahara is Gobi" and "Congo is Sumatra". Perhaps Wolfe is comparing these as places which are in similar stages of ecological and spiritual succession.

Adam Thornton — 11 Jan 2011, 20:34 · in reply to Lee Berman

On Jan 11, 2011, at 2:22 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

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I *told* you it was a Balrog!

Oh dear.

I don't think I was quite accurate in my portrayal of Fat Severian as Elvis. What if in addition to *not skinny*, he is *not tall*? Like, *distinctly* not tall? And all the exultant stuff? Just fantasy.

"There and Back Again" would be a perfectly good title for *_BotNS_*. Hey, this is a great theory! It needs more Daleks, though.

Adam

Son of Witz — 11 Jan 2011, 21:13 · in reply to Lee Berman

On Jan 11, 2011, at 12:22 PM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

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People keep getting it wrong.

Wolfe wrote to Marc, "No, No, No, Green is Urth"

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If it was "Urth is Green" I would put zero stock in it because it sounds like a joke.

But "Green is Urth" is less ambiguous.

It is perfectly possible that Wolfe was fucking with Marc, "I'm gonna really twist his head off with this one"

Maybe Wolfe has a story up his sleeve that will answer this question some day.

Jordon Flato — 11 Jan 2011, 21:48 · in reply to Son of Witz

On Tue, Jan 11, 2011 at 1:13 PM, Son of Witz <Sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org> wrote:

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If Green is Urth (and hey, we're being literal here, so let's not get cheeky with this Urth/Ushas are the same thing crap) then Green would have to been in Severian's past, pre Ushas conversion. And that, to me, seems completely impossible, unsupported, and just doesn't make sense.

Urth becomes Ushas. It does not remain Urth.

So if Green is Urth, to me this sets up a clear metaphor that Green is a symbol of what Urth would have become without a flood. A world ruled by monsters, taken over by survival of the fittest, and left to rot and decay in it's own filth. Sure it's lush, but it's a lushness of hell. So, yes, clearing the sewers is a highly resonant act to Severian bringing the flood.

And Blue has a number of thematic resonances with Ushas. So Wolfe has set up a great system for us where he can play with the symbolic consequences of a Urth without Flood (Green) and an Urth with flood (Blue).

At least that's what strikes me in the moment.

Son of Witz — 11 Jan 2011, 22:25 · in reply to Jordon Flato

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Just kidding.

I like this. The idea of twin planets, with and without deluge is very interesting.

It is possible that Green is some wild future of Urth where the pondscum in the Green Men took them over, brought their consciousness into the plant consciousness and made canibalistic flora. And It is possible that planets could be moved around, for whatever reason, swapping Blue for Lune, and it's possible that the Whorl was gone for waaaaaay long and is essentially a new ark. But the book gives us NONE of that.

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Yes, this is certainly along the lines of my own thoughts on the matter. But, I still get a sense that this is more than just a symbolic, thematic similarity. There are ruins on Green. There are ruins beneath the waves of Blue (and Ushas). We have the portents of a Flood in Dr. Talos' play but I think we also have some historical allusion to a "Deluge" in the history of Urth. We have forests on Lune but no apparent civilization remaining.

I am seeing evidence of a planetary cycle. I consider also the evidence of Fomalhaut. This is a yellow star in our earthly time, just like Sol. Yet in BotNS both are unnaturally red long before their time to go red giant. Even if we ignore the connection of "Fishes Mouth" to all the fishy and cavey stuff on Urth, the redness of Fomalhaut by itself (and the implied destruction of planets there) suggests a cosmic cycle we only get to see small portions of in the Sun Series books.

(As Dan'I hints at, perhaps this is even an adjunct exploration of what happens to a planet when humanity has been replaced by a shadowy, abo-ey, faerie, inhumani type species.:-) At the end of RttW, there is a potential war set up between humans and inhumi on Blue. In the end, who will win?)

Jordon Flato — 11 Jan 2011, 22:35 · in reply to Son of Witz

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That is plain and clear, and unambiguous. IF we are being literal. And therefore, if you are making a literal connection, I think the only real way to phrase it would be Green is Ushas.

Of course, I'm being precious here, because no disrespect to Marc, I can't swallow even the smallest part of Urth being Green or Green being Urth in a literal sense.

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António Pedro Marques — 11 Jan 2011, 23:28 · in reply to Jordon Flato

No dia 11 de Jan de 2011, às 21:48, Jordon Flato <jordonflatourth at gmail.com> escreveu:

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This is a very important point. Let's repeat: Severian's Urth becomes Ushas, so, by Rolle's theorem, Green can't be a post Severian Urth (unless one goes with Marc's scheme, but I've yet to see anyone convinced by it, despite he's having done what was possible). It can't be a pre-Severian Urth unless it's pre-humankind, again by Rolle's theorem, and that doesn't make much sense at first sight. Gene Wolfe is fond of jokes but he's also very serious about them, so it's unlikely it was just a clever reply. So just what did he mean? One has to look beyond what we now know of Urth and the one-dimensionality of the global timeline. And it has to make reasonable sense and serve some purpose.

Gerry Quinn — 12 Jan 2011, 00:16 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

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Flood in Dr. Talos' play but I think we also have some historical allusion to a "Deluge" in

the history of Urth. We have forests on Lune but no apparent civilization remaining.

We don't know much about civilisation elsewhere on Urth - the only description of Ascian society is from the story of a captured soldier from there. If the Commonwealth is South America, it seems possible that civilisations we know nothing of persist in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia etc. And perhaps on Lune.

There are ruins everywhere.

I am seeing evidence of a planetary cycle. I consider also the evidence of Fomalhaut. This is

a yellow star in our earthly time, just like Sol. Yet in BotNS both are unnaturally red long before their time to go red giant.

Fomalhaut will go red giant long before the Sun, as it is heavier - perhaps in less than a billion years. However, the Sun is not a red giant in Severians time. A red giant has a cooler surface than a star like the Sun, but radiates more heat due to its larger surface area. That said, Fomalhaut seems to have gone red before its time for some reason in BotNS (though we don't really know how long the events in BotNS are from now (or equivalent in Urth's cycle), but there don't seem any obvious conclusions to draw from this.

Even if we ignore the connection of "Fishes Mouth" to all the fishy and cavey stuff on Urth, the redness of Fomalhaut by itself (and the implied destruction of planets there) suggests a cosmic cycle we only get to see small portions of in the Sun Series books.

On the other hand, the unnamed star around which Blue and Green orbit seems to be doing fine. I don't see where a 'cosmic cycle' fits in with regard to the aging of contemporaneous stars.

- Gerry Quinn

Jane Delawney — 12 Jan 2011, 01:36 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 11/01/11 22:33, Lee Berman wrote:
We have forests on Lune but no apparent civilization remaining.

(in UOTNS) The sailors have a proverb regarding the bad luck incurred if one kills a Port o'Lune man. That's about the only reference in the text to doings on Lune.

jd

Lee Berman — 12 Jan 2011, 01:40 · follows Jane Delawney

Gerry Quinn: Fomalhaut seems to have gone red before its time for some reason in BotNSbut there don't seem any obvious conclusions to draw from this.

Unless you understand the reason Sol went red before its time.

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It's because you are missing the spiritual side of the cycle.

Gerry Quinn — 12 Jan 2011, 02:03 · in reply to Lee Berman

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We know why. But what has that to do with Fomalhaut? What obvious conclusions can we draw? That there is a black hole in Fomalhaut too?

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Feel free to explain how this "spiritual side of the cycle" causes Fomalhaut to age rapidly.

- Gerry Quinn

Adam Thornton — 12 Jan 2011, 02:08 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 01/11/2011 08:03 PM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

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It's all in the post above. Fomalhaut is prematurely red because its inhabitants, like those of Urth, were Bad somehow, and provoked the Hieros into putting a black hole into the center of *their* sun too.

The bestowing of the black hole is in response to the systems' inhabitants' spiritual deficiencies.

Hey, I don't believe it either, but it's a consistent and not-difficult-to-follow theory, and textually-supported to the degree that we know Fomalhaut is inhabited and we know that some inhabited systems get black holes given to them for being Bad.

Adam

Jeff Wilson — 12 Jan 2011, 03:01 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On 1/11/2011 8:08 PM, Adam Thornton wrote:

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Where are we told they get black holes for being bad?

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

Adam Thornton — 12 Jan 2011, 04:10 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 01/11/2011 09:01 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:
On 1/11/2011 8:08 PM, Adam Thornton wrote:

Where are we told they get black holes for being bad?

I thought we were in _The Wonders of Urth and Sky_. Perhaps I will look for it tomorrow.

Adam

Jerry Friedman — 12 Jan 2011, 04:34 · in reply to Jordon Flato

From: Jordon Flato <jordonflatourth at gmail.com>

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What if Wolfe sent you a postcard that said, "Ushas is Urth!"?

Seriously again, there are hints that the Severian in /Short Sun/ is a different iteration of him than the Severian in /New Sun/. If that's true, there may be no Ushas in the world of the /Short

Sun/. Urth may still be Urth.

Jerry Friedman

Lee Berman — 12 Jan 2011, 13:21 · follows Jerry Friedman

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This is an interesting idea that I hadn't heard before (from others). Do the hints about Severian you mention have to do with Merryn? Other things?

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This is an interesting idea that I hadn't heard before (from others).

Others here have mentioned it, maybe when you weren't reading the list or something. I think more than one person has come up with it independently, but I'm not sure.

Do the hints about Severian you mention have to do with Merryn? Other things?

One of the two main hints, as I see it, is indeed Merryn. In TCotC, Severian strongly implies that she's a stranger to him, but in RttW they're together. And they see it as nothing special, though the picture we get in BotNS is that the torturers have very few and carefully controlled interactions with the witches, and that a (free) girl in the Matachin Tower would be a very strange event.

The other, which someone else here pointed out, is that Severian takes Silkhorn and Co. to see his three-legged dog, and Hide describes Severian as still growing and younger than Hide, who Silkhorn says is sixteen. But Severian says he briefly had Triskele not long before he became captain of apprentices and met Thecla, when he was apparently about twenty, and I don't think we can see him as a growing boy then.

A minor point is that Hide says the journeymen's hoods are trimmed with red, and in all the mentions of the torturers' clothes in TBotnS, we never hear anything about that.

A strange point is that the young Severian tells Silkhorn he won't put Silkhorn in his book, since nobody would believe him. Aside from letting Hide tell us how good Silhorn is, this suggests an explanation for why Silkhorn (as the ghost of Malrubius) isn't in TBotNS. On the other hand, Severian did put the ghost of Malrubius in his book, and many other incredible things.

Of course there are answers to these hints: we could speculate on why Severian doesn't mention his acquaintance with Merryn, and maybe the chronology is wrong or Hide's estimate of Severian's age is wrong. So I just brought it up as a possibility that might be worth considering.

Jerry Friedman

Adam Thornton — 13 Jan 2011, 04:19 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 01/12/2011 10:14 PM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

The other, which someone else here pointed out, is that Severian takes Silkhorn and Co. to see his three-legged dog, and Hide describes Severian as still growing and younger than Hide, who Silkhorn says is sixteen. But Severian says he briefly had Triskele not long before he became captain of apprentices and met Thecla, when he was apparently about twenty, and I don't think we can see him as a growing boy then.

What evidence do we have that he was that old? Because in my mind, Severian, when he goes on his Big Adventure, has always been about seventeen. Or perhaps, Seventeen.

He sure **seems** super-callow. Not to mention phragyllistic.

Adam

Jerry Friedman — 13 Jan 2011, 06:24 · in reply to Adam Thornton

From: Adam Thornton <adam at io.com>

On 01/12/2011 10:14 PM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

The other, which someone else here pointed out, is that Severian takes Silkhorn and Co. to see his three-legged dog, and Hide describes Severian as still growing and younger than Hide, who Silkhorn says is sixteen. But Severian says he briefly had Triskele not long before he became captain of apprentices and met Thecla, when he was apparently about twenty, and I don't think we can see him as a growing boy then.

What evidence do we have that he was that old?

/Lexicon Urthus/ isn't evidence?

That means I hope someone else knows.

Because in my mind, Severian, when he goes on his Big Adventure, has always been about seventeen. Or perhaps, Seventeen.

That still doesn't agree with the statement from Horn that Severian is younger than him when Horn is "rising sixteen" (almost sixteen, the dictionary tells me), but it's closer.

He sure **seems** super-callow."

True, although some of it may be his upbringing, which was sheltered in certain ways.

Not to mention phragyllistic.

And, ex-Pia, ladocious.

Jerry Friedman

António Pedro Marques — 13 Jan 2011, 12:24 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

Jerry Friedman wrote (13-01-2011 06:24):

From: Adam Thornton<adam at io.com> Because in my mind, Severian, when he goes on his Big Adventure, has always been about seventeen. Or perhaps, Seventeen.

That still doesn't agree with the statement from Horn that Severian is younger than him when Horn is "rising sixteen" (almost sixteen, the dictionary tells me), but it's closer.

How many Urth days does a bluish year span?

Lee Berman — 13 Jan 2011, 14:50 · follows António Pedro Marques

Jerry Friedman: One of the two main hints, as I see it, is indeed Merryn.

Well, when Severian was pre-pubescent they did meet in the Witches Tower. She answers the door and guides him to the Cumaeen. But it seems implied in CotC that the Stone Town rooftop is the second time they meet. Her hanging out in the Matatchin Tower really doesn't sound right.

Hide describes Severian as still growing and younger than Hide, who Silkhorn says is sixteen.

I guess there could be different year lengths between Blue and Urth. But, yeah, I get the impression that when Severian meets Triskele he is already close to if not fully grown.

A minor point is that Hide says the journeymen's hoods are trimmed with red, and in all the mentions of the torturers' clothes in TBotNS, we never hear anything about that.

I thought that could be a meta-reference to the cover art. The classic SotT cover has some reddish pattern trimming the collar and inside of the cloak (though not the hood).

this suggests an explanation for why Silkhorn (as the ghost of Malrubius) isn't in TBotNS.

I've heard of the idea before (Silkhorn as ghost of Malrubius). But doesn't that mean Silkhorn would have to resemble, i.e. BE Malrubius? Silk slices animals but could he flay skin, gouge eyes and otherwise torture human beings?

I agree there are enough inconsistencies to warrant the suggestion that this is not our version of Severian. I still think some of the motivation for the scenario is to present a Wolefean solution to the puzzle of who is Severian's sister: Merryn for those who prefer simpler, more direct answers; Jolenta (who plays Jahi= Jahlee) for those who prefer convoluted and indirect answers.

Jeff Wilson — 13 Jan 2011, 15:40 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 1/13/2011 12:24 AM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

From: Adam Thornton<adam at io.com>

What evidence do we have that he was that old?

/Lexicon Urthus/ isn't evidence?

Of itself, not really. It's a good place to start, and there's lots of useful references in it, but I can think of at least one of my contributions Mantiss included that turned out to be not particularly correct.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >