

Claw Power in BOTNS

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 02 May 1998

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m.driussi — 14 May 1998, 01:10

vizcacha

(and anybody else following this "how can the white fountain power the Claw in BOTNS when it doesn't exist yet, except possibly as much as a half dead/half live cat?" investigation),

Oh dear, the things I forget!

Look here, a passage in URTH (ch. 20), where Apheta is talking to Severian after a disclaimer about how she doesn't know much:

"I cannot say whence you drew [energy for miracles] when you were on Urth. Partly from yourself, no doubt. But not all or even most can have come from you, or you would have perished. Perhaps from your world, or from its old sun. When you were on the ship ["Tzadkiel"] there was no world and no sun near enough, so you took what could be drawn from the ship itself, and nearly wrecked it. But even that was not sufficient [to resurrect the murdered steward]."

Okay! This passage gives us the answer that the white fountain was not involved; that Severian basically made an empathetic pledge/sacrifice of life essence, vril, what-have-you, for each miracle, and the Claw brokered a more-than-matching grant from any or all of the local energy sources.

Further, this opens wide vistas in re-examining certain events in TBOTNS. For example, when Sev pledges by his sword to the old sun, "his life for mine," and then the notules kill the uhlan: this seems like a clear case of a deal with the (sky father) sun. When Severian performs an execution and feels the power flowing through his legs: this might be a deal with the (bloodthirsty mother) Urth.

In looking at this in the past, I wondered if the "temporal banking model" which Wolfe gives to explain Severian's power in TBOTNS could be expanded into different banks: the bank of the Mother Urth, the bank of the old sun, etc. I then went into a maze of thinking that Erebus, Abaia, and all the other titans were sitting at the top of similar energy pyramids, perhaps by their various signal elements (water, ice, etc.). But since that seemed kinda weak (even with Lune's causing 4.5 times the tidal force for the Water Dept.), I speculated that the black hole at the heart of the old sun was feeding them. (Problem with this: if Erebus and Abaia are descended from Typhon, then how come the faltering sun predates them? If they aren't relatives of T then that problem is erased--they were just Baldanders-types doing an end-run around Typhon and probably had a hand in manipulating the breakup of his dynasty into feuding siblings.)

Anyway, point is: Severian is an energy vampire. So one starts watching for clues and cues of this. Did Severian trigger the earthquake when the Convulsor hit him in order to utilize =that= energy, or was the earthquake an unrelated side effect of something else? (I mean, aside from

the mythologically satisfying: "And the Earth trembled in mourning for him.") Do "deposits" to the Earth Mother bank (executions) allow for later "withdrawals with interest"? Likewise the Old Sun Father bank?

Anyway, here is a model that does away with many of the more thorny issues in the paradox of the half-dead/half-live white fountain.

=mantis=

sph1635 — 02 May 1998, 12:41 · follows m.driussi

I like this explanation. The only area that I cannot find an explanation for is that of the time at the end of SWORD, when Severian enters the forrested hills for some weeks without any food. What I had always assumed is that energy was released from the claw when it's pyx case broke. But, then I remembered (from somewhere, I do not have any proof right now) that Severian does make reference to the lake and how it resembles the gem. So is it from one of these sources that Severian is able to survive in the hills without any nourishment? If not, then what is sustaining him?

Xury

Peter Grimes — 14 May 1998, 15:37 · follows sph1635

On Sat, 2 May 1998 sph1635 at utsph.sph.uth.tmc.edu wrote:
Severian does make reference to the lake and how it resembles the gem. So is it from one of these sources that Severian is able to survive in the hills without any nourishment? If not, then what is sustaining him?

Humans can survive for several weeks without food as long as they have water. Severian does describe himself as feeling weaker and weaker over this period of time.

Plus he already has the power of the New Sun in him because it started travelling towards Urth so long before that.

Between the two its no mystery how he survives.

-Dave

Michael Straight — 15 May 1998, 09:13 · follows Peter Grimes

On Thu, 14 May 1998 m.driussi at genie.geis.com wrote:
(and anybody else following this "how can the white fountain power the Claw in BOTNS when it doesn't exist yet, except possibly as much as a half dead/half live cat?" investigation),

[Theory about Severian getting power from Urth, Old Sun, etc.]

Anyway, here is a model that does away with many of the more thorny issues in the paradox of the half-dead/half-live white fountain.

While these ideas are tantalizing, I just wanted to go on record as really liking the time-twisting ideas about Severian being able to use the white fountain because it will exist in the future. There's lots of good SF precedent for that kind of thing -- take this passage from a Greg Egan story ("Eugene") I read just yesterday [minor spoiler]:

"You've invented time travel!"

"No. Suppose you fed the genetic profile of an embryo into a computer,

which then constructed a simulation of the appearance of the mature organism; no time travel is involved, and yet aspects of a possible future are revealed. In that example, all the machinery to perform the extrapolation exists in the present, but the same thing can happen if the right equipment--equipment of a more sophisticated kind--exists in the potential future. It may be useful as a mathematical formalism, to pretend that the potential future has a tangible reality and is influencing the past--just as in geometric optics, it's often convenient to pretend that reflections are real objects that exist behind the mirrors that create them--but a formalism is all it would be.

"So because you might invent such a device, we can see you, and talk to you, as if you were speaking to us from the future?" "Yes."

Probably complete nonsense, but I love it anyway. (Most of Egan's stuff has less handwaving than that, btw. His short-story collection Axiomatic is quite mind-blowing; it plays with ideas of mind and consciousness and identity that mix Daniel Dennett, Douglas Hoffsteader, and Oliver Sacks with quite original stuff of his own).

-Rostrum