

Time Is On My Side

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 22 Apr 1999

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Dan Parmenter — 22 Apr 1999, 15:53

From: Michael Andre-Driussi <mantis at sirius.com>

In several essays and countless conversations, people have wondered "Why Severian? What qualifies him?" And often, after listing his various strengths and weaknesses, his first known special talent is hit upon as being somehow the most significant: "It must be his Memory."

It may be, but I haven't seen anyone pursue that thread--it is usually a stepping stone to someplace else, or a side attraction. (Or maybe I'm just forgetting something.)

I've pursued that thread, though perhaps not as vociferously as others have pursued other threads. One idea that I found very compelling for a while was based on a conception of human memory as a sensory organ rather than a storage medium; essentially, that Severian has the ability to directly experience moments of his own past as if they were the present. He speaks at several points of being lost among his memories, replaying particular favorite moments and experiencing them as the present. Why couldn't Severian's memory be the instrument of his access to the corridors of time? Doesn't Dorcas speculate that he did a time-splice, bringing her back to the point where she lived? Obviously there are serious problems with this hypothesis, but I don't think it should be dismissed out of hand.

And with multiple Severians and time streams, well, is it any surprise that Severian's "perfect memory" seems to be anything but (for a while we were collecting examples of inconsistencies in Severian's account).

Let's pretend, for the sake of this experiment, that his memory is the =only= thing that qualifies Severian. (I.e., it is not that he is a torturer; nor that he is the person on throne when the timer runs out; nor anything else.)

But wait! Just having a good memory *isn't* enough. Ouen "doesn't forget much" right? But he didn't qualify.

The same rules for raising ghosts =seem= to apply to resurrecting corpses (which makes sense, of course, since in resurrection one is raising the ghost and reuniting it with the body). But the various resurrections are often complicated by other things: who remembered Typhon for his resurrection (well, I would say the Claw); the Jonas ghost riding in the Miles body (actually this finds a possible solution in the outline above); who remembered Dorcas (well, "Charon," obviously); etc.

I thought Jonas-in-Miles was haunted by a memory of Jolenta?

From: Peter Westlake <peter at harlequin.co.uk>

I'm much more convinced by Severian's own explanation, that the torturers are the only people who can be relied upon to Do What Needs To Be Done.

Yes, remember that Appian's love of mankind was too great, though that seems a bit contrived. So what was needed was not just a torturer (plenty of them around, even with the guild's decline, and hey, all men are torturers, right?) but a torturer with a perfect memory.

I've always found it strangely sad that Severian gets to spend very little time as a righteous healer. Even when he heals Jader's sister and then walks triumphantly among his former prisoners (after giving them a bath), he himself remains in awe of the Claw, having not yet learned that the claw is merely a "focus" (in the old Champions gaming system sense) rather than an actual relic of power (like say, Green Lantern's ring).

Lex Shellac