

Blackout

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 25 Apr 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1575>

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Roy C. Lackey — 25 Apr 1999, 02:51

It has been suggested that the blackout on Tzadkiel's ship was caused by the drain of power occasioned by Sev's attempt to revive the dead steward. Maybe, but there is another explanation that, I think, has more textual support.

Shortly after Sev regains consciousness following the attempt, he comments that on no other occasion during the two years after he became Autarch that he even bothered to attempt such revivals did such disastrous consequences follow. The other times it just didn't work. This time he is stunned, loses consciousness, and the ship goes dark. It has been suggested that on Urth he had some power source there to draw on that was not available on the ship, and that the blackout was caused by a power drain on the ship's resources when he tried to revive the steward. He failed to revive the steward, but the attempt did give birth to the Claw of the Conciliator.

That events in Sev's career on the ship are being manipulated by Tzadkiel and/or his minions is undoubted. The three hierodules, F,B&O, insist on talking to Sev in their room so that he will not be in his own stateroom when it is ransacked. They know it will be ransacked because they know the future. Knowing the future, they also knew the steward would be killed. Why didn't they prevent his death? Because it was necessary to the chain of events that would lead to Sev's blood imbuing the thorn with its power, giving birth to the Claw, which figures so prominently in the Urth Cycle, to Sev's career and the plans of the agents of Yesod. There are many other occasions when events are being manipulated, especially while Sev is on the ship.

Another occasion is, obviously, when Tzad revivifies Sev after his death at the bottom of the airshaft. It has been assumed that Sev died from the fall, yet Sev notes: "Intellectually, I knew we could fall but slowly in the ship; I was even half-aware that we fell no faster at the lower levels. And yet we were falling, air whistling by faster and faster, the side of the airshaft a dark blur." Clearly, the laws of physics are being violated, or the "fall" was not a simple fall. He sees his dead, broken body: "He lay between two great machines, already splattered with some dark lubricant." Earlier, he had been told by Idas, who had slipped away from a gang of sailors working to repair the lights: "Something conductive must have fallen across the terminals of one of the big cells, but no one can find out what it was. Anyway, the plates burned through. Some cables too, and that shouldn't have happened." No, and it wouldn't have, in the natural course of events. The ship's lights came on the instant Sev touched Idas's hand, allowing him to see the knife in the other hand and thus defend himself. These are not coincidences.

After Sev's "trial" and return to Tzad's ship he spends a night in one of her staterooms feeling sorry for himself, leaves to go in search of Gunnie, thinks the ship changes itself for him, and suffers another great fall, seemingly fatal: "My mouth was filled with the dust of death. I sucked the water eagerly, moving it from cheek to cheek before I swallowed, feeling the tissues revive." Now there are two Gunnies; the one he knew and her younger self, Burgundofara. He is concerned because of the experience with Hildegryn. Gunnie explains that there can be two versions of herself because the ship operates in eternity, outside of space and time and: "We're

between the suns and the years too, so there can be two Gunnies with no danger to anybody. Or a dozen." The same, of course, applies to Sev, or anyone, which is how, I submit, Tzad&Co. effect some of their manipulations of the events Sev experiences.

It is my contention that the proximate cause of the blackout was Sev--inside Sidero--landing, at the terminus of his "fall", atop one of the "cells" (one of the "two great machines" mentioned above) shorting it out. Sidero would make a great conductor of electrical current. Whether the "fall" killed him or he was electrocuted doesn't matter. The ship's crew couldn't find what caused the short because Sidero left the scene and Sev was brought back to life and moved to a safer location by Zak and/or Gunnie. That the events seem out of sequence to Sev--and the reader--is because the ship moves in and out of time (as Gunnie explains) and there are at least two Sevs at some point.

Just how did Sidero come to lose his arm? The text, all too carefully, doesn't say, but his loyalty to the ship is well established. However it happened, I submit that events were arranged so that he did lose it, just so that Sev would climb inside Sidero (not for protection from the winged being; he died anyway), then "fall" to land on the "cell", to cause the blackout, which caused the Claw to come into existence. When Sev hears someone, who turns out to be Sidero, coming up the metal stairs he notes: "Once there was a clatter, as of a sword or helmet dropped, and another pause before the faltering footsteps came again. I was descending toward something that some other fled; there seemed no doubt of that." It is never mentioned what was dropped or what Sidero fled. Sev describes him as "terrified" and "trembling". Remember, this is an android. I submit that what was dropped was the remnant of Sidero's damaged arm and what he fled was a guilty conscious and, possibly, Tzadkiel's wrath. The guilt was because he had struck a man--Sev--in anger--the first time this coming event happened. He damaged his arm in the same "fall" that would kill Sev minutes later. He is wary of Sev, asking if Sev is loyal to the ship. When Sev answers: "True to the death, if need be.", the answer is ironical, as it shortly turns out, but it calms Sidero, who then allows Sev to effect some repairs. Sidero apparently thinks Sev has forgiven him for what, for Sev, has yet to happen, or realizes that this is a different version of Sev. Sidero mentions that the ship sails in and out of time and that he has no idea how many times men he regards as hazardous to the ship--those who don't follow orders--have tried to destroy him. In other words, he has human emotions and sometimes acts on them. Then regrets it. But he is willing to do whatever his captain--Tzadkiel--wishes, whatever the personal cost, even if he has to do it twice.

Sidero, Gunnie, and even Tzadkiel all acknowledge the ships temporal anomalies. After Sev's "trial" the Tzadkiel who is the ship's captain didn't even know about Sev's adventures.

Before you dismiss this out of hand, please reread the sections of _Urth_ where Sev is on the ship with the above in mind. Many of the parts I have outlined above have no explanation outside of some similar interpretation. And remember the final words Tzadkiel had to say to Sev on the ship:

"Yours is a race of pawns," Tzadkiel told me. "You move forward only, unless we move you back to begin the game again. But not all the pieces on the board are pawns."

Roy

Mark Millman — 26 Apr 1999, 08:39 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On 25 April 1999 at 7:51 am GMT, Roy C. Lackey wrote:
[snip]

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[snip]

Surely the "dark lubricant" is actually blood; it would be typical of Severian to misidentify it. Since Sidero is, at least metaphorically (but quite likely, at least in part, literally) a "man of iron", falling toward an electrical device, perhaps the fall is accelerated by magnetic attraction--which both supports Mr. Lackey's arguments and saves him from having to accuse Wolfe of violating physical law (in this instance, anyway). It could even have been the power drain caused by the activation of the "great machines", especially if they were being abused for a purpose outside their design parameters, that caused the black-out, without necessarily having to posit that Severian or Sidero shorted out the devices, bridged the cells, or what you please.

Mark Millman