

Jonas' port

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 01 Jun 1999

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 01 Jun 1999, 10:57

corncrake wrote, regarding the disappearance of the port that Jonas and co. were looking for:

What, presumably: it's turned into a citadel, with torturers, witches, magic atria, homunculi, the works. Nowhere a hard-working sailor can land a spaceship any more.

Here's an interesting point we can all agree with, however tentatively <g>.

But, in turn, it raises some interesting questions! For example, what kind of low tech sputnik was Jonas flying/crashing, anyway? Because the tender that brings Severian and Burgundofara to Urth does not need any sort of "port" at all--it doesn't even have to land in water, like the ships in 5HC. It just lands its Greco-Roman keel down on the ground, then lifts off again . . . all this, in the decadent Era of Typhon!

Granted the usual disclaimers: Wolfe hadn't written URTH yet; Wolfe gets confused, forgetful; etc.

"Low tech sputniks" like, for clear example, the type which fossilize into the towers on Citadel Hill.

Here's an important point about Jonas: because he has read Lewis Carroll, because he has read some history from the same rough time-frame, Jonas is another 20th century viewpoint character. (More useful than Robert and Marie because he sees the Commonwealth and responds in words.) He knows that the Theseus story has been warped from the version he =read=, just like we know from the same version we =read= (that is to say, neither we nor he heard it told by the ancient Hellenic storytellers). If we can accept this, then we will also probably see that the middle ages Jonas refers to in talking with Severian are =our= historic European Middle Ages, not some posthistoric analog--thus, Jonas is speaking for a 20th century observer, looking around at the society of the Commonwealth and saying, no, this =cannot= have lasted this long--even the European Middle Ages only lasted a few centuries, not a chiliad or more.

So! If this is the case, then what are the markers of "deep" or "big" time that Jonas has =just= learned?

Granted that there is something like "time shock" at work on some characters in Severian's narrative: Jonas is experiencing it in the antechamber after who knows how many years/decades/centuries of wandering Urth; Severian gets it in jiff time by seeing the towers of Citadell Hill, after all sorts of obvious clues that he was not prepared to interpret correctly. Time shock makes Severian sort of crazy (well, more crazy than usual) and might be the best explanation for his sudden murder of Prefect Prisca; and likewise it could be used as the entire reason for Jonas' temporary insanity in the antechamber and after.

(Jonas never saw Citadel Hill--that might have triggered "time shock," if what I'm saying has any

bearing.)

Thus, in the same way that Severian blithely strolled the land, thinking himself in his own era until he was shocked into reality, so Jonas probably thought he was stranded in some short-period dark age . . . having no clear notion of just how long and deep a drop the civilization had gone through.

("Time shock" might also be the first stage of a deeper "resurrection shock" in the case of Miles and Dorcas. The time shock is based upon the realization that the world you knew "just yesterday" is long gone, along with all the people you once knew (if you've been gone long enough); the resurrection shock is the spooky knowledge that you were actually dead. Resurrection shock involves temporary amnesia which =might= be a function of how long the subject was dead--Mineas was only dead a few minutes, so his amnesia might clear up within a day or two; Dorcas was dead for forty years and her amnesia lifts gradually over several months.)

=mantis=