

Jonas datapoints

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 08 Jun 1999

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 08 Jun 1999, 13:44

What did Jonas learn from the nth generation prisoners of the antechamber? First I will attempt to gather all the points.

Item 0.1: at the end of SHADOW, Jonas begins to tell a tale, presumably to impress Jolenta (much as the tales are told in the lazaret much later). It seems to suggest that he is very wise in archane lore, and/or he is much older than he looks. (The tale remains unfinished.)

Item 0.5: From Chapter X, CLAW: "I learned (or rather, I thought I did) that his father had been a craftsman; that he had been raised by both parents in what he called the usual way, though it is, in fact, rather rare; and that his home had been a seacoast town in the south, but that when he had last visited it he had found it so much changed that he had no desire to remain."

Comment: Jonas' hometown a place on the coast.

=In the Antechamber=

Item 1: "I couldn't break away from the women who had me, at first. Afterward, those people couldn't break away from me."

Item 2: "I must escape from here . . . If I don't, I will kill myself or lose my reason."

Item 3: (details about the group: several old women, a man of about fifty, another about thirty, three other women, and a flock of children)

Item 4: (the group's questions about river, fashions, and food)

Item 4.5: (that the oldest women are "seventh" generation prisoners--daughters of seventh generation prisoners)

Item 5: "They are remarkable people in some respects. Externally they have been shaped completely by this place where they have spent all their lives. Yet beneath that are [. . .] Family memories, I suppose you could call them. Traditions from the outside world that have been handed down to them, generation to generation, from the original prisoners from whom they are descended. They don't know what some of the words mean any longer, but they cling to the traditions, to the stories, because those are all they have; the stories and their names."

Item 6: "The name of the first prisoner . . . was Kimleesoong"

Comment: Jonas learned this from the prisoners and it is significant to him, but means nothing to Severian.

Item 7: "Kim Lee Soong would have been a very common kind of name when I was [...] a boy. A

common name in places now sunk under the sea. Have you ever heard of my ship, Severian? She was the _Fortunate Cloud_."

Comment: Obviously Jonas did =not= learn this from the prisoners--he is speaking from past experience. He is bringing it up to give Severian some context as to why it is important to him. The suggestion is that Jonas' home culture (see Item 0.5) had a lot (perhaps a numerical majority?) of Asians; and of course, that the first prisoner of this generational group was Asian (or at least had an Asian name). As a "time marker," the "sunk under the sea" bit would seem to indicate a greater interval than "seventh generation" prisoner (140 years?), or even the age of the antechamber if beginning with the Age of the Autarch (1000 years).

Item 8: "We must get power to the compressors before the air goes bad . . . I feel weight! It must be only the lights."

Item 9: "Jonas was cursing--at least, the tone of his voice told me he was cursing, though the words came in tongues unknown to me" and later Jonas begins "talking to himself in a nasal, monosyllabic language I did not understand."

Comment: Jonas curses and mutters in his (presumed) native tongue, which is a foreign language to Severian. It may or may not be Asian.

Item 10: the little girl mentions "the navigator" in conversation with Severian.

Comment: this is the first indication that at least some ancestors of the generational prisoners might have been the crew of a starship. The girl is talking to Severian, not Jonas. We aren't sure of the kin-group of the girl--she might or might not be a member of the same group that was talking to Jonas.

Item 11: "Do you know what this place is called, Severian?" etc.

Comment: Basically the antechamber is a waiting room where coffee and danishes are still served twice a day. There is a lot of detail on what amounts to what we moderns call a drop ceiling; these hints might be toward a real, specific building we should recognize, or a category of building. Dentist's office? Aerospace museum? Or is the House Absolute in fact another spaceport ruin? The "wells" that dot the garden could be 20th century-style launch silos.

Item 11.5: "Once I read a history. I don't suppose you know anything about it. So many chiliads have elapsed here."

Comment: This is a clear time marker. Many thousands of years have passed on Urth since Jonas first departed.

Item 11.7: Nicarete says, "This prison is not supposed to be a prison at all. Long ago--I believe before the reign of Ymar--it was the custom for the Autarch himself to judge anyone accused of a crime committed within the precincts of the House Absolute . . . Important cases were delt with quickly, but the offenders in less serious ones were sent here to wait"

Comment: the antechamber has a time marker of one thousand years.

Item 12: "I have to talk to somebody, so it has to be you even though you'll think I'm a monster when I'm done."

Item 13: "We crashed. It had been so long, on Urth, that there was no port when we returned,

no dock. Afterward my hand was gone, and my face. My shipmates repaired me as well as they could, but there were no parts anymore, only biological material."

Item 14: Speaking of Jolenta, Jonas says "I have never loved before, never in all the time since our crew scattered."

Comment: So it seems that after the crash, Jonas' crew scattered. From where to where? Who knows--there are seven continents. But they crashed upon a caucasian fellow, fwiw, not a xanthoderm.

Item 15: Regarding the source of biological material, Jonas says "He was on the ground. We killed him by accident, coming in. I needed his eyes and larynx, and I took some other parts."

Comment: Presumably this is the confession that he supposes will make Severian think him a monster. But Jonas' stories are always being interrupted, so who knows.

=mantis=

Mark Millman — 08 Jun 1999, 17:24 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

On Tuesday 8 June 1999, mantis wrote:
[snip!]

Or is the House Absolute in fact another spaceport ruin? The "wells" that dot the garden could be 20th century-style launch silos.

[snip!]

I have always contended that Father Inire's Hypogeum Apotropaic is a former bomb or fallout shelter, but I suppose it could also be a former launch bunker--it would still be underground and protected (or, more accurately, protective).

Mark Millman