

Antechamber, Jonas, navigator

The Urth list — 5 messages, 5 voices, 09 Jun 1999

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 09 Jun 1999, 11:47

Antechamber-as-missile-base: it is possible, and in some ways likely. But one of the solid clues we have is that one of the "original" ceilings has a painting of clouds and birds on it--while such a room could exist in a bunker or anywhere else (the pleasure dome of Dr. Strangelove), still, it isn't an icon of "bunker" in the way that, for example, radiation warning signs (I thought Severian saw these in the tunnels of the Citadel, =not= in the House Absolute) and rows of stopped clocks are.

Clouds and birds would be a fine decoration for a spaceport.

Thematically, the "garden above and palace below" arrangement at first echoes the Eloi/Morlock scenario of THE TIME MACHINE, furthered by the similar situation on worldship Yesod.

A different tack: the name itself, "Antechamber," implies that there is some room that is bigger or more important adjacent or nearby. Again, this is "the waiting room." Waiting for justice--that is what the prisoners are doing, that is certain. We don't know much about the surrounding area, so there might not be a "chamber" nearby. But the odd thing is, we do know that there is direct secret access from the Antechamber to the Presence Chamber . . . could the antechamber have previously been a waiting room for a teleportation station?

The Navigator. New tack: let's take the lore as literal truth, there was only one guy, and his name was Kim Lee Soong. Not a whole crew, not a fragment of a crew, just the one guy. (This tack puts even more weight upon Kim Lee Soong.) From the physical evidence, the generations in the antechamber look to be twenty years apart, so KLS was imprisoned for trespassing or whatever it was at least 160 years ago (seven generations at 20 years plus one more generation). If there was only one guy from a starship, then it seems somewhat more likely that he himself was the navigator. And he was the first prisoner, or at least, the first lifelong prisoner, of the antechamber.

My longtime sense of the navigator's funeral: the navigator was a prisoner in the antechamber, and because he was considered something of a nobleman (by virtue of his own personality or his title as navigator, which is a high position indeed) even by his unwitting captors (because at this early stage the antechamber wasn't the dumping ground it had degenerated to by Severian's time), he was given a fitting and proper ceremony. The other prisoners saw the ceremony and it was burned into their lore because it was the last glimpse they had of the outside world and/or the navigator was very important to them. (Previously I had assumed that there were more crewmembers as prisoners, and for them the death of their highest ranking member was really like the death of a king or president.)

(Still begs the question: what did the navigator do to become arrested?

The answer is that whatever it was, it was trivial, because we are told major cases are/were dispatched quickly. And yet for some reason it was not a simple situation whereby he could be

released--in a sense, every time he came up for parole, there was some reason to keep him in custody.)

Putting these two things together for my first time: Kim Lee Soong was the navigator, the only crewmember from some unnamed ship, and he became the "culture hero" (and perhaps blood ancestor as well) for generations of prisoners because he brought big knowledge of the starry heavens to people who were trapped in a big cave. (Note the Platonic imagery.) Almost an Oannes to them.

Another tack on Jonas' agitation: maybe there is a hint of "resurrection shock" when he says that he feels that he is finally waking up. If Jonas personally knew a man named Kim Lee Soong, a specific man with a very common name who he has learned was trapped in this prison and lived and died, then Jonas would have two avenues for shock: the loss of another personal link to his lost homeland; the concrete passage of biological time compared to his mindnumbed and timeless robotic wandering.

The Navigator as JFK. I wouldn't deny the cultural impact of JFK's funeral on the 20th century USA and how this is reflected in what the girl says. It also bundles nicely with the Apollo astronaut on Lune--but it is an association a step removed. (The Man on Moon picture is direct.) JFK is linked to Apollo as its visionary father, but one who didn't live to see it achieve its goal . . . like Caesar, JFK died, and Nixon is the one who was in the office. So maybe a stronger case could be made that "the navigator" is a wholly legendary figure, a composite of two historical figures--JFK (visionary of Apollo Project) and, say, Henry the Navigator (visionary who also died before the goal was achieved).

As always, it all depends upon the greater application.

=mantis=

Mitchell A. Bailey — 09 Jun 1999, 16:46 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

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My take has been that the House Absolute was reclaimed as a residence/command center rather early in the Monarch's Empire, several millenia earlier; the painted ceiling could date from a time when that part of the antechamber had been an apartment for the monarch or his family or an important minister or staffer; the text clearly states that several rooms were consolidated as the antechamber grew. Wouldn't you think the monarch's retinue would include a good few Doctor Strangeloves?

...(I thought Severian saw these in the tunnels of the Citadel, =not= in the House Absolute) and rows of stopped clocks are.

I saw that too. This was after he returned as Autarch. One of the perks of office is that you get a decent flashlight to take with you down into the Citadel tunnels. Apprentice Sev was in utter darkness and couldn't see the signs or anything else.

It was at the door to Inire's specula chamber in the Second House that the "crimson teratoid

sign" Sev surmised to be of extraterrestrial origin appeared. That seems to be what we're interpreting as radioactive or biohazard warning symbols.

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Sounds sorta baroque for me, but fashions change. That's really what I thought of reading that passage: one of those roccoco lavishly ornamented European drawing rooms of say the eighteenth century, or the frescoes of ancient Rome. You're assigned a suite in an ancient concrete bunker, you've got money and slaves, what do you do to make it more cheerful?

Why is this 'spaceport' underground? Protection against the backblast of more primitive chemical thrusters? War or military application? (which leads us back to...) The spaceport which became the Citadel wasn't essentially underground; the tunnels beneath it had gone out of use and memory by Sev's time, probably long before Typhon's reign.

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that there is direct secret access from the Antechamber to the Presence Chamber . . . could the antechamber have previously been a waiting room for a teleportation station?

Uh, I get the impression that this type teleportation is the exclusive province of Father Inire and a few of his peers, and was installed by and for him.

The Navigator. ... so KLS was imprisoned for trespassing or whatever it was at least 160 years ago (seven generations at 20 years plus one more generation). If there was only one guy from a starship, then it seems somewhat more likely that he himself was the navigator. And he was the first prisoner, ...

Can't be; the antechamber/holding cell used as such, by your own chronology in Lexicon Urthus, has to be over a millenium old since it seems to predate the autarchs.

...or at least, the first lifelong prisoner, of the antechamber.

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(Still begs the question: what did the navigator do to become arrested?
The answer is that whatever it was, it was trivial, because we are told major cases are/were dispatched quickly. And yet for some reason it was not a simple situation whereby he could be released--in a sense, every time he came up for parole, there was some reason to keep him in custody.)

I rather have the idea that the crowded magistrates-court docket and neglect go back much farther than 160 years.

The pettiest cases are ignored and forgotten, and so the accused wind up in effect serving a life sentence by default. Sort of makes me think of the "Kafkaesque" criminal justice system of St. Croix in "V.R.T.", where they eventually decide, pretty much by default, to hold Victor Trenchard alias John Marsch Phd. indefinitely. Release, over such a petty technicality as innocence of the crime for which "Marsch" presumably was originally being investigated (the murder of Maitre, for which Number Five already had been convicted and sentenced), would constitute an unthinkable admission of error and fallibility on the part of the Croix secret police.

Roy C. Lackey — 12 Jun 1999, 00:34 · follows Mitchell A. Bailey

mantis wrote:
Another tack on Jonas' agitation: maybe there is a hint of "resurrection shock" when he says that he feels that he is finally waking up. If Jonas personally knew a man named Kim Lee Soong, a specific man with a very common name who he has learned was trapped in this prison and lived and

died, then Jonas would have two avenues for shock: the loss of another personal link to his lost homeland; the concrete passage of biological time compared to his mindnumbed and timeless robotic wandering.<<

I think the all-too-human tendency to anthropomorphize is evident both in Wolfe's writing about Jonas and our speculations about him. Ascribing human emotions such as "shock", "agitation", loyalty, love, friendship, loss, etc. to an android are misplaced. Jonas is not a man: he is a machine. Any simulacra of human emotive states that Jonas manifests are just that. He does not have a human brain, therefore is not subject to or capable of the electro-chemical processes therein which are responsible for producing such human sentiments. Wolfe invites such humanization of Jonas with Sev's portrayal of "him": even the question of gender is an arbitrary one, one determined by programming, not biology. If the spacecraft had killed a woman instead of a man, would the android have become Joann rather than Jonas? Or would "he" have just gone around in "drag" costume? <g>

Earlier I speculated about Jonas's "age", or, more to the point, the age of the human face he is wearing. No need to speculate: in chapter X of Claw Sev supposes him to be "about ten years my elder". He later ups that estimate somewhat, but only on account of the knowledge Jonas possesses, which Sev believes could only accrue to a man of middle age. Sev can be no older than his early twenties, which means Jonas can appear to look not much more than 33 years old. There is no evidence in the text to lead us to believe that normal human beings have the means to extend life or youth, and even if they did, there is no evidence that Jonas had access to such wonders of medical technology. In fact, at least for the masses, most technology on Urth is more primitive than our own.

Even if the man killed when Jonas's ship crashed was a young man -- say 18 -- that would seem to indicate that the crash could not have happened much more than 15 years before Sev met him. However old Jonas may be -- and he does seem to come from an era much nearer ours than Sev's -- he cannot have been wandering Urth for nearly so long as is commonly assumed.

Roy

Peter Stephenson — 12 Jun 1999, 11:29 · follows Roy C. Lackey

"Roy C. Lackey" wrote:

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I don't think it can be that simple. As someone was saying just earlier in the week, Wolfe writes about non-humans as if they have `souls' in some sense. They're not completely human --- but they're not completely inhuman either, just like Jonas himself. There is no such stark distinction in Wolfe's writing. (And androids **are** anthropomorphic; another of those cases of the literal and metaphoric being mixed which makes Wolfe so rich.)

corncrake

Alex David Groce — 12 Jun 1999, 11:47 · follows Peter Stephenson

On Jun 12, 12:34am, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Subject: (urth) Re: Antechamber, Jonas, navigator
mantis wrote:

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I think this is missing the point--I'd be surprised if Wolfe believes that human emotions are purely a matter of particular electro-chemical processes of the brain--just as many proponents of strong AI suppose the brain to be one of the many "computers" capable of "running intelligence," human emotions might have analogues produced by other physical systems. This is only improper anthropomorphizing if you take a rather provincial view of the applicability of human emotions. From Wolfe's complex theology, I'd say that he'd view (and I'd tend to agree here) most human emotions as the images of Divine ones, analogous if in no way the same. And Wolfe's universe seems to not limit "the image of God" to man, or at least to our garden-variety of man. In one sense, Jonas IS a man.B

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But since we don't know anything about the process by which the dead man was incorporated into Jonas, it very well could extend the tissue life a great deal. Suggestive, maybe, but certainly not conclusive about Jonas' age.

Even if the man killed when Jonas's ship crashed was a young man -- say 18 -- that would seem to indicate that the crash could not have happened much more than 15 years before Sev met him. However old Jonas may be -- and he does seem to come from an era much nearer ours than Sev's -- he cannot have been wandering Urth for nearly so long as is commonly assumed.

Roy

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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