

Presence chamber's panels

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 22 Jun 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1696>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 22 Jun 1999, 15:09

Roy,

Me say:

Re: that symbol in the presence chamber that makes Jonas say he's on Urth.<<

You say:

The crimson sign was on the outside of the door to the chamber, not in the chamber itself. Jonas may not even have noticed the sign. When Sev hears a tread upon the stair he forces the door open. Once inside, the door closes and the light brightens. After looking around the chamber he examines Jonas's face, which is "still fixed", but looks like the face "almost, of a man about to wake...". Then, after ignoring what Sev has been saying to him, is when Jonas says: "I know where we are," ... "and raised one arm stiffly to point toward something I had taken to be a folding screen." Sev asks where, and Jonas answers "On Urth", then walks across the room to the panels.

At this point, Roy, you are being either contentious or sloppy! Because on the same page, a mere four sentences beyond your paraphrase, when Jonas strode across the room to the folding panels, Severian notes: "Their backs were set with clustered diamonds, as I now saw, and =enameled with such twisted signs as had been on the door=" (II, p. 167--emphasis mine).

You will probably argue that these aren't necessarily the exact same shapes painted on the door--but surely you will concede that they are of the same ilk, the same writing system, both on the door and in the chamber?

(FWIW, I think it is that detail about clustered diamonds that made me wonder if the writing system was more like "Chaldean" [a magical system wherein letters look like occult constellations of stars--if you've ever seen the old Avon paperback edition of NECRONOMICON then you've seen some examples--or the one used on the title page of my Wolfe related chapbooks, that's a crude one] than like "Chinese" [which is also on the table of consideration because of all the Asian pointers in the antechamber].)

You say:

He had been confused since he got zapped, obviously, because he'd known for years that he was on Urth. He had earlier had a "flashback", so to speak, to a time when there had been a blackout aboard a spacecraft he had been on. He may be in the throes of another such flashback when he sees the panels, causing him to forget that he was already on Urth, but recalling another time he had been on Urth in the presence of such mirrors. This raises the issue: where had Jonas had prior knowledge of these kinds of mirrors? After all, they are not, evidently, a common means of transportation around the universe.

FWIW, your notions of zapping are interesting and seem valid--whether this is the plowman's reading or the metaphysical truth remains uncertain (but that's nearly always the case with this baffling text).

But beyond that, help me with the logic here--you are saying that:

A) the symbol doesn't say "Urth" and

B) teleportation mirrors are not common to the Briatic universe, through which Jonas has done more travelling than perhaps any other character, yet

C) Jonas sees the mirrors and associates them with Urth because it was on Urth that he saw them before.

I find the third statement to be a bit of a stretch--I mean, at that point you might as well go whole hog and say "because =these= are the exact mirrors he saw before, and he really =does= know exactly where he is now."

As to how and where mirror tech is used, I'm afraid that most of our information relates to that =other= sailor, Hethor--surely he isn't lugging around something that unfolds into a phonebooth-sized box? And yet, could Hethor really summon the salamander--or those flying mounts?!--through a dingus the size of a cosmetic compact mirror?

(Are notules Briatic critters or not? On the world where they are commonly used, that world that Jonas seems to have visited, are they drawn through mirrors from other universes, or are they gathered in caves?)

(Inire's mirrors obviously work for sending and receiving--it may be that there are mirrors which can only do one or the other. Inire's summoning makes it seem like "fishing," in the sense that one watches for shapes and then either allows them to manifest or reboot the device and watch for another shape. If valid, then Hethor's summoning time would be largely taken up with rebooting, throwing back all the Fishes, waiting for something more powerful to show up: the salamander, the slug, the notules, the worm of white fire, etc.)

=mantis=

Roy C. Lackey — 23 Jun 1999, 16:21 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis,

Two weeks ago Mitchell Bailey wrote:

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.

To which you replied:

And Jonas seems to interpret those same symbols as some form of writing;

he

seems to read the one as saying "Urth," or words to that effect. FWIW.

I took "the one" to refer to the "crimson teratoid sign" on the door. My mistake.

You have written:

But beyond that, help me with the logic here--you are saying that:

A) the symbol doesn't say "Urth" and

I don't think it does. Why should it? The chamber and the specula are already on Urth.

B) teleportation mirrors are not common to the Briatic universe, through which Jonas has done more travelling than perhaps any other character, yet

Again, as I said, there is no hint in the text that teleportation is or ever was a common means of transportation. I would agree with Mitchell, who said: "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."

C) Jonas sees the mirrors and associates them with Urth because it was on Urth that he saw them before.

I find the third statement to be a bit of a stretch--I mean, at that point you might as well go whole hog and say "because =these= are the exact mirrors he saw before, and he really =does= know exactly where he is now."

It's possible, but, I agree with you, improbable. Yet we can agree, I think, that it was either one of the symbols (the "glyph" on the door, or one of the "twisted signs" on the panels) or the sight of the panels themselves that caused Jonas to make his pronouncement about being on Urth. If the former, and Jonas "read" the symbol to mean "Urth", then his revelation is pointless; just a confused android rambling on about the obvious--that he was in fact where he had already known for years he was--on Urth. If the latter, it leads to the improbable conclusion already mentioned, that he has seen the same or similar panels on Urth before, but his pronouncement is equally pointless. Either way, he is stating the obvious, because it is unarguable, from the text, that he was ever in doubt about what world he had been wandering for years.

So what is the point of the scene? Do we dismiss his utterance as the confused rambling of an android who is out of his head, akin to his earlier mutterings about the blackout? If so, then none of this matters, and there's no point in speculating about it. Yet we continue to do so because, I think, we all sense there is more going on here than meets the eye.

So here is a wild theory--a fan fiction, if you like.

When Jonas said "I know where we are." and "On Urth.", that is what Sev heard and wrote down. Or is it? Or did Jonas say "On Earth", which Sev heard and wrote down as "On Urth"? How could he tell the difference?

Consider: Jonas has undeniable knowledge--literary, historical, mythological and geographical--about what the reader recognizes as our Earth, but which is lost on Sev. For Sev, Jonas's guarded revelations about Urth's past belong to the Age of Myth, which is our age, or part of it. Of all the characters in the Urth Cycle, Jonas is far and away the closest to our own era, in terms of personal knowledge of our Earth.

Which brings me back to Jonas's utterance. If he said "On Earth" rather than "On Urth", it puts an entirely different spin on the scene and saves him from having made what is otherwise a meaningless statement. Sight of either the glyphs or the panels causes him to realize that Urth is indeed Earth; the Earth that he has known in his time travels with the Hierodules, and where he may even have been manufactured, in lands now sunk beneath the sea, long ago in the Age of Myth.

Roy