

More lies

The Urth list — 6 messages, 6 voices, 08 Nov 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1939>

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Roy C. Lackey — 08 Nov 1999, 16:49

Here are some occasions where Sev lied to the reader; that, or his perfect memory failed him. The day after his elevation he saw the order for Thecla's excruciation to begin on the following day. (I, XII)

"I could not sleep after that. Instead I went (for the last time, though I did not know it) to the tomb in which I had played as a boy."

Then (IV, XXXVI), as autarch, he returned to the tomb, "The mausoleum where I had played as a boy stood as I had left it, its jammed door three-quarters shut.", to retrieve the false coin given to him by Vodalus.

Also, compare the little "charm" he recounted both when he hid the coin and when he recovered it; they're not quite the same. One uses "glass", the other "grass".

Here's another: Just after describing where he and his friends swam and before recounting his near-drowning (I, II), Sev says: "I have chosen to describe all this now because I never went again after the day on which I saved Vodalus." Then, when he is captain of apprentices (I, X), "I took parties of apprentices to swim, thinking that to be my duty, though I could never dive in deep water without fear." Both statements can't be true.

During his "conversation" with the mandragora (IV, XXXV), another memory of his infancy is awakened: "I remember a time very long ago when I was cold and hungry. I lay upon my back, encircled by brown walls, and heard the sound of my own screams. Yes, I must have been an infant. Not old enough to crawl, I think." Yet (I, II) elsewhere he says: "From my earliest memory I remember all. That first recollection is of piling pebbles in the Old Yard." Any child old enough to pile pebbles is more than old enough to crawl. Note the "brown walls"; the walls of the cells in the Matachin tower are gray, as noted in the breast-feeding memory.

Now, these are just a few examples I stumbled across without really trying, where Sev is either lying for no good reason that I can see, or, more likely (unless Wolfe is sloppier than I believe), where Wolfe is showing the reader that Sev's memory is less than perfect--or both.

Roy

Kevin J. Maroney — 08 Nov 1999, 18:16 · follows Roy C. Lackey

At 04:49 PM 11/8/99 -0600, Roy wrote:

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Or that Severian slips up. Remember that his memory is not perfectly organized; he describes in some detail the difficult process by which he reconstructs his memories. Even if his memory is

perfect in the way he describes, it would not function in such a way as to protect him from misstatements like those you listed.

Still, that's an interesting list.

Wombat, a.k.a. Kevin Maroney kmaroney at crossover.com Kitchen Staff Supervisor, New York Review of Science Fiction <http://ebbs.english.vt.edu/olp/nyrsf/nyrsf.html>

Matthew Malthouse — 09 Nov 1999, 02:20 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

"Kevin J. Maroney" wrote:

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How many Sevs? How many different histories might Sev remember of himself at different times?

And how many memories may not be his own but conflated from the alzebo: regardless of when the events take place Sev is recounting them to us from the position of Autarch, or even re-writing them aboard Tzad's ship. if (and I'm not sure that I do) we accept multiply dead Sev to produce the right one might not one Sev have remembered brown walls and another grey ones? Once never again gone to the river and another done so?

As for the last time but I knew it not, that we certainly the last time that Sev as he then was went to the tomb. I'd say that in literary terms it was fair comment for even without the died/recreated stuff Sev the Autarch going to the tomb was so different as to be another person.

Matthew

William H. Ansley — 08 Nov 1999, 22:58 · follows Matthew Malthouse

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Poor Gene Wolfe! He can't make any mistakes at all. If he does he is either accused of being sloppy or strange theories start to blossom in the minds of members of this group. (Of course this happens all the time, anyway, and I certainly don't exclude my own mind.)

But we know he does make mistakes. He himself said so, in answer to a question asked him by members of this list.

Then again, Wolfe brings this kind of comment on himself by being incredibly subtle, indirect and downright tricky.

William Ansley

Michael Straight — 09 Nov 1999, 08:16 · follows William H. Ansley

On Mon, 8 Nov 1999, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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I don't think "for the last time" here necessarily means "the last time ever in my whole life." In context it just means that he didn't know at the time that he was about to leave his home and would no longer be able to visit the tomb.

-Rostrum

JMCAzurin — 09 Nov 1999, 23:43 · follows Michael Straight

Roy C. Lackey enumerated:

...some occasions where Sev lied or his perfect memory failed

The day after his elevation he saw the order for Thecla's excruciation to begin on the following day. (I, XII)

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Then (IV, XXXVI), as autarch, he returned to the tomb

This doesn't have to be either an outright lie or a memory failure. You might simply interpret the quote as, "The day after my elevation, I went to the tomb. Little did I know it would be my last such visit as a member in good standing of the order of seekers of truth and penitence, for I was soon to be exiled for facilitating Thecla's suicide."

Here's another: Just after describing where he and his friends swam and before recounting his near-drowning (I, II), Sev says: "I have chosen to describe all this now because I never went again after the day on which I saved Vodalus." Then, when he is captain of apprentices (I, X), "I took parties of apprentices to swim, thinking that to be my duty, though I could never dive in deep water without fear." Both statements can't be true.

He might just mean he never went for a fun afternoon swim with his friends again. He says he had to take the prentices, but the character of that sort of outing would be different. As Sev says he thinks it to be his
duty.

Mikah

- Are you crying?
- No, I'm bleeding.