

One more New Sun IAQ

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 22 Apr 2001

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Talarican — 22 Apr 2001, 09:18

Into the relative quiet reigning on the Urth list at present, I interject what I anticipate will be the final installment of BNS IAQ's. Hopefully these will turn out to be one of the better production runs. Enjoy.

- The Mad Exultant

(Shadow, IV) Okay, where DID Triskele go, and to whom? Apart from Sev's statement that they reencountered each other occasionally, Wolfe teases us with too many sly speculations about Triskele's whereabouts to simply dismiss the issue as a detail-for-texture. (In fact, Triskele contributes nothing to moving the plot along, so he serves some other purpose) Did Triskele die about the time Severian went into exile? Of what, and why? Aquastors are "always of the dead", and the Triskele which accompanied the aquastor of Master Malrubius clearly was an aquastor, as it vanished with Malrubius. If Triskele has NOT died prior to that time, then how do we resolve the paradox? (possible partial answer: having escaped into the old tunnels which presumably connect to the Corridors of Time, Triskele was in the past or future and therefore not "alive", for the purposes of the Aquastor Restriction, at the time of Sev's walk on the beach. So where/when WAS he at the time?) (another possible sly clue: Sev speculates that perhaps Triskele was adopted by someone who headed north to the war, but he doesn't explicitly specify a soldier. Could Triskele have encountered other denizens of the Corridors of Time, such as Inire?)

(Sword, XIV) What was pictured on the giant ancient mosaic exposed on Casdow's Cliff, over which Sev descended but never deciphered? Like the picture of Neil Armstrong planting the flag on the Moon, will this turn out to be some recognizable cultural icon from our time, perhaps a corporate logo? (It is interesting to see how similar is Sev's description of what he observes in the tiles, to the "magic eye" art that was to become a fad about a decade after Sword was published.) (One possible clue: the predominant colors are beryl (pale green with a bluish cast, i.e. aquamarine, teal) and white.) (I considered the Proctor & Gamble logo, P&G being owner of the Pringle's brand, but its official color is blue)

(Shadow XXXV) As the players approach the Piteous Gate, Dr. Talos points out the abundant undeveloped meadowlands still available for use within the Wall. Baldanders shakes his head and replies "They were not for the growing of Nessus". What did Baldanders believe they were for? What WERE they for, then?

Another thing: Baldanders is clearly in his way a rebel and a menace to the Commonwealth, yet he and Dr. Talos repeatedly pass through the heavily guarded Gates without a care in the world. Surely his activities in the north, though Lake Diuturna is so remote, could not altogether have escaped the notice of officials of the Commonwealth such as the archon of Thrax. News of his visits from Hierodules has even become known to Cyriaca in Thrax! (Sword XII) Surely the House Absolute, even without Inire's exotic methods of surveillance, must have some idea something peculiar and potentially worrisome is brewing in those parts. Would Hierodules have dealings with citizens of the Commonwealth and not inform Inire, who is presumably their

ambassador/control agent on Urth? Could they do so without Inire finding out? Would Inire know such a thing and keep it to himself?

Talos actually offers the observation (Shadow XXXV) that some guards in the garrison manning the gates probably are on the lookout for persons on the Autarch's Most Wanted List. Later, as the company broke up and went its separate ways (Claw, XXVI), Talos said he at first speculated that Sev was sent by operatives of the House Absolute for intimidation, but readily dismissed that notion as "an absurd overreaction" and remained untroubled by the fact a servant of the Autarch travelled with them. (Perhaps an "absurd underreaction". One might think a more appropriate response, on learning the notorious rebel mad scientist was abroad, would be to send an Inquisitor, leading a squad of anpiels and fusilarii, after him) Why is Baldanders so confident he is not being sought, or that his disguise is so perfect he can pass through a gauntlet of vigilant pandours undetected? (but they're looking for a small man!) (Could Baldanders, like Vodalus, be in the final analysis a cats-paw of that power the Autarch serves? The Hierodules do seem to hint broadly at this possibility)

For that matter, the purpose of the Wall is somewhat problematical, in spite of Jonas' hints. While it seems to serve in and of itself as a fortress as well as a defensive work, it seems rather extravagant and useless. A civilization capable of building it should not need it, and it would presumably constitute only an annoying minor obstacle to any enemy capable of seriously threatening such a civilization. Flyers can simply pass over it, it is irrelevant to a bombardment or invasion from the air or from orbit, and doubtless concentrated high energy artillery could breach it in a matter of days. The only rationalization that makes any sense would be that the builders somehow anticipated the future decadence of their civilization, and wished to bequeath their descendants a formidable passive defense requiring little maintenance or skill to be effective against similarly regressed adversaries.

Another problem with the Wall arises in Urth (XLVII, XLVIII) . Where is it after the flood? The water covering Nessus does not cover, and did not knock over, the towers of the Citadel, assuming we accept Sev's assertion that that observation was real. Yet the Wall, high as the lowest clouds, seems to have essentially vanished, though Sev did indeed mention that "sections" of the Wall were down. One would have thought that if the incoming wave couldn't knock down the Citadel towers, the Wall could have withstood it and indeed preserved the City within its circle, provided the gates were closed. (That would be another valid purpose for building it) If nothing else, the rubble would have been tremendous and unmissable, possibly forming an atoll of metal islands in the new sea.

For that matter, Sev at this point has at least two separate experiences of exploring drowned Nessus (under water deep enough to cover the Citadel towers, then with Juturna in water shallow enough for the tops of the towers to break the surface.) Which, if either, of those experiences were true, the other at least, if not both, being a dream?

(Urth XLV) What was Thais about to say to Sev after he offered Odilo his blanket on Eata's boat, "I -", cut off when Pega jabbed her? ("I'll share mine with you"? But why would Pega object? She could be next)

(Claw XI, very end of chapter) Was the family estate of Thecla and Thea's clan located in the province ruled by Thrax, probably upriver? Were they one of those maverick exulted families of that province which caused the archon so much indigestion? (well, what with their daughters growing up to be Vodalarii, it seems likely) As he first experiences her memories merging with his after Vodalus' banquet, Severian has a Thecla-memory of playing by the River Acis (!). This was indeed, so far as I could discover, the first mention of the river Acis in BNS, long before Sev arrived in Thrax. For that matter, could they be the "great northern clan" of which the young apprentice Eata fantasized being a lost scion? (Shadow II)

(Urth XLVI) I realize that Autarch Severian might not wish to produce an heir prior to his New Sun trial, but - hey! - he was married to Valeria a good decade or so before he left. How did they avoid a "blessed event" in all that time? Are birth control pills available in the Commonwealth, or was the relationship of Severian and Valeria asexual? It is interesting that, of all the women with whom Sev has encounters, the one he actually marries is one of the few never described in even abstractly erotic terms.

When Dr. Talos visits the Autarch Severian (Citadel XXXVI) in order to pay him his last remaining share from their itinerant-players gig - a counterfeit chrisos - Sev notices that it is identical to the chrisos Vodalus tossed him after the fight in the necropolis. Obviously, not only was Vodalus' chrisos bogus (as was Vodalus' movement), but we are shown that someone who came to see *_Eschatology and Genesis_* got a fake chrisos from the same source as Vodalus, and passed it to Talos. What is the significance of this, in a scene Sev admitted was a flash-forward out of time sequence with that point in his narrative? And did the company receive chrisos at any time other than from the House Absolute - i.e. was the old Autarch's court passing out counterfeit coins? We can of course see an illustration of what we have already been told expressly, that a covert extralegal connection between the Vodalarii and the House Absolute existed, but is there something else here?

(Citadel XXX) After she and the Green Man rescue Severian from the Ascians, Agia releases him instead of torturing him to death, quite casually consoling herself with the certainty that "in the end you will come into my hands again". Even more interesting, Agia apparently did not free Sev only because the Green Man was present to ensure she did (how would he compel her?). The Green man states that "the woman... would have *_freed_* you without my help". Why is Agia so sure she will get hold of Sev again? Why is she content to wait for that occasion rather than seizing the moment? (maybe she was hoping he would fail and the Hierogrammates would castrate him? But why let them have all the fun?) Does her threat/prophecy in any sense come to pass? (her aquastor, at the battle before Tzadkiel's throne? But from her viewpoint, this took place before the events of *_Citadel_*, indeed before Briah existed)

(Urth XXXII) As Severian boards the *_Alcyone_*, he thinks he recognizes a "sun-browned" deckhand, but cannot recall who he resembled. Who WAS that tanned man?

Finally, I have some difficulty with the alleged love affair of Thecla and Severian while she was in the Tower. Is Sev being an "unreliable narrator" when he describes, only much later and after subsuming her memories, their carryings-on? Gurloes, you might recall, (Shadow VII) detected Sev's attraction to her from the very first and warned him not to get heavily involved. One would think apprentice Severian, otherwise terrified of Gurloes, might be warned off. One would think that Severian's visits with Thecla would be closely monitored, too much so to allow for more than at most very brief furtive naughtiness, which the scenes actually there in Shadow suggest. Could the "memories" of more relaxed and leisurely trysts, related in the later volumes, be fantasies augmented by his shared memories of her, concocted from both their desires?

Roy C. Lackey — 22 Apr 2001, 18:05 · follows Talarican

From: "Talarican" <exultnttalarican at mindspring.com>

Subject: One more New Sun IAQ

Date: Sun, 22 Apr 2001 09:18:42 -0400

Into the relative quiet reigning on the Urth list at present, I interject what I anticipate will be the final installment of BNS IAQ's. Hopefully these will turn out to be one of the better production runs. Enjoy.

- The Mad Exultant

Well, Mitc...er...Talarican, are you compiling these IAQ's somewhere? How can it be the "final installment"? Because your list is hardly exhaustive. I could add some more, as doubtless could others here.

[snip]

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I agree wrt your objections about the practicality of the Wall. Indeed, the only good purpose for it that I can see was to prevent the very inundation that it apparently didn't, but should have.

(Urth XXXII) As Severian boards the _Alcyone_, he thinks he recognizes a "sun-browned" deckhand, but cannot recall who he resembled. Who WAS that tanned man?

No doubt someone will suggest it was himself, and possibly it was. Along this line, here is one of my own IAQs, from two chapters later. Who was the "greasy, close-faced woman they said was the ship's cook" who was present at the table in the inn in Saltus for Sev's "last supper" prior to his arrest? She showed up again three chapters after that, among the group who visited him in his cell to hear his sermon on the dying of the Old Sun and the coming of the New Sun, Sev's account drawn largely from his knowledge of Talos's play. Sev's tale was overheard by Canog, who took notes for the book he would write, which became the basis for Talos's play, which became the basis for Sev's tale, which ...but I digress, and anyway, I've brought up the dubious authorship of this uncreated story before, to no avail.

Roy

matthew.malthouse — 09 May 2001, 14:02 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On 22/04/2001 14:18:42 Talarican wrote:
(Shadow XXXV) As the players approach the Piteous Gate, Dr. Talos points out the abundant undeveloped meadowlands still available for use within the Wall. Baldanders shakes his head and replies "They were not for the growing of Nessus". What did Baldanders believe they were for? What WERE they for, then?

I take Baldander's "were" as deliberate, he's talking of the past. Then add what we know of Nessus growing upstream - quite normal for urban areas with poor sanitary planning where the wealthy who can afford to build do so where the waters are less polluted, but an event of the (relatively) low-tech society much later than that which built the wall originally. Plus the human tendency to symmetry along with hints about the early shape of Nessus.

What I get from all this odd arithmetic is that by design the wall was to enclose not only the space port and city but also sufficient hinterland to feed the population. Think like the outer wall around the farm land at Minas Tirith.

So if originally there was both city and farm land with the wall the contemporary reason for not building nearer than the Last Inn would be to maintain a cordon or killing ground for clear fire from the Autarch's soldiers housed within the wall. This suggests that the emphasis has changed from defending Nessus to containing it and its population.

Now, absolute off the wall speculation this but: the wall is circular is it not? I can recall no hint at all in the text and it's likely that non exists but might it originally have supported some

hemispherical "force field" defence? In a society that could build it and which had functional space ships a defense against ground attack - however impressive a defense - seems incomplete and inadequate.

Matthew