

Nodding trees

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 02 Dec 2002

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Dan Rabin — 02 Dec 2002, 04:26

Marc Aramini writes,

Also, remember that the trees take part in the cannibalistic ritual of Vodalus: " the trees nodded, and I nodded with them". THE TREES PARTICIPATE IN THE CEREMONY OF THE LIEGE OF LEAVES.

Severian is under the effects of a powerful psychoactive drug (alzabo) at the moment narrated. He is hallucinating. I can't count this as an instance of Wolfe intending the trees to be understood as sentient.

Also remember that there is a big section that talks about Vodalus hiding the forests of Lune - sentient trees there, maybe? The trees of Green?

Not a big section. From `_Torturer_` chapter 5:

This was done before they got it irrigated. See that gray-brown? In those times, that's what you'd see if you looked up at her. Not green like she is now. Didn't seem so big either, because it wasn't so close in-that's what old Branwallader used to say. Now there's trees enough on it to hide Nilammon, as the saw goes." I seized my opportunity. "Or Vodalus." Rudesind cackled. "Or him, that's right enough. Your bunch muyst be rubbing their hands waiting to have him. Got something special planned?" If the guild had particular excruciations reserved for specific individuals, I knew nothing of it; but I endeavored to look wise and said, "We'll think of something." "I suppose you will. A bit ago, though, I thought you was for him. Still you'll have to wait if he's hiding in the Forests of Lune."

OK, so there's this once-arid Moon that's now a big forest. It's hard to find things even in a little forest full of ordinary non-sentient trees, because you can't see very far. So this really big forest is so big that it can hide Nilammon, who was trying to hid from a mob (thanks to `_Lexicon Urthus_` for the reference). So Severian thinks it a chance to work in a mention of Vodalus, who he presumes to be hiding from all the Autarch's horses (or destriers) and all the Autarch's men. Forests don't need volition or sentience to hide things--they just stand around being composed of zillions of opaque trees, and human lack of x-ray vision does the rest.

If Wolfe does have a thing about sentient trees, it's certainly much more muted in his works than concerns with memory and identity. You want sentient trees, read `_The Lord of the Rings_`, which has them in abundance, right out in the open, with raw explicit scenes like Old Man Willow trapping hobbits, Huorns making Orcs disappear, and Ents tearing down the stronghold of an evil wizard. Great material, those sentient trees--too bad that slacker Wolfe had them all over his major works and never got any good action out of them! Instead, his readers have to settle for tired old stuff such as vampire popes, robot nuns, giant time-travelling sailing ships, false gods who appear on giant vision screens, monarchical succession by practical cannibalism,

splendid giant underground palaces with coextensive secret passageways, maintenance crews that strap on wings to tend the sun, all kinds of shallow showy stuff like that.

-- Dan Rabin