

sev's skull

The Urth list — 5 messages, 5 voices, 08 Jul 2003

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maa32 — 08 Jul 2003, 19:47

So there is some disagreement over the skull. I tried to emphasize that perhaps the Severian we knew was just a copy, as the Apu-Punchau who rises over his body is just a copy. The original Severian has long since died, and has always been dead, as he says while underground with Master Ultan: I felt as if we were both dead and buried, or something like that. Why should the chapter entitled "resurrection and death" be any different than the later, heirodule maintained Severian? If he's not the first Severian (and we meet Ymar in Urth, and Severian says little about being identical to him - something one would certainly note: "he looked just like me as a kid! Go figure!") I think that when Severian speaks of not being the first Severian, he means that there was a boy raised among the torturers who died and was then altered and artificially maintained by the Hierodules, who have the ability to tamper with time itself - and remember that the conciliator is the master of time. If the Severian of the narrative of The Book of the New Sun is simply another eidolon, then surely that could be Severian's skull. Marc Aramini

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 08 Jul 2003, 19:57 · follows maa32

perhaps the Severian we knew was just a copy,

What do you mean "just" a copy? If the original drowned and the Sev we knew is a copy ... isn't he still the important one?

Chris — 08 Jul 2003, 20:29 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I always felt the reason Severian - at the time of his writing the BotNS - felt as if there had been another one before him was actually quite straightforward, and I am surprised not to have heard the same explanation from anyone else here.

We know that Severian's subjective timeline jumps all around in comparison to everyone else. We also know that at least one of these incarnations is an autarch at some point before Severian the boy torturer was born. The autarchs seem to have a tradition, going back quite a long time, of using the alzado to pass on the memories of the previous autarchs to the new autarch.

Now, with normal people who don't have Sev's perfect memory, these memories aren't passed on completely - there is considerable loss. And you can expect that, through many generations, these memories would be faint indeed. So, when Severian became autarch, he in fact picked up faint traces of his *own memories*, including some he hadn't even had yet. At the time he was writing it is only natural that he would have a vague feeling that somehow he had been through all this before, and would make inferences (correct or not) about why this might be.

And this is assuming that the loss of "resolution" by the time of BotNS is fairly severe. If you assume less loss (fewer generations, or less loss per generation), the situation becomes even more perverse and difficult to interpret - how would Severian be affected by having picked up

memories of things he hadn't done yet? However, given that Severian seems unaware (or claims to be unaware) of his future success, I think that whatever he picked up must have been very vague. He assumes that he must have failed, based on the general feeling of having done it all twice; he can't think of any reason why he'd be doing it twice, unless he had somehow failed and was being sent back to get it right.

On a more abstract and unrelated note, I suspect it's probably misleading to think of "copies of Severian". If the "real" Conciliator is more or less angelic/archetypal, then Severian and all the rest are sort of imprints/copies of him, rather than of each other.

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Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 09 Jul 2003, 07:56 · follows Chris

On Tuesday, July 8, 2003, at 12:47 PM, maa32 wrote:
If he's not the first Severian (and we meet
Ymar in Urth, and Severian says little about being identical to him -
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Don believes that the skull might or might not be Severian's. Don however is certain that Severian leaves out many things when it suits him as both the Book of the New Sun and the Urth of the New Sun are Apologies and somewhat self serving autobiographies. Don would also venture to guess that if a person fully grown ran into someone who looked exactly like him as a child he might not recognize it, a person's current self image being the dominant one in his thoughts. Ymar is the first Severian. He is the Aleph. He is also the only other one who was raised by torturers and went in a ship to attempt a reconciliation with the Hieros. The original "Severian" has a tomb on Urth. His timeline is not negated by our Severian who, though he may have died many times, has no mausoleum. I have no doubts about this and only a direct negation by Gene Wolfe himself will change my mind.

Don is through ranting now.

Don Palumbo — 09 Jul 2003, 16:42 · follows Lisa Schaffer-Doggett

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Somewhere in BNS (it's at the end of Torturer), Sevarian talks about the writing process, comparing it to being a torturer, and says among other things that one of the tasks a writer must perform is to follow the prescribed models. Wolfe, in writing this story, is following the prescribed model of the monomyth very consciously, and all of the references to death and rebirth throughout the text--as well as references to a whole lot of other things, such as ogre/father-figures, women of all sorts, initiations, threshold crossings, talismans, etc, etc.--should be understood in this light. Campbell asserts that death and rebirth

is a metaphor for transitions that occur to everyone in the course of life, and Severian certainly undergoes enough changes of this sort so that this invites the reader to see his death-and-rebirth experiences as symbolic of his own transcendence of past selves.

As the demands of the monomyth model, and a symbolic reading in any case, is enough to explain the reason for all the death and rebirth stuff in the story, I see no reason to believe that Severian ever literally dies for good and is replaced by some other version of himself unless what happen cannot be explained in any more plausible way, which I don't think is the case in BNS in itself.

Mind-boggling as reading BNS is in itself, this effect is truly compounded if you read it while keeping the monomyth in mind every sentence of the way. This adds whole new dimensions to the story.

--Don Palumbo

At 12:47 PM 7/8/03 -0700, maa32 wrote:

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