

Severian, memory, alzabo

The Urth list — 8 messages, 5 voices, 09 Jul 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4073>

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Craig Brewer — 09 Jul 2003, 04:13

Chris offered:

As a final note (I have rambled too long), I've also wondered if perhaps Severian had a normal memory, but came to believe that his memory seemed perfect to him because of the recursive-alzabo-effect I was talking about earlier. Even receiving partial memories an infinite number of times would lead to perfect recall, but only of **those** memories.

I've wondered the same thing, especially since what bothered me about the alzabo effect has always been that I couldn't figure out if Severian only gains, for example, the memories that Thecla remembered with her "imperfect" (i.e., normal) memory or if he gained **all** of her experiences which might have somehow been "in" the part of her that he eats. That led me to some wilder speculation towards wondering if the tradition of the Autarch eating the previous Autarch began with the first Ymar who was HIMSELF Severian (with, again, a perfect memory). The only way, perhaps, for one "incarnation" to share all of the memories of the previous one would be to "ingest" those memories through the Alzabo.

I'm not sure, tho, that the alzabo itself is responsible for his supposedly perfect memory since Severian speaks as if he perfectly remembers the events before his first experience with the alzabo in Vodalû's forest.

Another piece of Severian-memory (or lack thereof) that bothers me is how he gets lost in the tunnels before the Atrium of Time. Granted it's dark and confusing, but couldn't someone with a perfect memory stop and retrace the whole thing?

Craig

Don Palumbo — 09 Jul 2003, 17:05 · follows Craig Brewer

As a few people have said this, it may be worth pointing out that the Autarchs do not use the alzabo drug to pass on their memories. When the Autarch has Severian kill him and eat his forebrain, he points out specifically that the drug in the vial around his neck is not taken from

the alzebo, but is a rarer, better, and more powerful drug.

--Don Palumbo

At 09:13 PM 7/8/03 -0700, Craig Brewer wrote:

Chris offered:

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Craig

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James Jordan — 09 Jul 2003, 15:45 · follows Don Palumbo

At 12:05 PM 7/9/2003, you wrote:

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--Don Palumbo

And Sev does not just get their memories, any more than he just got Thecla's. They come to life in him. This is part of how he passes the trial. I originally thought this was nod to Casher O'Neill in *On the Sand Planet* by C. Smith, who passes trials with the same benefit as gained in *On the Wind Planet,* but Wolfe told me Smith was not an influence on him.

Nutria

Chris — 09 Jul 2003, 18:09 · follows James Jordan

This is true, though the fact that they come to life within him seems unique to Sev (regardless of which concoction he uses) rather than characteristic of the autarch's drug. If I had to guess I would say that the difference between the drugs is that *for a normal person* the memories gained from the alzado fade quickly and are lost, whereas the autarchs must retain more of them and on more of a permanent basis. With Sev this difference doesn't seem to be so large.

Chris

At 12:05 PM 7/9/2003, you wrote:

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matthew.malthouse — 10 Jul 2003, 09:17 · follows Chris

On 09/07/2003 19:09:22 Chris wrote:

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to be so large.

I can't recall any clue that suggests Sev's experience with autarchical inheritance was different from his predecessors - and he has his predecessors memories for guidance and comparison.

The other occasion when Sev eats of Thecla he (and we) have the warning that sharing those whom one knew well and were emotionally tied to already had dangers. Did not Thea avoid the experience for this reason?

Matthew

Don Palumbo — 10 Jul 2003, 16:47 · follows matthew.malthouse

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Nutria,

Wolfe is an engaging and surprisingly modest guy. I was once talking with him after having read only *The Shadow of the Torturer* (this must be at least 15 years ago), and I told him how much I liked it and how I was looking forward to reading the rest of the BNS, and he was quite eager to "save me the trouble" and wanted to tell me how it all came out on the spot. I insisted on not being told, but in retrospect it would have been interesting to have heard his off-the-cuff version.

--Don Palumbo

At 10:45 AM 7/9/03 -0500, James Jordan wrote:

At 12:05 PM 7/9/2003, you wrote:

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Nutria

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James Jordan — 10 Jul 2003, 14:53 · follows Don Palumbo

At 04:17 AM 7/10/2003, you wrote:

I can't recall any clue that suggests Sev's experience with autarchical inheritance was different from his predecessors - and he has his predecessors memories for guidance and comparison.

Matthew

I assume you refer to the possibility that the previous autarchs are brought back to life in Sev. I don't know of an explicit clue either, but Wolfe has said that he "only says things one time" in these books. The fact that Thecla comes to life inside Sev seems to me to be the only clue we need.

Of course, since eating the Autarch is not by alzado juice, there may be a difference. Yet, both of these things link to the Christian Eucharist, which is not merely symbolic (for Wolfe anyway), but has to do with "Christ living in you."

Hence, if they did not come back to life inside Sev, I'd want to know why not.

Nutria

Chris — 10 Jul 2003, 19:46 · follows James Jordan

I do not know where to find it exactly, but I believe I got this impression from a passage that indicates that the voices/memories of the autarchs from the most distant past are more faint. There could be other explanations, I suppose, but I read it as an indication that a certain amount was lost on each passing generation.

With Severian (in theory) there would be no loss.

But in any event yes, this is probably to be inferred from the fact that Sev's experience with Thecla was distinctly different, with a certain amount of rationalization thrown in. It seems natural, and I can't think of any reason to think otherwise.

Civet

At 04:17 AM 7/10/2003, you wrote:

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