

Severian's motive for memory

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

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4074>

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maa32 — 09 Jul 2003, 05:54

I don't expect that everyone will agree with me on this one, but I think it justifies Severian's CONTINUAL claims of perfect memory a bit.

First off, let's think about Severian's audience in Book of the New Sun: he is the autarch, and he wants to quell the angry exultants who don't like commoners or half-breeds on the throne, the ones who gave Appian so much trouble that he had to keep hostages to kill if a family got out of hand (his concubines). Severian also has to worry about threats from outer space, threats from sea powers that he doesn't understand, and threats from the north. In the popularity polls, I think this would make a ruler a lot lower than Nixon. Nixon didn't torture people from birth. So what does Severian do? He writes a narrative in which he purports to be a religious figure of DESTINY - his fate pre-ordained from the beginning. He uses ghosts of old masters to put forth the idea that the highest form of government is loyalty to the person of the monarch: ie - whoever is in charge now is the big boss, and no hostile takeover should be allowed since he is like God. Indeed, Triskele is used in this scene as a sample worshiper of Severian. He placates the insurgents like Vodalus by claiming from the very beginning that he's on their side, and always has been. He presents the Ascians in a more sympathetic light than can be expected because he probably wants the war to end. He tries very hard to make it clear that he is the ordained master, the New Sun. Note that it is not this Severian who brings the new sun and writes Urth of the New Sun - that is another one. Notice that over and over Severian will try to show how his destiny was inescapable: he was forced to eat Thecla (who was definitely a supporter of Vodalus and Abia, since she wanted to go up to Lake Diuturna when she got out and talked about pelagic depths all the time), forced to eat the old autarch, and destined for a throne without real desire for it. In many ways, the first four books can be seen as a political document apologizing for his rise to autarch. He has been manipulated by powers which should not be meddled with, but from the beginning he had some presentiment of that great destiny.

Why the insistence that his memory is perfect? For one thing, he wants his audience to believe that once and for all he is the commonwealth - all the memories of its rulers live on in his perfect mind. Another reason is that I believe that he has lived his life over and over again - there is little evidence that Severian is going to go back in time after the end of Urth of the New Sun and be an autarch whose forebrain will be eaten in the line of succession. And yes, Severian DID have access to the Book of Canog, which was the Book of the New Sun, and the story of his life. It was one of the four that he checked out for Thecla, according to Wolfe in his little essay in Plan(e)t Engineering. So he could have read his life before.

In any case, the political agenda of the first four books (which I insist were written by a very different Severian than Urth of the New Sun) is quite clear: Severian was destined to be the ruler, and possibly save the Urth, so don't rebel or complain. Or he'll torture you, because he's good at that, too. And he's not afraid of putting people in their place violently, like Eata. And he won't ever, ever forget if you betray him. Marc Aramini

James Jordan — 09 Jul 2003, 13:53 · follows maa32

At 12:54 AM 7/9/2003, you wrote:
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written by a very different Severian than Urth of the New Sun)

Marc,

I guess I've been asleep, but if this is something that's been discussed and is now agreed upon, I missed it. What evidence is there for this?

Nutria

Chris — 09 Jul 2003, 17:42 · follows James Jordan

I'm completely willing to entertain the concept of BotNS as a piece of propaganda, but in practical terms I just can't see it as beneficial to Severian's position *politically*. In many ways it's counter-productive, but the most important one is that it paints him into a corner w.r.t. the New Sun. The book leaves off with him about to be tested. Any of his subjects who read it after that point will expect a new sun to have arrived, and if they don't get it then they will assume that Severian is a failure. If Sev is in fact expecting to provide a new sun, then he doesn't really need a book to assure his political power. And if he's not, then by no means does it serve his purpose to create an immediate expectation of one - he would benefit more by ending his book by implying that the test will take place at some point in the distant future ("If you're just patient enough, Severian will fix all this one day.")

IMHO if the book is a piece of propaganda, it is probably for religious reasons (and not necessarily hypocritical ones - he may be proselytizing for beliefs that he personally holds).

Also, if you do assume that Severian had a copy of BotNS then you have said a mouthful. There are several different ways you can go with it (I considered drawing a diagram for myself, but of course it wouldn't translate well to posting), but the implications of any of them are overwhelming enough that they tend to set the tone of how you interpret the entire book. They also tend to preclude a simple, propagandistic reading.

On a side note, is anyone using the name "Civet"? I've been fascinated by these little beasties lately.

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and no hostile takeover should be allowed since he is like God. Indeed, Triskele is used in this scene as a sample worshiper of Severian. He placates

the insurgents like Vodalus by claiming from the very beginning that he's on

their side, and always has been. He presents the Ascians in a more sympathetic light than can be expected because he probably wants the war to end. He tries very hard to make it clear that he is the ordained master, the

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And he won't ever, ever forget if you betray him.

Marc Aramini

Josh Geller — 09 Jul 2003, 18:17 · follows Chris

People will only be expecting the New Sun after Severian has left with the hierodules. It's not his problem after that. It is Valeria's and her boyfriend's problem. We don't know what means they used to keep things quiet and moving along. Running a country is a big enough deal even without worrying about what happens after your reign.

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On Wed, 2003-07-09 at 10:42, Chris wrote:

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Marc Aramini

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<http://join.msn.com/?page=features/junkmail>

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James Wynn — 10 Jul 2003, 00:58 · follows Josh Geller

Chris asks:

On a side note, is anyone using the name "Civet"? I've been fascinated by these little beasties lately.

Crush proffers:

Since you are interested in civets I'll remind you that Musk went by that name, sort of. "Civet" is synonymous with "perfume" and is the original "musk".

-- Crush