

TBOTNS as political document and the wait for new sun

The Urth list — 7 messages, 3 voices, 09 Jul 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4076>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 09 Jul 2003, 19:40

Responding to Marc Aramini, Civet wrote:

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*.

I want to point out that John Clute first raised the interpretation of The Book as political. His essay is in STROKES, a collection of his essays and reviews.

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.")

This raises the question of how long anyone thinks the wait will be. Severian is probably the most "in the know" in the Commonwealth (aside from Father Inire, of course), and judging by his actions/reactions, he seems to have thought that the whole thing would happen in real-time, synchronized with his experience, so that he would return to Urth in less than a year and the Old Sun would have been replaced with a New Sun.

That is: from the moment he gets on the Ship, the Old Sun will last only a few more months -- certainly not a year.

From his point of view it took a bit longer than he thought, but still less than a year, whereas from Urth's point of view 40 years had gone by. Whoops!

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.

The distinction is being made between Canog's book (he overheard the Conciliator talking to his friends about the death of the sun and the coming of a new one), which presumably became something of a bible for the church of the Conciliator, and Severian's book, which is a rip-roaring heroic adventure tale (with graphic sex and violence, monsters and magic, etc.).

I think Severian the Narrator chooses to call his tale by the same name because he understands

that he will be bringing the new sun: he himself really will be "finishing" that tale, a somewhat garbled storyline begun 1000 years earlier (by himself, but he doesn't guess that part yet: he knows he will be Apu Punchau, but not the Conciliator). And nobody remembers Canog's book, anyway -- iirc, Talos says it is "long lost."

=mantis=

matthew.malthouse — 10 Jul 2003, 09:22 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

On 09/07/2003 20:40:27 Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

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I want to point out that John Clute first raised the interpretation of The

Book as political. His essay is in STROKES, a collection of his essays and reviews.

Severian states that he sent one copy of the manuscript to the library at the citadel and will cast the second - the copy we are reading - into the void.

Wouldn't a conscious effort at propaganda require a rather more active effort at publication and dissemination? Without that I can't see Severian having contemporary politic motives as being credible. A concern for history - one that rulers often have - looks more plausible.

Matthew

Josh Geller — 10 Jul 2003, 15:55 · follows matthew.malthouse

On Thu, 2003-07-10 at 02:22, matthew.malthouse at guardian.co.uk wrote:

Severian states that he sent one copy of the manuscript to the library at the citadel and will cast the second - the copy we are reading - into the void.

That's what he says.

Wouldn't a conscious effort at propaganda require a rather more active effort at publication and dissemination?

How extensive is the Library again?

Doesn't Severian remark to the effect that 'surely the rabble of the city are not permitted here'? I don't recall him receiving an answer, do you?

In a society that does not have mechanical printing, where would be the most likely place to find a scriptorium?

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matthew.malthouse — 10 Jul 2003, 15:41 · follows Josh Geller

On 10/07/2003 16:55:41 Josh Geller wrote:

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Plausible.

But no clue that the Commonwealth is a society without mechanical printing. Ultan and Cyby are Curators not Scrivenors.

Matthew

Josh Geller — 10 Jul 2003, 16:15 · follows matthew.malthouse

On Thu, 2003-07-10 at 08:41, matthew.malthouse at guardian.co.uk wrote:

On 10/07/2003 16:55:41 Josh Geller wrote:

In a society that does not have mechanical printing, where would be the most likely place to find a scriptorium?

Actually, I misspoke slightly. I think that they do have mechanical printing, but not much need for it because the society is mostly illiterate.

Plausible.

But no clue that the Commonwealth is a society without mechanical printing. Ultan and Cyby are Curators not Scrivenors.

Exactly. But I think what I say still applies. There don't seem to me too many books around, and no newspapers. There is also no mention of a Printer's Guild (btw, secular guilds in the middle ages did have ceremonies analogous to the St. Katherine's Day feast). I think that if there are any printing presses around, the librarians control all or most of them, and in the same way that the use of the roads is forbidden to the general populace, the use of printing is forbidden to people not associated with the government, as the Library certainly is.

Perhaps upon receiving the book, Master Ultan had enough copies made to stock the branches of the library.

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matthew.malthouse — 10 Jul 2003, 15:58 · follows Josh Geller

On 10/07/2003 17:15:56 Josh Geller wrote:

Perhaps upon receiving the book, Master Ultan had enough copies made to stock the branches of the library.

What need of branches when L-Space bends sufficiently to put Ultan's stacks both in the Citadel and the House Absolute. :-)

Matthew

Josh Geller — 10 Jul 2003, 16:33 · follows matthew.malthouse

On Thu, 2003-07-10 at 08:58, matthew.malthouse at guardian.co.uk wrote:

On 10/07/2003 17:15:56 Josh Geller wrote:

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What need of branches when L-Space bends sufficiently to put Ultan's stacks both in the Citadel and the House Absolute. :-)

Perhaps 'branch' is not quite the exact term. But the Library extends to the City, as well as to the Citadel and the House Absolute. This is explicit.

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