

Silkhorn's memory; Sev's book

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 10 Jul 2003

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Roy C. Lackey — 10 Jul 2003, 06:38

Recent discussion has asserted that Horn or Silk--or Silkhorn--had a perfect memory, like Severian's. No such claim is made in either the LS or SS books.

BTW, on my first reading of the SS series and every time since, I was struck by the sharp contrast between Horn's son's account of Sev's actions during their journey to Urth and the account Sev gave of the same time period in NS, the short time he had Triskele. By Sev's account, he did not have the liberty to be guiding visitors around or to interact with prisoners (such as opening cells and fetching Merry'n) that is recounted in SS.

Also, the manuscript Sev wrote (the one he was finishing writing in the last chapter of CITADEL, on the eve of his journey to the stars) was to be sent to Master Ultan for archiving. It was never intended for publication in the Commonwealth, therefore was not intended to sway the populace during his reign or the subsequent regency. He even had to reproduce the manuscript by hand, from memory, aboard Tzadkiel's ship. It was this second copy that Wolfe gave us. No other copies existed, afaik.

-Roy

James Wynn — 10 Jul 2003, 09:05 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy corrects:

Recent discussion has asserted that Horn or Silk--or Silkhorn--had a perfect memory, like Severian's. No such claim is made in either the LS or SS books.

Crush pipes up:

That is certainly true, and I'm glad you pointed that out, because I, who launched that branch of the recent discussion, certainly never claimed Horn said that.

What I DID say was: "Horn makes a _similar_ claim [to Severian's] that he does not believe he has 'forgotten anything' that he and Nettle wrote in the Book of Silk."

The reference is on page 43 of my hardcover copy of "On Blue Waters". It is near the end of chapter one when he discusses the things he brought with him on the boat:

"A copy of our book, which I meant to read during calms and the like, not so much to relearn the facts we had set down as to gently persuade my memory to dwell upon our conversations, and the conversations I had with Nettle, Moly, and others about him. You that read will not credit it, but I do not believe I have forgotten anything that Nettle and I put into our book, or that I ever will."

I have loaned out my copy of tSoT but I am pretty sure this is a close parallel to something Severian said; basically, that he suspected readers would doubt it, but he had perfect recall. While Horn limits his perfect memory to events in his book, the parallel is there, and to my eye

certainly deliberate, and BECAUSE of its limitedness, even striking. It is the sort of boast that forces one to wonder why it is being made. It seems obvious to me that some sort of very close connection is being implied here between these two characters although I cannot say right now what it is.

For that matter, since all of Severian's "life" is, for all intents and purposes, _in his pair of books_ (because he is after all a literary character) perhaps the difference is not even _that_ stretched.

-- Crush

Charles Reed — 15 Jul 2003, 03:44 · follows James Wynn

Howdy Crush. It's been a long time since I've posted to the group, but I've been following the discussion intermittently (as my limited time allows) and wanted to point something out: You quoted On Blue's Waters (hardback page 43) as follows:

"A copy of our book, which I meant to read during calms and the like, not so much to relearn the facts we had set down as to gently persuade my memory to dwell upon our conversations, and the conversations I had with Nettle, Moly, and others about him. You that read will not credit it, but I do not believe I have forgotten anything that Nettle and I put into our book, or that I ever will."

You then go on to say in pointing out the parallel with Severian that:

. . . Horn limits his perfect memory to *events* [my emphasis] in his book . . .

This might be nit-picky in the extreme but I feel compelled to point it out anyway. Horn is not claiming his memory of *events* in the book to be infallible; he is merely claiming that he has forgotten nothing of what he *wrote* in the book. These are two entirely different things. The actual events that occurred in Horn's final days and weeks aboard the Whorl are most likely a confused jumble in Horn's mind. And there are major, gulf-sized holes in Horn's actual memory since he pieced the story together from his and Nettle's memories, plus a variety of other sources, including his memories of what Silk (and others) told him. Some of the conversations, I believe, he even admits to making up wholesale based on who he knew to be present, and what those people most likely said.

I think the only real similarity between Horn and Severian (at least as far as their abilities to remember) is a thematic one. Horn's memory isn't perfect -- he just claims to not have forgotten anything which he put into his book. That sounds almost oxymoronic, but I don't think it is. I don't even see it as abnormal, given the fact that he spent nearly every evening for (what I would guess to be) well over a decade writing it and re-writing it and re-writing it again. It is his life's work -- as opposed to being his vocation. There are stories I wrote in junior high that I still recall with extraordinary vividness because of the energy I invested in them at the time. Writing something down on a piece of paper is extraordinarily powerful in its ability to imprint something strongly in memory.

Severian, on the other hand, does indeed make the claim of having an infallible memory of *events* -- not merely an accurate memory of something he wrote down.

Take that for what it's worth. :-)

Charles

James Wynn — 15 Jul 2003, 13:35 · follows Charles Reed

Charles takes Crush to task:

Howdy Crush. It's been a long time since I've posted to the group, but I've been following the discussion intermittently (as my limited time allows) and wanted to point something out: You quoted On Blue's Waters...You then go on to say in pointing out the parallel with Severian that: "Horn limits his perfect memory to *events* [my emphasis] in his book." ...Horn is not claiming his memory of *events* in the book to be infallible; he is merely claiming that he has forgotten nothing of what he *wrote* in the book. These are two entirely different things. I think the only real similarity between Horn and Severian (at least as far as their abilities to remember) is a thematic one....I don't even see it as abnormal, given the fact that he spent nearly every evening for (what I would guess to be) well over a decade writing it and re-writing it and re-writing it again. It is his life's work -- as opposed to being his vocation...There are stories I wrote in junior high that I still recall with extraordinary vividness because of the energy I invested in them at the time. Writing something down on a piece of paper is extraordinarily powerful in its ability to imprint something strongly in memory.

Crush responds:

Hey Charles,

Thanks for the reply.

I concur. Sev's and Horn's claims are thematically linked -- Horn does not claim to have a generally eidetic memory. I also agree that had Horn not said anything, I would have never doubted that he remembered everything he "put into" "The Book of Silk." By the same token, with Sev as a first-person narrator, I would never have doubted, whatever his lies, that he remembered without error the events in which he took part. So why do they both -- particularly Horn think anyone would not have believed them?

I am saying this little claim of Horn's is surely a *parody* of Severian's claim. tBotNS is Wolfe's most famous work. Probably among the top two most well-remembered motifs of the story-telling in that book is Sev's constant -- constant -- harping on his immutable memory.

In both cases we have a superfluous extolling of memory. Not an impressive brag on Horn's part *except that he makes it at all.* It was not the substance of the claims (except that they are both about memory), but the choice to make them that I found striking.

So.... for me, I wonder, what is the connection between Sev and Horn that they make superfluous claims about their memory.

-- Crush

Chris — 15 Jul 2003, 15:57 · follows James Wynn

Civet replies:

Except for the fact that Horn has probably met only *one* other writer and seen *one* other original book (aside from his own) in his entire life. The things we know about writers are not commonplace assumptions to him, and would not be to his readers either. In fact, his readers would understand the process even less.

Being a writer is a fairly special thing in this case, and perhaps it is partly vanity that makes him take this little excuse to remind his audience... and partly wanting to describe his love for the book he wrote to a group of people he thinks can't possibly understand?

Crush responds:

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