

(no subject)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 14 Jul 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4094>

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James Wynn — 14 Jul 2003, 06:15

Andrews asks:

...what would be the narrative point of Sev having a false belief in his own perfect memory? If the intention were to cast ambiguity over everything he says, then it seems too weak to have only examples of fairly trivial recollection errors - does it matter to the story if he actually doesn't have perfect memory for detail; would it really cast doubt on his account of larger things? I'd expect there to be at least one substantial example, even if it were Wolfishly hidden & scattered in 5 holographic parts over 3 volumes.

Crush blabs on and on:

To merely "cast ambiguity over everything Severian says" is not IMO the point. Yet while the discrepancies are slight, that is made up for in that Severian throws us LOTS of clues -- I'm talking about, each time he reminds us that his memory is immutable.

One might as well ask (*should* ask, I say) "what is the point in having a first person narrator assert his own flawless memory?" A flawless personal recollection of the facts is typically *assumed* for any first-person narrator -- even for the most unreliable narrator. That Severian repeatedly reminds us that he remembers everything perfectly is therefore suspicious. Who is Severian trying to convince? IMO We were gullible to believe him after he said it the second time, let alone over and over.

On the other hand, for Severian NOT to have a perfect memory but to *think* he does or to want desperately to believe he does suggests volumes about the nature of memory. After all, how can Severian, or anyone, know he has a valid memory? The Nature of Memory is a subject in which Wolfe is manifestly interested. During his recent online chat on SciFi.com, I broached the subject of Wolfe's relentless reopening of the theme of the Meaning of Identity. His response was "I think that identity *and memory* are the fascinating themes of life" which considering the phrasing of my question sounded to me as if he considered the two concepts -- identity and memory -- to be the same category.

Well, Severian definitely has a discombobulated identity what with sharing it with Thecla and all those other Autarchs -- what of his memory? Latro is another journal-writing character with a memory issue. So is Number Five, as whole swaths of his life -- almost a year at one point -- are lost to him. Also there's Aunt Jeanine's theory that all the humans on St. Croix and St. Anne's are abos who killed and replaced the humans but have *forgotten it.* I seem to be alone in this, but this theory led me wonder what happened to Number Five during those lost forgotten months. Then there is journal writer Horn's peculiar assertion that he has not forgotten anything he wrote in the Book of Silk.

There is *definitely* a solid definable connection between *each* of these characters (and I'm not talking about clones or memory sharing) which I have decided with trepidation to define in an extensive essay as soon as I finish the Short Sun -- but I admit I think I know only superficially what a faulty memory has to do with this connection. But then I haven't *any* real

inkling of what blue and green orbs have to do with this connection either.

Finally, for Severian to boast fallaciously about his memory is, I am convinced, a direct parody of "Cugel the Clever" (as he calls himself), Jack Vance's shirtless (IIRC), sword-wielding comic hero in "The Dying Earth" series.

-- Crush