

The Piteous Gate (was: Book of the new sun (1-4) questions)

The Urth list — 5 messages, 5 voices, 21 Feb 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4538>

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Tony Ellis — 21 Feb 2006, 19:08

Duncan wrote:

1: what happened at the piteous gate? there was a riot,
there were clone soldiers...

The explanation for this has cropped up a few times in the list, actually, but since it's my explanation I'm happy to repeat it. :-)

The soldiers are driving people off the road, because it's illegal to use the roads of commonwealth.

We're given all the facts we need before Severian even sets off on his journey. Master Palaemon tells us: "...there is a redoubt, so I've heard, every fifty leagues... [the roads] are patrolled by uhlans under orders to kill anyone found on them, and since they have permission to loot the bodies of those they slay, they are not much inclined to ask excuses." Shadow, XIII

mournings glory — 21 Feb 2006, 19:51 · in reply to Tony Ellis

Mr. Ellis writes:

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Here's something I don't understand, however.

If it's illegal to travel via the roads, how exactly are all these people planning to get to where they're going? On the day in question Severian claims the highway leading to the Piteous Gate is "**crowded** with carts and wagons and traffic of all kinds." Surely, most of these people are aware that traffic is prohibited on the Commonwealth's roads. So what will they do once they've passed beyond the Gate? Jump into the Gyll and start swimming? (River traffic does seem to be tolerated.) Melt into the woods and follow crude dirt paths--with carts and wagons and beasts of burden? Hide in the bushes whenever they sense a uhlan nears?

Moreover, if such a wide variety of traffic is allowed to exit and travel beyond Nessus by whatever means, doesn't this simply circumvent the law that made road travel illegal in the first place? Wouldn't, in fact, if the law were strictly followed, most people be turned away at the Gate? Apparently not, since enough people are aware they can reach their destinations via alternate means -- which in effect makes the prohibition useless anyway.

"We have closed the roads to paralyze the social order," the old autarch tells Severian. Methinks he needs to look again.

msg

Rob Davies — 21 Feb 2006, 19:55 · follows mournings glory

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I find this explanation a bit odd. Why have a gate if no one is allowed to use the road to pass through it?

Rob

Transient — 21 Feb 2006, 21:20 · in reply to mournings glory

On Feb 21, 2006, at 2:51 PM, mournings glory wrote:

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We're given all the facts we need before Severian even sets off on
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But it certainly doesn't make sense that there is a society of people descended from petitioners, living out their whole lives in a waiting room at the House Absolute, living off of danishes and coffee!

So, perhaps it was an order issued some time ago, and over time it has simply become an entrenched dynamic in the Commonwealth. The uhlands clearly don't enforce it in an efficient or organized manner, or people would never try to use the highways or gates.

Maybe the uhlands - are they the regular military? - are stretched so thin with the constant war that they can't spare the troops to enforce the rule efficiently; units are rotated back to Nessus so infrequently that the desperate people get to risking the roads again, and any uhlands who encounter them enjoy some fine sport, then loot the bodies, and that's how things are. Or perhaps the officers purposely wait until there are a lot of people hazarding the roads, and then hit them and split up the booty.

Either way, it is a situation a lot like Nessus, and the BOTNS itself: new orders built upon the old without the old being resolved or understood. A theme is laid down and it takes on a new life and a new meaning.

Like that one episode of Babylon 5 where Londo was explaining the danger that a crazed emperor posed to the Centauri Republic: he related how many centuries ago a princess had discovered a single flower sprouting from the palace grounds in the middle of winter, and had ordered the palace guard to place someone next to it to keep it from being stepped on. The flower was long since gone but the palace guard still placed a soldier in that same spot to the present day.

Chris — 21 Feb 2006, 22:02 · in reply to Rob Davies

The road is officially devoted to military use, the transportation of troops and supplies, so that is what the gate is for.

I find all arguments about what happened at the Piteous Gate to be a bit tenuous, but here are a couple things which make a certain amount of common sense to me at any rate.

Even if the uhlans are authorized to plunder anyone on the road, it would probably not be profitable for them to do so (because then nobody would ever use the road). The profitable way to approach it is to leave people alone for the most part and not enforce the rule - this also happens to be good for the economy - which would encourage people to go ahead and use the road, even if they are aware that there is some small risk involved. Then, every once in a while, you come down and enforce it; and when you do so, you will end up with a huge haul rather than a couple stray travellers here and there.

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