

Close Reading: Torturer Chapter I

The Urth list — 35 messages, 15 voices, 04 Sep 2006

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JWillard — 04 Sep 2006, 11:28

Maybe this is a dumb idea, but I thought today that it might be interesting to start a close-reading project, beginning at the beginning with Shadow of the Torturer. Anyone who's interested could join in. In a thread like this title, we could start to gather questions and observations (specific and general), for each chapter and inch our way forward. (A chapter every few days or every week wouldn't take too much time away from any other reading.) I know that I've reached a point of frustration: I keep wanting to gather what I have learned (think I've learned) from Wolfe's books, but find my thoughts are more and more scattered and that I have less and less time to just sit down and re-read each book from cover to cover on a regular basis. I wonder if going back to square one and bouncing ideas off of each other will yield something of worth.

If you think this sounds like an invitation to navel-gazing, well ... I'd say our devotion to these particular works has already marked us all as navel-gazers. I reject any sentiment along the lines of: "That sentence is very important, but that other sentence doesn't mean anything. I just know!" As no one has delivered a comprehensive key to the Wolfe opus, I don't believe in trivial trivia, provided one can ask an interesting question or defend an interesting observation about it.

So, in a nutshell, starting with Chapter I, everything you think is important about it: characters, events, onomastics, rarefied vocabulary choices, things, foods, Urth-specific names (mystes, asimi, etc.), the obvious, the not-so-obvious, nagging doubts/questions, wild speculations. I realize that things will be repeated: the idea is to gather them so that we're not constantly searching.

So, to leap in:

I find Drotte's line, "You must know that for certain simples to attain their highest virtues they must be pulled from the grave by moonlight," darker now, as Vodalus and crew are pulling a kind of simple from the grave by Lunelight.

Did Wolfe pick saint names by language for a reason? Why Roche, and not the Latin form, which I come across often. Why the odd form for Vodalus? Where's Eata from? Are these clues?

A reminder of why I walk through Wolfe like a minefield: description of Vodalus, "I could see him through the fog, very tall, slender..." Very tall of course implies something familiar upon first reading, not alien basketball player.

Thea: "nearly as tall as ... Vodalus." Two dove metaphors: "Her voice was like a dove's call..." and "As if a dove had momentarily commanded an arctother ..." Why? Significance of the heart-shaped face?

Is there anything odd about Hildegrin never having used a pistol?

"and what power of Erebus's gives you the right to come here and do something like this?"
Something interesting I found in the W2 awhile ago: According to some sources, Charon is the son of Erebus. Is Erebus somehow Severian's great-grandfather? Is this line a joke: Severian being the "power of Erebus"?

A Vodalarius is a follower of Vodalus. What is Severian a follower of (figuratively or literally)? There are, if I recall, many saints named Severus. Is there a hidden Severus in BOTNS? W2 def. for Severian: Eccl. Hist. a One of a sect of Encratite Gnostics of the 2d century. b A follower of Severus, the Monophysite patriarch of Antioch of the 6th century, who taught that the body of Christ, prior to his resurrection, was subject to corruption.

Suspicious sentence: "The knife had somehow fallen from the dead man's neck. Perhaps he had pulled it out in his agony." Whenever Severian uses a perhaps, or one of its relatives, I get nervous. What other purpose would the line have? Is this someone half-healed by Severian's presence? Something entirely different?

"Of those values ... I accepted only one: loyalty to the guild." Used to think this was noble. Now wonder, programming?

Who was dug up? On a whim, thinking the line "we'll have her out like a carrot" was somehow oddly specific, I googled 'carrot symbolism' and found a coat of arms: "Among the earliest people to bear the Carrot name were the Carrot family who lived in Cornwall. This name is derived from Welsh surname Caeriw, meaning dweller at the fort on the hill."
<http://www.houseofnames.com/xq/asp.fc/qx/carrot-family-crest.htm> Worthless? I don't know.

So this is a scattershot version of what I'm proposing, but there it is. Any takers?

Jon Capps — 04 Sep 2006, 17:58 · in reply to JWillard

JWillard wrote:

Maybe this is a dumb idea, but I thought today that it might be interesting to start a close-reading project, beginning at the beginning with Shadow of the Torturer.

I'm currently focusing on getting through the Soldier books in prep for Sidon (I'm nearing the end of Mist), but I'd be more than willing to participate. Shadow and Claw is how I discovered Wolfe. I just finished my third reading of New Sun this Spring, but I've never actually sat down to critically study it.

Oh, and I'm new to the list, so hello everybody. I'd meant to register about the time Wizard was published, and never got around to it until now ;)

jon

nastler — 05 Sep 2006, 07:19 · in reply to JWillard

--- JWillard <aldenweer at charter.net> skrev:

Maybe this is a dumb idea, but I thought today that it might be interesting to start a close-reading project, beginning at the beginning with Shadow of the Torturer. (snip)

I think this is an interesting idea. Would you be prepared to gather all the comments and edit into a coherent list of observations for each chapter? Could be fun...

nastler

b sharp — 05 Sep 2006, 13:24 · follows nastler

Welcome to Jon Capps!

JWillard writes:

Maybe this is a dumb idea, but I thought today that it might be interesting to start a close-reading project.....

Not dumb, but rather extremely ambitious. I'm willing to do anything to shed more light on BotNS. I'm not sure where to draw the line on what is too prosaic to be worth mentioning for this audience. The tone JWillard sets with his first chapter observations is pretty high on the esoteric scale.

For my contribution to Chapter 1 I'll draw attention to this reference regarding the three grave robbers: "As though an amschaspand had touched them with his radiant wand, the fog swirled and parted to let a beam of green moonlight fall."

Amesha Spenta or Ameshaspand is a Persian deity of purified light who specifically opposes the gods of darkness. This reminds me of Wolfe giving a golden aureole to the unpleasant characters Agia and Agilus. Does this mean that people with nasty behavior can (or always do) contribute to a larger holy purpose?

I'd like to ask why Severian and companions were trying to get into the graveyard at night, do we know? Eata was trying to slip through the bars and they seem afraid the guard will return. Yet Severian notes a path inside the gate they had used to return to the Citadel in previous visits.

For What Its Worth comments on some of JWillard's observations and notes:

On Thea:

Significance of the heart-shaped face?

Contrast this to Thecla's triangular face (and widow's peak). What is the relationship between a heart and triangle? Sunken cheeks? I've previously proposed a kaibit relationship.

Is there anything odd about Hildegrin never having used a pistol?

I think it establishes him as a working class kind of guy while advanced weaponry is reserved for big shots with access to stellar technology. I think pulling a dead body up like a "carrot" is another way to establish Hildegrin as a badger, a digger, a practical guy who gets things done without sentiment.

Who was dug up?

A dark haired woman in a pale gown with a livid face (Allowin's Neckace?). She has tribade (lesbian) tendencies according to Vodalus' followers. Severian sees her face in Ultan's face. On Flood Day, Severian sees a dark haired woman in a pale gown on the Path of Air with something familiar about her face. In Talos' play, the woman on the Road of Air is Contessa Carina. Any other clues people have spotted?

"and what power of Erebus's gives you the right to come here and do something like this?" >Something interesting I found in the W2 awhile ago: According to some sources, Charon is the >son of Erebus. Is Erebus somehow Severian's great-grandfather?

Yes, I think so, Charon being the son of Erebus (darkness) and his sister, Nyx (Night). And let's not forget that Charon's associate, Cerberus (Wolfe?) was the son of Typhon and Echidna.

A Vodalarius is a follower of Vodalus. What is Severian a follower of (figuratively or literally)?

I always felt the Vodalus plot-line was meant to suggest that when we are young we often idolize negative people, buying into the glamour and rebellion. But later, when we gain wisdom, we see them exposed, as the false gold of a counterfeit chrisos.

Suspicious sentence: "The knife had somehow fallen from the dead man's neck. Perhaps he had >pulled it out in his agony." Whenever Severian uses a perhaps, or one of its relatives, I get >nervous. What other purpose would the line have? Is this someone half-healed by Severian's presence?

Interesting, I'd always thought Severian's first narrative act of healing was Triskele. But perhaps this is.

"Of those values ... I accepted only one: loyalty to the guild." Used to think this was noble. Now >wonder, programming?

From a religious, and especially Catholic perspective perhaps "programming"

IS a noble thing. A child starts with blind faith, as a young adult spends time doubting and questioning and pondering, eventually to the conclusion that salvation lies only in blind faith. (Correct me if I'm wrong on that, especially those who were Jesuit trained).

-bsharp

powens — 05 Sep 2006, 13:44 · in reply to b sharp

JWillard writes:

Maybe this is a dumb idea, but I thought today that it might be interesting to start a close-reading project.....

Long time reader - first time poster (I think) Wouldn't this be a good time to start the Wiki? So that it can be added to as we cover each chapter?

Pollo

HHR — 05 Sep 2006, 14:16 · in reply to powens

On 5 Sep 2006, at 14:44, powens wrote:

JWillard writes:

Maybe this is a dumb idea, but I thought today that it might be interesting to start a close-reading project.....

Long time reader - first time poster (I think) Wouldn't this be a good time to start the Wiki? So that it can be added to as we cover each chapter?

Sounds like a great idea. I'd very much enjoy hearing everyone's views on the less obvious details of the chapters, I certainly

remember last time I read the first few chapters of Shadow I was amazed at how much detail there was that I had overlooked or forgotten the first time, and that I had never seen mention of on Urth.

With a Wiki we can each write up articles of as much or little detail as we like, as well as centralizing the work already existing out there.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 05 Sep 2006, 15:51 · in reply to b sharp

On Tue, 05 Sep 2006 09:24:40 -0400, "b sharp" <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> said:

Who was dug up?

A dark haired woman in a pale gown with a livid face (Allowin's Neckace?).

She has tribade (lesbian) tendencies according to Vodalus' followers.

You're conflating two different women, I believe.

The first was disinterred back when Severian was still a boy; Drotte is captain of the apprentices at the time.

Years subsequently pass. But from the conversation of the Vodalarii ("Going far this time? Going to drown yourself again?"), it seems readily apparent they've been participating in corpse-eating all along, and not at several year intervals.

Even on ice, a real carrot kept this long is hardly likely to be delectable!

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - Send your email first class

b sharp — 05 Sep 2006, 17:00 · follows Rex Lycanthrosaurus

Regarding the woman in the coffin and the victim of Vodalarii corpse eating previous to Thecla, Rex says:

You're conflating two different women, I believe. The first was disinterred back when Severian >was still a boy; Drotte is captain of the apprentices at the time. *Years* subsequently pass.

I admit that I am not the stickler for timeframes that, say, Roy C. Lackey is, but I always thought it was months that pass between Severian's night in the graveyard and his expulsion etc., not years. Severian may think of himself as a boy but he is strong enough to defend Vodalus from the attack of an armed man.

It is summer ("when the warm weather came") when Severian almost drowns in Gyll. That night he is in the graveyard and receives a coin from Vodalus. "It was Midmorning of the next day before I thought to look at the coin Vodalus had given me". It is on that same day Severian and other apprentices are shown the flayed leg torture of a handmaiden we later learn is Hunna, servant of Thecla. She is being tortured to extract information about Thea and Vodalus, just as Thecla supposedly is later. But is it years later? I don't see any evidence for time passage except for a change of season.

It is icy winter when Severian encounters Triskele and Valeria. I've always assumed he is

elevated and meets Thecla within months after that. After he is expelled the weather is warm enough to sleep outdoors and eat in outdoor cafes. It seems pretty warm through Severian's travels (of course he is travelling north toward the equator). Eventually, Citadel ends in Autumn. So I've always thought BotNS takes place in a time frame a bit longer than 1 year.

Rex says:

it seems readily apparent they've been participating in corpse-eating all along, and not at several >year intervals.

I can agree they probably don't wait years to eat each new corpse, but I doubt it is a daily or weekly event. The ceremony is too elaborate. Eating a corpse only makes sense if the person possessed some special knowledge, or, as in the case of Thecla, the person had a measure of loyalty to Vodalus that he hoped to imbue in his followers.

Thecla's corpse may have been preserved with ice in a cave, but being summer, I think the dead woman in the pale gown was eaten rather quickly (Thea and Hildegrin are both concerned about her freshness, ack!). So I think the time span between ghoulish meals was about 6 months.

Is there counter-evidence for years passing that I am missing?

-bsharp

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 05 Sep 2006, 18:03 · in reply to b sharp

On Tue, 05 Sep 2006 13:00:34 -0400, "b sharp" <bsharp@flat at hotmail.com> said:

Thecla's corpse may have been preserved with ice in a cave, but being summer, I think the dead woman in the pale gown was eaten rather quickly (Thea and Hildegrin are both concerned about her freshness, ack!). So I think the time span between ghoulish meals was about 6 months.

Is there counter-evidence for years passing that I am missing?

"...in the year I am recounting, the year of the fight by the graveside, Drotte and Roche were elevated, leaving me captain of the apprentices." (I, Chapter V)

Elevation takes place on the Feast of Holy Katharine, which is at least one half year away. ("The day of our patroness falls in the fading of winter.")

Severian is not elevated to journeyman for *at least another year,* and given all the duties he must master as captain as apprentices, it may actually be two or three.

Severian is elevated at least a year-and-a-half after the graveyard encounter with Vodalus, and then, after he aids in Thecla's suicide, is exiled after ten days in the stir, whence commence the main events of Vol.1: his encounters with Agia, Hildegrin, Baldanders, Dorcas, the manomachy, the execution of Agilus, etc. Plus there's the time it takes him to walk to Saltus before he's finally kidnapped by Vodalus and where in his journey to the rebel encampment he comments about how "the familiarity of this place...recalls to me many summer days in our Citadel."

So at a very minimum two years have gone by, and it could be as many as three or four.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - Access all of your messages and folders
wherever you are

Tony Ellis — 05 Sep 2006, 18:03 · follows Rex Lycanthrosaurus

bsharp wrote:

I'd like to ask why Severian and companions were trying to get into the graveyard at night, do we know? Eata was trying to slip through the bars and they seem afraid the guard will return. Yet Severian notes a path inside the gate they had used to return to the Citadel in previous visits.

They're just returning to the Citadel after swimming in Gyoll - perhaps later than usual because Severian almost drowned. And they **want** the guard to return - he was supposed to let them in. That much we're told in the chapter.

The implication is that the guard has been bribed to make himself scarce by Vodalus and co. I have it in my head that we're told this somewhere, but that could be my imagination.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 05 Sep 2006, 18:45 · in reply to nastler

I think this is an excellent idea. At the risk of repetition or contradiction I will go ahead and make my comments before reading others'. So pulling out my old copy of SHADOW, and with TextEdit open...

Chapter title: "Resurrection and Death"

A bit of irony here; death usually precedes resurrection. But, of course, "resurrection" in this case is meant in literal root sense, unburying, and so refers to Vodalus and his companions as "resurrectionists." Severian's own first (?) death and resurrection, though they have already happened earlier in the day, are postponed to the second chapter. The imagery of the sepulcher is brought to bear right as a *_memento mori_* hanging over the whole Book.

p9. IT IS POSSIBLE I already had some presentiment of my future.

A rather haunting first line, for me. I used to think that tBotNS was an attempt at "holographic" prose -- the idea that, as when you cut up a hologram, the whole picture, in less detail, is contained in each piece, so each chunk of the Book would contain an image of the whole. I no longer think this, but clearly there is a lot of cross-reference and cross-imagery, and this first sentence is a clue as to the why of it; time is not linear here. This first page is full of forward references:

--The image of "the locked and rusted gate," of which we shall be reminded at the end of SHADOW, as Severian tells us that he has taken us from one gate to another.

--The gate is "the symbol of my exile." Why "the" rather than "a" symbol, I wonder?

--Noting the "thousands of paces of wall," Severian observes that "It was a walk I would take, much later."

Certainly many of the book's themes are taken up by the end of this first chapter -- memory and death, wandering and exile, war and revolution, truth, lies, and evasions, and so on.

p12. A man who had not spoken before said, "I'm going to watch over my mother ... They could have her a league off by now."

At first I was puzzled by this, thinking this guy's mother must be someone special if the Vodalarii were going to take her; then I realized, they're watching out for the "ordinary" anthropophagi as much as the Vodalarii.

Now, there's an interesting phrase at the bottom of 14/top of 15. Vodalus tells Hildegrin (as yet unnamed) to take his pistol, then tells the volunteers "Guard yourselves!" Then:

pp14-5. As if a dove had momentarily commanded an arctother, the woman took the shining pistol from the heavy man's hand...

Now, the heavy man is Hildegrin, who has just been given the pistol. But who has commanded whom? Thea does not appear to have commanded anyone, yet it's hard to imagine Vodalus as "a dove."

The fight between Vodalus and the volunteers is delightfully confused, more like a real fight than most in fiction.

p16. He stumbled, as I have said. In that instant, I believe my whole life teetered in the scales with his.

Indeed it did; if the volunteers had prevailed and found him there with Vodalus, they'd surely have taken him for the Vodalarius he would shortly claim to be, and kill him on the spot. But Severian is talking about the change in his life that takes place because of the incidents that follow, about how his accepting Vodalus's service led him to "free" Thecla and, ultimately, to the throne.

Why does Severian claim to be a Vodalarius? As he says,

p17. It was a term I had scarcely heard.

Is it only because he needs a reason for being there, which won't lead to Vodalus killing him?

Nor, I think, does his explanation of the efficacy of the coin in cementing his service ring true. He goes out of his way to point out that soldiers take their oath to the Autarch and are given a coin with the Autarch's picture. Whose picture is on the coin Vodalus gives Severian? Not Vodalus', to be sure; so the magickal explanation he offers simply doesn't wash.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I've got a piece of braaaaaain lodge in me heeead!!!

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 05 Sep 2006, 18:52 · in reply to Rex Lycanthrosaurus

It suddenly occurs to me, reading various responses to various comments, that the "carrot" remark may suggest that the dead are buried vertically rather than horizontally, perhaps due to limited space?

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 05 Sep 2006, 18:57 · in reply to Rex Lycanthrosaurus

On 9/5/06, Rex Lycanthrosaurus <lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm> wrote:
Severian is not elevated to journeyman for *at least another year,* and
given all the duties he must master as captain as apprentices, it may
actually be two or three.

Actually, I'm pretty sure that Severian is Captain of Apprentices
for only one year; if I'm right, we'll come to the appropriate reference as we go through the
book. And he has very little to "master" as captain -- he finds his work that year very light.

Still, that makes it at least a year and a half from the graveyard sequence to the encounter with
Vodalus in the wood.

The main action, Severian's wanderings, takes only a few months.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 05 Sep 2006, 18:58 · in reply to Tony Ellis

On 9/5/06, Tony Ellis <tonyellis69 at btopenworld.com> wrote:
The implication is that the guard has been bribed to make himself
scarce by Vodalus and co. I have it in my head that we're told this
somewhere, but that could be my imagination.

We're given another explanation for the missing guard in the BOOK OF THE SHORT SUN.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

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Roy C. Lackey — 05 Sep 2006, 19:00 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

b sharp wrote:
I admit that I am not the stickler for timeframes that, say, Roy C. Lackey
is, but I always thought it was months that pass between Severian's night in
the graveyard and his expulsion etc., not years. Severian may think of
himself as a boy but he is strong enough to defend Vodalus from the attack
of an armed man.<<

I ain't takin' sides, just being a stickler. <g>

The day Severian almost drowned was the last day of the year on which it was still warm
enough to swim in the Gyll. The weather turned cold the following day. It was hog-slaughtering
time down south, as evidenced by pork soon appearing on the menu. Winter was coming on. At
the beginning of the following spring, Drotte and Roche were elevated to journeymen and Sev
became captain of apprentices. The spring of the following year was when Sev began his exile.
The Feast of Thecla was about 3 weeks after that. So it was a little more than a year and a half
between the graveyard scene and the Feast of Thecla.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 05 Sep 2006, 19:52 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Dan'I quoted and wrote:
On 9/5/06, Tony Ellis <tonyellis69 at btopenworld.com> wrote:

The implication is that the guard has been bribed to make himself scarce by Vodalus and co. I have it in my head that we're told this somewhere, but that could be my imagination.

We're given another explanation for the missing guard in the BOOK OF THE SHORT SUN.

Yeah, that theory was put forth some years ago. It's one of those theories that is so neat it *ought* to be true. But it can't be.

Severian and his pals were swimming in the Gyll, so the weather was still warm enough for swimming. As b sharp recently noted, "It is icy winter when Severian encounters Triskele and Valeria."

Sev was outside trying to unclog a frozen drain pipe the day he found Triskele. The dog ran away a week later, and Sev met Valeria. There was snow on the ground that day. It was winter when Sev had the dog. There is no way that Sev went swimming that week, and there is no indication in IGJ that it was winter when Silkhorn saw the dog.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 05 Sep 2006, 20:14 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 9/5/06, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Severian and his pals were swimming in the Gyll, so the weather was still warm enough for swimming. As b sharp recently noted, "It is icy winter when Severian encounters Triskele and Valeria."

Sev was outside trying to unclog a frozen drain pipe the day he found Triskele. The dog ran away a week later, and Sev met Valeria. There was snow on the ground that day. It was winter when Sev had the dog. There is no way that Sev went swimming that week, and there is no indication in IGJ that it was winter when Silkhorn saw the dog.

... so ... IGJ can't be reconciled with SotT at all?

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I've got a piece of braaaaaain lodge in me heeead!!!

Jon Capps — 05 Sep 2006, 21:40 · in reply to powens

powens wrote:

Long time reader - first time poster (I think) Wouldn't this be a good time to start the Wiki? So that it can be added to as we cover each chapter?

I have a hosting account that has not reached its domain limit, so I can setup a wiki for the list if people want it. But this month is

extraordinarily tight for me, so I cannot afford to purchase the domain name.

So, if the list wants it, and can decide on a domain name, and someone's willing to donate the \$10 or so to get it (or to register the domain name oneself), I'll volunteer to host/admin the Urthwiki.

Or, if it is decided that the wiki should be under the urth.net domain, I might be able to work with Ranjit on getting something set up.

jon

Roy C. Lackey — 06 Sep 2006, 06:34 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Dan'I wrote:

Now, there's an interesting phrase at the bottom of 14/top of 15.

Vodalus tells Hildegrin (as yet unnamed) to take his pistol, then tells the volunteers "Guard yourselves!" Then:

As long as we're looking at the minutiae of this chapter, I might as well remind people that there is a mistake in NEW SUN involving this exchange. Vodalus definitely gave the pistol to Hildegrin. But later, Sev recalls the scene and has Vodalus giving it to Thea. The mistake is repeated in the appendix to CITADEL, so the mistake is probably Wolfe's.

There is another mistake on the second page, pointed out years ago by someone else (can't remember who), concerning whether it was Roche or Drotte who said the approaching volunteers were carrying pikes. That mistake may or may not be Sev's.

pp14-5. As if a dove had momentarily commanded an arctother, the woman took the shining pistol from the heavy man's hand...

Now, the heavy man is Hildegrin, who has just been given the pistol.

But who has commanded whom? Thea does not appear to have commanded anyone, yet it's hard to imagine Vodalus as "a dove."

It's just that Thea took decisive action. Hildegrin was flustered, so the woman took the pistol from the big, bear-like man.

The fight between Vodalus and the volunteers is delightfully confused, more like a real fight than most in fiction.

p16. He stumbled, as I have said. In that instant, I believe my whole life teetered in the scales with his.

Indeed it did; if the volunteers had prevailed and found him there with Vodalus, they'd surely have taken him for the Vodalarius he would shortly claim to be, and kill him on the spot. But Severian is talking about the change in his life that takes place because of the incidents that follow, about how his accepting Vodalus's service led him to "free" Thecla and, ultimately, to the throne.

Sev admired Vodalus for his bravado, for disdaining the pistol, and for standing alone against three armed men. "Yet something touched me. Perhaps it was Vodalus's willingness to die to protect her that made the woman seem precious to me; certainly it was that willingness that kindled my admiration for him." But when Sev was put to the test, he wasn't willing to die to protect *his* beloved, Thea's sister, Thecla. He even helped torture her.

One other thing I hadn't noticed for all my reading: Sev had it in for Drotte. Vodalus had fallen and was defending himself with his cane-sword. "I remember thinking what a fine thing it would have been to have had such a sword on the day Drotte became captain of apprentices, and then likening Vodalus to myself." Apparently, Drotte had done to Sev what Sev would later do to Eata when Sev became captain -- establish a pecking order by brute force. But I digress.

-Roy

nastler — 06 Sep 2006, 07:10 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

--- "Roy C. Lackey" <rlackey at stic.net> skrev:

One other thing I hadn't noticed for all my reading:
Sev had it in for
Drotte. Vodalus had fallen and was defending himself
with his cane-sword. "I
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Vodalus to myself." Apparently, Drotte had done to
Sev what Sev would later
do to Eata when Sev became captain -- establish a
pecking order by brute
force. But I digress.

I noticed this on the re-read too, the four
apprentices are Severian, his "friend" Roche, their
"captain" Drotte, and the "boy" Eata.

Also in this chapter the first (but not last)
"tableau" consisting of a "beast" man, an "armed" man,
and a woman.

nastler

Roy C. Lackey — 06 Sep 2006, 07:14 · follows nastler

Dan'I quoted and wrote:
Sev was outside trying to unclog a frozen drain pipe the day he found
Triskele. The dog ran away a week later, and Sev met Valeria. There was
snow
on the ground that day. It was winter when Sev had the dog. There is no
way
that Sev went swimming that week, and there is no indication in IGJ that
it
was winter when Silkhorn saw the dog.
... so ... IGJ can't be reconciled with SotT at all?

Well, I can't go that far. Silkhorn's astral trips to Severian's era don't always dovetail, as Andrew Bollen has been insisting for some time. Jahlee was certainly cavorting naked in Nessus on the occasion in question, so it wasn't winter. All I was trying to do is show that the two instances of the guard being absent from the necropolis gate were not the same occasion.

-Roy

nastler — 06 Sep 2006, 07:22 · in reply to JWillard

--- JWillard <aldenweer at charter.net> skrev:

"and what power of Erebus's gives you the right to
come here and do
something like this?" Something interesting I found
in the W2 awhile
ago: According to some sources, Charon is the son
of Erebus. Is Erebus
somehow Severian's great-grandfather? Is this line
a joke: Severian

being the "power of Erebus"?

This line is spoken by the leader of the volunteers to Vodalus. Vodalus' connection to the hidden powers is made clear(er) later in the book(s).

Oh, and chapter one gives us our first glimpse of "green moonlight". Something I missed totally but presumably caused more careful first-time readers to go, "eh?".

nastler

b sharp — 06 Sep 2006, 12:48 · follows nastler

Plaudits to JWillard for starting this thread. It appears that attacking BotNS chapter by chapter may expose a lot of things previously hidden in the cracks. For example,

Roy says: (snip)

there is a mistake in NEW SUN involving this exchange. Vodalus definitely gave the pistol to >Hildegrin. But later, Sev recalls the scene and has Vodalus giving it to Thea. The mistake is >repeated in the appendix to CITADEL, so the mistake is probably Wolfe's. There is another >mistake on the second page, pointed out years ago by someone else (can't remember who), >concerning whether it was Roche or Drotte who said the approaching volunteers were carrying >pikes. That mistake may or may not be Sev's.

I didn't mention these two mistakes as I thought it was accepted Urth dogma that they were Sev's mistakes not Wolfe's, and that they are purposeful in establishing, within the first pages, Severian as an unreliable narrator. Since Wolfe is "translating" Severian's words I can't see a repeat of a mistake in an appendix as proof positive of auctorial error. If anything it seems like the appendix mistake would be Wolfe's way of calling extra attention to a Sev error.

I think it is recognition of this unreliability which allows us to spot other mistakes, like the east/west switch that allows us to firmly establish this is the South American continent. Allows us to spot other Sev mistakes such as confusing wife/husband with sister/brother, old man with old woman, not noticing the identity of weapons, characters etc.; mistakes which really impact the story. But I guess it isn't dogma afterall.

Roy posted:

Sev admired Vodalus for his bravado, for disdaining the pistol, and for standing alone against three >armed men. "Yet something touched me. Perhaps it was Vodalus's willingness to die to protect >her that made the woman seem precious to me; certainly it was that willingness that kindled my admiration for him." But when Sev was put to the test, he wasn't willing to die to protect *his* beloved, Thea's sister, Thecla. He even helped torture her.

This admiration of the hereditary elite, despite their obvious flaws, is a continuing theme. Elsewhere Wolfe notes that the exultants are braver than common folk and much more prone to extreme violence when needed. In Urth, Thecla is praised for being willing to defend, with her life, someone dependent on her. Well, we know Wolfe is no Marxist, ;-).

Roy says:

Apparently, Drotte had done to Sev what Sev would later do to Eata when Sev became captain.

Yes, seems like standard procedure; perhaps Drotte would have done it first to Roche, to establish him as his "second". And the morning after Severian is elevated to journeyman, we see the new captain of apprentices:

(the boy Eata, not quite so small now, with a puffed lip and the gleam of triumph in his eye).

-bsharp

Matthew King — 06 Sep 2006, 13:20 · in reply to Jon Capps

On Sep 5, 2006, at 4:40 PM, Jon Capps wrote:

I have a hosting account that has not reached its domain limit, so I can setup a wiki for the list if people want it. But this month is *extraordinarily* tight for me, so I cannot afford to purchase the domain name.

So, if the list wants it, and can decide on a domain name, and someone's willing to donate the \$10 or so to get it (or to register the domain name oneself), I'll volunteer to host/admin the Urthwiki.

Or, if it is decided that the wiki should be under the urth.net domain, I might be able to work with Ranjit on getting something set up.

A name that occurred to me last week:

urthandskai.com

(or .net or .org; they're all available. Org domains are difficult to transfer, though.)

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 06 Sep 2006, 15:05 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 9/5/06, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Vodalus had fallen and was defending himself with his cane-sword.

Occurs to me: are Vodalus and the Doctor the only people in the Book with cane-swords? And does this imply a connection I'm not seeing?

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I've got a piece of braaaaaain lodge in me heeead!!!

JWillard — 06 Sep 2006, 19:25 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Wow! I'm thrilled with the response this has received.

nastler says:

Would you be prepared to gather all the comments and edit into a coherent list of observations for each chapter?

Yeah, I think this would be rewarding, though I don't know the best way to do it.

b sharp writes:

The tone JWillard
sets with his first chapter observations is pretty high on the esoteric scale

Sorry - I tend towards the esoteric. But that's also why I thought it would be good to get different people focused on the same content, so that different things come into focus.

Great observation on the amschasband. Perhaps it's also a hint of outside intervention of some kind: Severian must meet Vodalus as part of the narrative that's been assigned to him.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes:

The gate is "the symbol of my exile." Why "the" rather than "a"
symbol, I wonder?

Maybe I'm just being extra thick, but I've never understood why Severian makes this comment, period. Why does he land on this gate as the symbol of his exile? He seems to mean it in a way focused on this particular point in time. Is it because he has just realized what he is, having just come back to life?

Now, there's an interesting phrase at the bottom of 14/top of 15.
Vodalus tells Hildegren (as yet unnamed) to take his pistol, then
tells the volunteers "Guard yourselves!"

Yes, I was struck by the fact that Hildegren commands Vodalus, as well. But Thea's the dove.

Another line I meant to comment on, pg. 11 of Shadow/Claw: "I dashed along a path that was (or at least then seemed) completely unfamiliar..." Like I said, words like 'perhaps' and 'seem' are treacherous coming from Severian.

One thing I feel more strongly is that Severian's 'allegiance' to Vodalus is an affectation. Well, that will have to wait. Work calls.

Tony Ellis — 06 Sep 2006, 21:58 · follows JWillard

Dan'I wrote:
But when
he deliberately evokes Frankenstein, I'm forcefully reminded of the
most chilling line in Shelley's book: "You are my creator, but I am
your master. Obey!"

There's definitely an air of that about the relationship of Talos and Baldanders, isn't there? Who could imagine Baldanders creating Dr Talos's wonderful play, and yet Baldanders created Dr Talos. In Frankenstein, a recurring theme is that of 'who is victim, who is victor?' - monster and maker take turns pursuing each other for most of the book, as far as I can recall.

As for chilling lines, personally speaking, the monster's promise "I will be with you on your wedding night!" is the most unsettling for me. There's a whole world of horror there, both overt and psychological. Brrr!

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 07 Sep 2006, 01:47 · in reply to Tony Ellis

On 9/6/06, Tony Ellis <tonyellis69 at btopenworld.com> wrote:
There's definitely an air of that about the relationship of Talos and
Baldanders, isn't there? Who could imagine Baldanders creating Dr
Talos's wonderful play, and yet Baldanders created Dr Talos. In

Frankenstein, a recurring theme is that of 'who is victim, who is victor?' - monster and maker take turns pursuing each other for most of the book, as far as I can recall.

A little over half, I think, though it's been a while.

Odd thought, though ... given that Frankenstein's given name is "Victor," but he is in the end the victim...

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I've got a piece of braaaaaain lodge in me heeead!!!

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 08 Sep 2006, 01:56 · in reply to Matthew King

I'm not holding it up as THE MODEL, but A model of a single subject Wiki, which might be worth looking at, is "This Might Be a Wiki" (<http://tmbw.net>), the wiki for fans of the band They Might Be Giants. It's a pretty nicely organized kind of fansite.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I've got a piece of braaaaaain lodge in me heeead!!!

Ranjit Bhatnagar — 08 Sep 2006, 02:06 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

I'm not going to involve myself in the administration or policy of the wolfewiki, but if the interest is there and we're ready, I can provide the domain name (wiki.urth.net or some such), and-- unless someone with more experience would rather host the actual wiki software, I can set that up too.

- ranjit

Sarah Dorrance-Minch — 08 Sep 2006, 02:46 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes <[danldo at gmail.com](mailto:danldo@gmail.com)> wrote: Actually, I'm pretty sure that Severian is Captain of Apprentices

for only one year; if I'm right, we'll come to the appropriate reference

as we go through the book. And he has very little to "master" as

captain -- he finds his work that year very light.

I can't help but wonder why Severian was called in to assist with the Revolutionary given his pre-existing relationship with Thecla, which even were it not intimate was certainly close enough to create a clear conflict of interest in the client/torturer relationship. Which surely the masters of the guild would have known. So, was somebody paid off? Or did one of Severian's masters have a hidden reason for wanting to tempt Severian to do something that would get him kicked out of the guild?

Sarah Dorrance-Minch

(in SCA, THL Isobel Wren, called "Midori")

Mother to Sophie (10/28/02) and Liesl (5/17/04);

militant lactivist cult member

In a dark time, the eye begins to see

Roy C. Lackey — 08 Sep 2006, 06:54 · follows Sarah Dorrance-Minch

Sarah Dorrance-Minch wrote:

I can't help but wonder why Severian was called in to assist with the Revolutionary given his pre-existing relationship with Thecla, which even were it not intimate was certainly close enough to create a clear conflict of interest in the client/torturer relationship. Which surely the masters of the guild would have known. So, was somebody paid off? Or did one of Severian's masters have a hidden reason for wanting to tempt Severian to do something that would get him kicked out of the guild?<<

Severian was certainly intimate with Thecla. Perhaps the answers to your questions lie in the answer to another question: Who gave the order for her to be tortured? Not merely tortured, but tortured in a manner that would result in her slow but sure death.

The Matachin Tower was the autarch's private dungeon, not the city jail. Most people in Nessus didn't even know it existed. Thecla's death there served no useful purpose. She was not even being used as part of a public-relations ploy to deter sedition. The Old Autarch professed ignorance of her plight until after she was dead, but also endorsed the action of the "certain officers" who had caused her to be arrested in secret.

Thea had already fled the House Absolute to be with Vodalus before Thecla was arrested. Thecla was imprisoned for a year before her death. Alive, she possessed at least as much value to the autarch as she did as a ceremonial concubine. Dead, she lost all value to the autarch and risked the possibility that her influential exultant family up north would turn openly against him.

Even if those "officers" decided that holding her prisoner while negotiations with her family or Vodalus went on behind the scenes was a fruitless endeavor, they could better have left their options open by letting her sit in prison indefinitely. They could even have had her executed and be done with it. But they didn't. *Someone* ordered her tortured first. The torture wasn't even for the purpose of extracting information or compelling cooperation. As far as Thecla was concerned, the torture was purely vindictive and would result in her death, even if Severian hadn't shortened the ordeal by giving her a knife.

This all strikes me as rather bold decision for "certain officers" to make behind the autarch's back, particularly given that Thecla was one of the twenty-or-so favored concubines in the autarch's inner circle. That the order for her torture coincided with Severian's elevation to journeyman can have been no accident. Some power-behind-the-throne was at work here. Thecla's death did nothing to further the welfare of the Commonwealth or the autarch. Her death was the goad needed to push Severian out of the insulated nest of the guild and put him on the path to the Phoenix Throne. And the throne was just a necessary stepping stone to Yesod and a New Sun.

Those time walkers Severian mentioned near the end of CITADEL who intervened in the life of the "first Severian" were still orchestrating events in his own life. In the end, Thecla's blood is on their hands.

-Roy

Robin Hankin — 09 Sep 2006, 22:35 · in reply to b sharp

What a wonderful idea. I've been on this list for some time, but have never contributed. Hi all. One of the things I noticed in this rereading is that there are two things in the chapter that Severian professes admiration for. The first is Drotte and his quick -thinking lie. This is the first indication, I think, that Severian prone to deceit himself and is thus unreliable as a narrator. The other thing Severian admires is Vodalus' bravado in handing over the pistol to Thea (or Hildegryn) and his willingness to risk their defense armed only with his sword. Given that Vodalus is a self-serving S.O.B. (and the false coin that he gives Severian is further proof of his falseness) I'm guessing that Vodalus did not think himself in real danger from the watchmen- he certainly would not deliberately sacrifice himself for and of his followers. So his admiration here is also for something false.

That got me thinking about Severian rushing to the aid of Vodalus when he stumbled in the fight. Now I wonder if that Vodalus really stumbled. He might have come to his aid solely out of admiration for Vodalus, and threw in the prospect of real danger to Vodalus in order to magnify the importance of his actions. Perhaps Vodalus was never in any real danger at all.

Robin P. Hankin

Nathan Spears — 21 Sep 2006, 23:17 · follows Ranjit Bhatnagar

As an organizational comment - isn't what you are looking to create something like a Scofield's Bible?

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/ScofieldReferenceNotes/srn.cgi?book=mt&chapter=003>

Assuming the wiki would be more structured than "Chapter 1: An endless series of comments", etc, you almost need a chapter and verse breakdown of the book for cross-referential purposes. And you also need editors who will condense comments into appropriate lengths for insertion into the main body of the wiki, and link out to longer essays that touch on a verse but for whatever reason (length, theme, etc) don't belong in the main body? I'm imagining here someone re-reading the BotNS and looking at the wiki simultaneously, getting play by play, with links to appropriate other places in the wiki. Then at the end of the chapter or book or tetralogy are essays dealing with themes and all that sort of thing, which don't really have a place in the "flow" of reading the book.

So basically you need a few people to agree on a structure and then impose it rigorously; otherwise the wiki will be like the list but with more hyperlinks. Which wouldn't be terrible but the other would be more fun.

Sorry to blither so long but the wiki iss a pretty exciting idea and it got me thinking.

----- Original Message -----

From: Ranjit Bhatnagar <ranjit at moonmilk.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Thursday, September 7, 2006 9:06:34 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) Wiki

I'm not going to involve myself in the administration or policy of the wolfewiki, but if the interest is there and we're ready, I can provide the domain name (wiki.urth.net or some such), and-- unless someone with more experience would rather host the actual wiki software, I can set that up too.

- ranjit

Matthew King — 23 Sep 2006, 04:00 · in reply to Nathan Spears

On Sep 21, 2006, at 6:17 PM, Nathan Spears wrote:

Assuming the wiki would be more structured than "Chapter 1: An endless series of comments", etc, you almost need a chapter and verse breakdown of the book for cross-referential purposes. And you also need editors who will condense comments into appropriate lengths for insertion into the main body of the wiki, and link out to longer essays that touch on a verse but for whatever reason (length, theme, etc) don't belong in the main body? I'm imagining here someone re-reading the BotNS and looking at the wiki simultaneously, getting play by play, with links to appropriate other places in the wiki. Then at the end of the chapter or book or tetralogy are essays dealing with themes and all that sort of thing, which don't really have a place in the "flow" of reading the book.

So basically you need a few people to agree on a structure and then impose it rigorously; otherwise the wiki will be like the list but with more hyperlinks. Which wouldn't be terrible but the other would be more fun.

Maintaining this kind of structure with an off-the-shelf wiki might be difficult. Are there any Ruby on Rails developers on the list who would like to collaborate on a custom solution?

Matthew