

Roche

The Urth list — 7 messages, 6 voices, 17 Sep 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4722>

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JWillard — 17 Sep 2006, 20:39

OK, I could swear I've seen this theory sketched somewhere: Roche is a servant of higher manipulative forces and is spying (at the least) on Severian. I've skimmed through Borski's book, Wright's book and searched in the archives, but I'm missing it. Regardless, one of the things that has struck me in closely reading the first several chapters is how active much of an active participant Roche is.

Chapter 1: "I would have hidden, but Roche held me..."

Chapter 2: Roche seems to be the one who succeeds in 'reviving' Severian. "...with Roche, then Drotte, then Roche again, breathing into my mouth." "At last I pulled away from Roche and vomited great quantities of black water."

Chapter 9: Roche takes Sev to the House Azure and basically controls the whole transaction: Sev has an overwhelming response to Barbea, the first prostitute introduced, using the loaded word 'golden' to describe her hair three times. But as he's about to say he wants her: "Before I could catch my breath, Roche said, "Let's see some of the others."" Then, after Gracia, "Thecla" comes out. Although at first Sev thinks it is the same Thecla, he is already starting to see through the illusion by the end of his observation: "...though certainly this woman was somewhat shorter." But then the transaction goes ahead. ""It is she you wish, then," our host said. I could not recall speaking. Roche stepped forward with a leather burse, announcing that he would pay for both of us. I watched the coins as he drew them out, waiting to see the gleam of a chrisos. It was not there - there were only a few asimi." So, it seems Roche has been instructed to choose "Thecla" for Sev. Also, the imagery there is interesting: After the intense reaction Sev has to Barbea's "golden" features, he's fixed up with Thecla and looks to see a golden chrisos but sees only silver asimi.

Chapter 12: "The next morning Master Gurloes ordered me to assist him in performing the excruciation. Roche came with us."

Maybe this is all trivial, but the reason I really started looking at it is this bit from chapter three of Shadow:

"There was a loose stone in the floor almost at the foot of my funeral bronze. I pried it up and put the chrisos under it, then muttered an incantation I had learned years before from Roche, a few lines of verse that would hold hidden objects safe:

Where I put you, there you lie,
Never let a stranger spy,
Like glass grow to any eye,
Not of me.

Here be safe, never leave it,

Should a hand come, deceive it,
Let strange eyes not believe it,
Till I see."

This bit's always nagged at me, and I think this is why: It almost sounds like a hypnotic chant. A chrisos=gold=sun is hidden then protected by this incantation: as the sun in Sev is hidden by some kind of post-hypnosis? So he doesn't see, or others? Either way, this passage has always seemed extra important, and this is all that makes sense to me.

And the real Saint Roche was arrested as a spy.

I've read in the archives questions about the significance of Roche's hair color (The Autarch says: ""You have been here previously, have you not? I remember your red hair and high color. Far to the south, in the narrow lands, the savages paint a fire spirit much like you.""") and the Roche limit and Roche lobe. It strikes me that (and I am science stupid, so bear with me) this involves binary systems. Is Roche in some way the dying (red) sun balanced by Sev's new? Can anyone out there make anything coherent out of this? Because, as I'm aware, I'm failing miserably...

Roy C. Lackey — 18 Sep 2006, 05:12 · follows JWillard

JWillard wrote:

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I don't really have much to add except to point out that when the incantation is repeated near the end of CITADEL, "glass" has been replaced with "grass". I don't know if it is a typo, or an error by Wolfe or Severian. That and, of course, the hidden coin is false gold. Why would Vodalus have been carrying a counterfeit coin?

-Roy

Stanislaus — 18 Sep 2006, 10:53 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Hello Roy,

Monday, September 18, 2006, 7:12:06 AM, you wrote:

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-Roy

Because Vodalus is counterfeit New Sun.

Best regards,
Stanislaus <mailto:sbocian@poczta.fm>

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Daniel D Jones — 19 Sep 2006, 02:03 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Monday 18 September 2006 01:12, Roy C. Lackey wrote:
That and, of course, the hidden coin is false gold. Why would Vodalus have been carrying a counterfeit coin?

Perhaps to use precisely as he used it - to give out as markers.

b sharp — 19 Sep 2006, 11:56 · follows Daniel D Jones

JWillard writes:

one of the things that has struck me in closely reading the first several chapters is how active much of an active participant Roche is.

I can agree with that in conjunction with the observation that Severian periodically mentions Roche during his travels while I don't think Drotte gets much mention at all. The red hair seems like it could be significant (given Fechin, Talos, Jolenta, Daria?). On the other hand, when Severian, as Autarch, confronts Roche at the end of BoTNS, he seems merely a friend and devoted guild member with no hint of being a secret agent, cosmic or otherwise.

Roy writes:

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I noticed the glass/grass issue also and had generally felt it must be a typo. The only doubt I have comes from a similar question which has been raised in this archive about a certain

passage in Shadow Ch.2. Severian imagines a miraculous light which engenders life in objects it falls upon, so a leaf plucked from a bush grows legs and a rough brown brush opens black eyes and scurries up a tree. Does he mean a cleaning brush? A brush plant? Is this a typo and a redundant bush was meant? Is there some deeper purpose to confusing man-made objects with plants? Ahhh, probably a typo.

Severian discovers the false nature of the coin given him by Vodalus because it resembles the false coin Dr. Talos gives him at the end of Citadel. In a recent dialog with Dan'I, it was discussed that Dr. Talos' cane sword may have been acquired as a "dropsie" from Vodalus in his audience. Is it possible the false coin also came from Vodalus or Hildegrin in the audience?

Is it auctorial inconsistency that Vodalus has (has made?) counterfeit coins with the Autarch's face on it, yet he is unable to recognize the Autarch when he has him in custody. Vodalus desperately wants to possess the Autarch's memories and has strong reason to suspect Appian (sorry Tony Ellis) or Severian is the autarch but somehow lets them both slip through his fingers without so much as a taste.

Stanislaus explains Vodalus' counterfeit coin as:

Because Vodalus is counterfeit New Sun.

I think Vodalus' dreams of a new galactic empire suggest he is more of a counterfeit Typhon.

-bsharp

Macronaut — 19 Sep 2006, 14:41 · in reply to b sharp

Severian. That and, of course, the hidden coin is false gold. Why would Vodalus have been carrying a counterfeit coin?

I think this is intended to show us how cheap Vodalus' apparent romantic nobility is -- it shows him as a common and mean-spirited grifter at heart.

Severian discovers the false nature of the coin given him by Vodalus because it resembles the false coin Dr. Talos gives him at the end of Citadel.

This is an excellent point, and I think this event clearly is meant to contrast Vodalus and Talos. Talos is a con man too, but is (1) up front and open about his graft; and (2) honest with others about his intentions even when it doesn't seem so (because they don't want to hear the message he's communicating). This gives Talos a form of integrity which contrasts well with Vodalus, who conceals graft and treachery under a virtuous and idealistic seeming.

Hope in this post that I'm not doing any of those complicated things that make the Theanthropos cry.

Macronaut

Stanislaus — 19 Sep 2006, 17:28 · in reply to b sharp

Tuesday, September 19, 2006, 1:56:11 PM, you wrote:

...

Stanislaus explains Vodalus' counterfeit coin as:

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I think Vodalus' dreams of a new galactic empire suggest he is more of a counterfeit Typhon.

-bsharp

Typhon is also a counterfeit saviour.

The situation of the human civilisation in the Sun-cycles is best explained, I think, by the Toynbee's theory about civilisation. The dying sun is only a symptom of a deeper malady. The civilisation of humanity had been declining long before this, as we can learn from Cyriaca's story.

Toynbee describes three false, and one true, kinds of saviours trying to support a dying civilisation. Saviour with a Sword. Saviour with a Time-Machine, Philosopher masked by a King, and God incarnate in a Man.

<http://nobsblog.blogspot.com/1999/03/study-of-history.html> (table of context with some excerpts)

1. Saviour with a sword - most straightforward method, exemplified by Typhon. He tries to rebuild the empire by military means. The wars can succeed and fail, but since that kind of saviour never tries to cure the source of the malady, only the symptoms, he is ultimately futile.
2. Saviour with a Time Machine - he tries to return the society to an earlier, healthy state. But since the present situation is the result of the former, it will appear again - even if he managed to restore the past, which is impossible.

Typhon tries to do something of the kind in the Whorl. He knows, however, of the above mentioned problem (his advisors, at least, must have possessed an unimaginable learning) and have a more reasonable plan. He suspects that the present society is doomed - although he will try his imperial plan despite of this.

But building the Whorl, his secondary attempt to save humanity, he assumes that the civilisation of his time has some flaw which doomed it. Maybe it took a wrong decision at some time (Cyriaca's thinking machines?, or enmity to tradition?). Anyhow, he assumes that if his empire should fail (and that is eventuality for which the Whorl is prepared) it would mean that he did not know or couldn't remedy this fault.

Therefore, he tries to begin again - the societies of the Whorl are new ones, disconnected from Urth. What's more, Whorl is divided into separate cities, each with a different culture. (Some quite original, like Amazons, some copied from history). Typhon's intention is to dump them all on the surface of some far away planet, not contaminated by his own, doomed civilisation, and allow them to fight for survival, in a Darwinian fashion.

3 Philosopher masked by a King. He has an idea how to organize the state in accordance with reason - he wants to be a Philosopher-King. Unfortunately, he is unable to persuade the people, and must use strength - so in the end he is merely a King, not a Philosopher. Ymar the Almost Just is a very succesful example of a would-be Philosopher King.

4. The God incarnate in a Man. A prophet, who knows the society is doomed, and who creates a new religion, which will carry the light and allow a new, more advanced civilisation to form after a period of barbarism. - This is the true New Sun, who destroys to create.

PS. You are right. Vodalus is, as you noted, a counterfeit Typhon - empty propaganda. Typhon nearly managed to create his empire. Vodalus couldn't even imagine how to go about trying to do it.

PPS. Most rich people had chrisos. Few have managed to unmask different personalities of the old Autarch (or of Severian). We must assume that they didn't look very similar to the official image.

Best regards,
Stanislaus <mailto:sbocian@poczta.fm>

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