

Two (hopefully) quick questions

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 04 Jan 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4965>

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Eric Ortlund — 04 Jan 2008, 20:49

Friends:

1) When Severian meets Dr. Talos toward the end of Citadel, he goes out of his way to emphasize to the reader that the coin Dr. Talos gives him is the same kind as that which was given to him by Vodalus. This has the feel (to me, anyway) of one of those Wolfian epiphanies which is implied but which is supposed to break over the reader . . . but I'm not being epi-phanized. What is the point of emphasizing that the two coins are the same? That Vodalus and Baldanders are both bad guys - both in league with Abaia? That seem the most obvious inference to me, but the reader knows that already; that doesn't need to be emphasized. That Dr. Talos is trying to draw Severian into his own cause, just as Vodalus did with his coin? That Baldanders and Vodalus are somehow in league with each other? All of the answers I come up with fail to match the size of the epiphany I think is being suggested. (I've been trolling through old posts, but can't find anything about this.)

2) I know that there has been a lot of discussion about Valeria already, but most of it seemed to center on whether Valeria was a true Autarch - a question which (no offense intended) doesn't interest me, because it seems to be extraneous to the novel itself. On the other hand, the fact that the ringing of the bells when Autarch Severian goes to see her is practically the last thing we're told in BotNS suggests to me that Wolfe is highlighting it - a "slingshot" ending, like Able telling us about Michael at the end of Wizard Knight (while the reader needs to go back and read the conversation between Able and Michael to understand how glorious of an ending this is, and how far the slingshot will shoot you if you get inside it). But I'm failing to find the slingshot here. The three big things we're told about Valeria are that (when Severian first meets her) she has a face which seems incredibly old (despite her young looks), that her family is waiting to travel to the stars with the Autarch, and that she's the last of her line. That would make sense with the last encounter, when Severian, himself destined to travel to the stars, starts the bells a-ringing in the Atrium of Time. The only other thing I remember being said about her in BotNS is when Severian tells the Anchorite Ash that . . . well, he wonders out loud why the walls around the Atrium of Time are so high, since it keeps the sun off the sun dial for all but a few hours a day. There must be something significant in that question, but I just can't come up with what it is.

And that's it - that's all we're told about her. The ringing of the bells in the Atrium of Time right at the end of the account hints (in my mind, anyway) that Valeria is extremely significant. But I don't know how to put together the information we're given about her to catch the slingshot ending here.

The one helpful thing I found in older posts was that the Atrium of Time exists outside of time somehow, which would explain Severian's description of her when he first meets her.

I'd be most grateful to anyone who, without undue speculation and purely from within the world of the text, can help me with these questions.

PS - I know this was said already several years ago, but Valeria mistranslates the Latin she quotes.

Eric Ortlund
Assistant Professor of Old Testament
Briercrest Seminary
<http://www.briercrest.ca/seminary/prospective/>
<http://scatterings1976.blogspot.com/>

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 05 Jan 2008, 08:55 · follows Eric Ortlund

On Sat, 05 Jan 2008 07:49:23 +1100 Eric Ortlund
<eortlund at briercrest.ca> wrote:
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1) When Severian meets Dr. Talos toward the end of Citadel, he goes out of his way to emphasize to the reader that the coin Dr. Talos gives him is the same kind as that which was given to him by Vodalus. This has the feel (to me, anyway) of one of those Wolfian epiphanies which is implied but which is supposed to break over the reader . . . but I'm not being epi-phanized. What is the point of emphasizing that the two coins are the same? That Vodalus and Baldanders are both bad guys - both in league with Abaia? That seem the most obvious inference to me, but the reader knows that already; that doesn't need to be emphasized. That Dr. Talos is trying to draw Severian into his own cause, just as Vodalus did with his coin? That Baldanders and Vodalus are somehow in league with each other? All of the answers I come up with fail to match the size of the epiphany I think is being suggested. (I've been trolling through old posts, but can't find anything about this.)

Remember that Sev saving Vodalus is the key event in the whole story: without it, nothing else would have followed. So says Sev; and this is why he starts with it.

In his recounting of it, Sev identifies taking Vodalus' coin with a soldier taking the "King's shilling", the formality which binds the soldier's loyalty. Taking it, Sev becomes a "Vodalarius". So on one level, I think, the falsity of the coin points to the falsity of Vodalus' cause. And also to the essentially false basis for the loyalty, which of course didn't last.

Finally, given my "Sev2 as cosmic error" reading, I also take it as a little marker that the event itself was "false" in that sense.

I don't think it's supposed to uncover any particular plot element, though. Vodalus I guess hands out fake coins both to save money and also as a little attack on the soundness of the Commonwealth. We know that he has spies watching Sev and Dr Talos' troupe, so no big surprise if one those spies was in the audience & dropped a fake chrisos while fleeing from Baldanders.