

Sev on Yesod; his powers; his testing

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 20 Jan 2008

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 20 Jan 2008, 06:36

This is dump of some of my efforts to make sense of UOTNS, long but I hope reasonably coherent.

First, the New Sun, the White Fountain and Sev's powers. I take it that the physical White Fountain comes into being when Apheta seduces Sev in Yesod:

(UOTNS XX) "Lying upon my back, I entered Yesod. Or say, rather, that Yesod closed about me ... There was something born between Yesod and Briah when I met with Apheta upon that divan in that circling room, something tiny yet immense that burned like a coal conveyed to the tongue by tongs. That something was myself."

Comment: Sev intends to question Apheta before having sex: "We must talk first. I would be betraying my kind if I did not question you." He says, "A hundred questions I had been ready to ask ..." But then "her lips brushed mine, and every question vanished." She stops him from asking, just as she cuts off Gunnie's attempts to ask questions later on.

But even though that seems to be when the White Fountain is created, Sev's faculty of "linking" to it happens earlier, in his time-line, on the Ship.

(UOTNS XXIII)

Sev: "Is this where I will be taught to bring the New Sun?" Apheta: "You will not have to be taught. ... You are gravid with the knowledge, and it will be born as soon as you approach

the White Fountain sufficiently for you to be aware of it."

....

Sev asks Apheta "how I came to carry such knowledge without being aware of it." Apheta: "Tzadkiel gave it to you as you slept." Sev: "You mean he came to your chamber last night?" Apheta: "No .. On the ship, I believe." Sev then thinks of his awakening to see hairy Zak after his "death" and eidolon-ization on the ship.

Comments:

- The "gravid" description resonates with Sev being "engulfed" rather than penetrating in bed with Apheta. In whatever is happening here, Sev is the "female", "passive" player. Or perhaps the host.

- I assume that Apheta **isn't** lying when she qualifies what she says with "I believe", presents information as being just her opinion etc etc. In this case, what she says is consistent with Sev's narrative.

This is the vision Sev had after his fall, I assume while he is being eidolon-ized (UOTNS IX):

"The winged woman of Father Inire's book [Tzadkiel] awaited me in the wings. Her hands she clapped once, formally, as a great lady summons her maid. As they parted there appeared between them a point of white light, hot and flaming. It seemed to me that it was my own face, and my face a mask that stared into it."

So: Tzadkiel "impregnates" Sev (makes him "gravid") with a link to the physical White Fountain as part of his eidolon-ization.

Comment: This suggests that the eidolon-ization may actually have been a *planned* thing, to produce a Sev upgraded with the "link". Recall how Sev comes to die on the ship. Encased in Sidero, he is attacked by a being with "titanic wings", which drops him down a shaft. The fall knocks him unconscious, and Sidero apparently strikes him, killing him, if he's not already dead. When his eidolon comes to life, Zak is there.

We never hear of the winged being again - unless it was, in fact, Tzadkiel. I think it was. Presumably Tzadkiel needed Sev dead, to get a Sev eidolon to work with; FB&O say that eidolons are never made of the living.

Sev's power seems to be the ability to draw energy from external sources and focus it to heal, to twist time etc etc. I see two main possibilities for where this power comes from:

- 1) It's intrinsic, somehow or other; nothing to do with Tzadkiel. Tzadkiel just gives him access to a big external source, the White Fountain; or
- 2) Tzadkiel implants the ability as part of the eidolon-ization.

Two of the main pieces of evidence for trying to puzzle this out come from FB&O (as Ray points out), and Apheta.

(UOTNS L) Sev: "Why couldn't Tzadkiel have called me back as I called back Zama? Healed me as I healed Herena? ..." (Famulimus kneels and kisses the floor.) Barbatus: "What makes you think Tzadkiel wields such power? ... great though he is, he's not the head of his race and its savior."

(UOTNS XX) Apheta: "If I try to unravel this for you, will you understand that I do not ... know all the secrets of you Briah ... You may master a New Sun. Should you, its energy will be yours to draw upon, though it will not exist unless you .. triumph here. But as the boy foreshadows the man, something of that faculty has reached you through the Corridors of Time. I cannot say whence you drew when you were on Urth. Partly from yourself, no doubt .. Perhaps from your world, or from is old sun."

I read Apheta's statement as supporting (2). She's not saying just that the influence of the New Sun was somehow reflected back in time, because she does not suggest that Sev drew on the New Sun on Urth. She must be saying that Sev's basic "faculty" for tapping energy was reflected.

Furthermore, she must be saying that the "faculty" does not depend on his "triumphing" in Yesod - it is independent from whether or not he actually brings the New Sun.

The only way I can put all this together is by assuming that the "link" implanted in Sev by Tzadkiel on the Ship included this "faculty", tuned or optimized for the white fountain.

Famulimus' statement, on the other hand, of course supports (1) against (2). If Sev's powers are greater than Tzadkiel's, then presumably Tzadkiel cannot have implanted them. But to me many things suggest that the Hierodules are "out of the loop", themselves dupes. Eg: What could possibly be the point of their "mission" on Urth, as reflected in their conversation with Baldanders, given that human civilisation will end in 50 years or so?

Even though FB&O don't know it, the right answer to Sev's question is: "Because Tzadkiel wanted to make alterations to your eidolon."

But I'm not sure I believe Apheta's reflection-back-in-time speculation. It may be that Sev is his own ancestor; perhaps he inherits the faculty implanted by Tzaadkiel from himself. He resurrects Dorcas with no conscious intent, not even knowing her body is there, and Dorcas rises to clasp his hand. Perhaps blood calling to blood ...

Final item in this lengthy post: Sev's "testing". I think the best explanation of most of the events on Yesod is that Tzadkiel is giving Sev a final check to make sure he's been conditioned well enough not to interfere with the operation of the "link" in calling the White Fountain to Urth. So:

- Do it even if it's likely meaningless? Check! After their night together, Apheta (lying) hammers him with discouragement & reasons for not going ahead. He and Urth don't really matter; it's the human race as a whole which is going to bring forth the Hieros. There are thousands of worlds with humans; it'd be better to be able to take care of them all at once, but physical constraints prevent this. What we do with you, we're going to have to do with thousands of other representatives of their worlds. None of them are individually important. I'm just a mid-level bureaucrat in the whole process, and you're nothing special. We don't even like you very much. If you fail it won't make anything worse but if you succeed everything you ever loved will be destroyed.

- Suspension of empathy? Check! The passage leading to the "trial" chamber is lined with scenes of Sev's various tortures & executions seen from the victim's viewpoint, which he pretty much ignores.

- Do it even if fellow humans (all the sailors except for Gunnie) hate the idea enough to die to stop it? Check!

On the other hand, Tzadkiel doesn't want Sev to think about things too carefully. There is urgency, and a sense of large risks taken.

Rush Sev through Yesod (less than a day), confuse him so he can't ask good questions, get him back to Urth in another day, rush him through his "mission" in what seems to be less than a week, herd him back on course when he's about to go astray, rush him back to his future just in time for the destruction of Urth. By the time the white fountain arrives & Urth is destroyed, for him it's been perhaps ten days since his trial. He never has a chance to think. And as he says to a Pelerine at the Lazarate, he's not a quick thinker.

But amongst the things which Apheta says, and which I believe: the Yesod-ites were indeed running a big risk that the game might go against them.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com wrote:

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This power might be inherited, and may also be what is required for an eidolon to instinctually become real again. In that case, it could support both (IIRC Borski's) theory that the old Autarch is Severian's mother Katherine, and mine that there is some hidden way of choosing successor autarchs: despite the lack of a visible dynasty, they are all blood relatives from a series of trysts with and among the servants and prisoners in and around the ruling household of the Commonwealth, and the assassination attempts on the heirs by both "good" and "evil" time travelers are tests for the attribute as well as attempts to influence the candidate one way or another.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >