

Sev the Murderer

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 05 Jun 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5043>

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 05 Jun 2008, 10:52

One of the first things Sev does in BOTNS is kill an innocent man who is fighting to prevent the violation of his dead, who presents no danger to him and with whom he has no quarrel.

"The second volunteer rasied his ax, then hesitated ... he circled to get a clear stroke ... The ax rose; I grasped the helve just below the head almost by reflex, and found myself at once in the struggle, kicking, then striking. Quite suddenly it was over. The volunteer whose bloodied weapon I held was dead."

The context makes it clear that the blood is the "second volunteer's", and that Sev has killed him. Only later does Sev come out and say explicitly that he did so. Perhaps somewhere he expresses some kind of remorse or shows some empathy, but I don't recall it.

Sev does this to protect Vodalus, of whom he knows practically nothing except that he is a grave robber, apparently just because he likes Vodalus' style: " .. it was that willingness [to die] that kindled my admiration for him." And because he is attracted to Thea.

The culminating point of Sev's sham "trial" in Yesod is when he joins battle on the side of the idolons against the sailors fighting to prevent the destruction of Urth. (UOTN XXI) The idolons are weak at first, then appear to gain strength as he focuses on them, and when he joins the battle, they triumph at once.

There is a resonance here; once again he takes sides against the real defenders in a cause he knows almost nothing about. He has no idea who the Hierogrammates and Hierarchs really are, or what their agenda is, or how it is to be accomplished. He had meant to question Apheta the night before, but was distracted by sex. At the crucial point, he chooses figments and fantasies over the lives of real people.

This, I believe, was the point of his "trial" - willingness to countenance the death of his fellows in a cause which he does not understand, and which he makes no real effort to understand. But right at the start of his story he demonstrates the characteristics which led to his selection for the role.

(Part of Gunnie's role in the story is I think to give us a viewpoint not infected with Sev's woolly mysticism. She, like the other sailors, doesn't seem particularly impressed with the Hierodudes; should she be, after experiencing Tzadkiel's apparent inability to maintain good order even on the Ship?

At any rate, she calls Apheta a whore. (UOTNS XXIII)

Apheta: "On Urth, women who look as I do, do no work at all - or so I have heard." Gunnie: "Some do.")

Dave Tallman — 05 Jun 2008, 12:03 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Thlassocrat wrote:

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Sev was raised to kill without pity, so this is not surprising. Probably if he had not helped Voldalus that night he would have been mistaken for a grave robber and killed himself, but I agree about the immorality of what he did.

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The real defenders? Now you are arguing for a complete moral inversion of the entire series, and I can't agree. The Sun wasn't dying of natural causes; someone put a black hole into it and shortened the life of the entire biosphere by millions of years. Was it worth catastrophic global warming to put the Sun back to normal? The choice of futures was the world of the Green Man or the world of Ragnorak. I believe Sev was on the right side, however foolish his motives. He was a flawed hero, not a villain.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 05 Jun 2008, 12:39 · follows Dave Tallman

On Thu, 05 Jun 2008 22:03:17 +1000 Dave Tallman

<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

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I don't think Sev was in any danger. The volunteers had seen him before, at the gate. If he had to intervene, it could have been on their side, and he could no doubt have killed Voldalus, given the position.

His training was in judicial punishment and execution, not private murder. What he did was certainly criminal, even in this benighted society.

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I've argued at length previously for just that inversion. Was it worth killing almost everybody on Urth to restore the Sun, just one star among many with human-populated worlds? If it was so necessary to restore it, could not humanity have been evacuated, as it was in Master Ash's timeline? What exactly were the Hiero-dudes seeking to accomplish? We really don't know, beyond some vague puffy story about repellant cycles of pain and evolution. Why assume that the Hieo-dudes and their plans are *good* things?

Anyway, the overwhelming majority of humans present in Yesod were in no doubt of what they thought about it. But their vote didn't count. They had been tricked - told they were to be spectators, dragooned into being matyrs.

Just on the topic of what exactly the Hiero-dudes goals are ... because Severian never really questions and examines them, we don't really know. To become like the Hieros? But how, and anyway, where are those Hieros?

I take as a hint this comment from Sev to Apheta in UOTNS XX: "You Hierarchs are magicians. You're more powerful than those I once met, but magicians still."

Before he meets those magicians, he finds a mutilated cock on the path, a charm against the coming of the New Sun. Perhaps Sev himself is a mutilated charm against the coming of Christ.

John Smith — 05 Jun 2008, 16:35 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Vodulus is like Robin Hood. He lives in the woods and battles the evil king. At least this is what Severian believes at the time. He has a romantic view of the outlaw-rebel, which explains why he kills a man to protect Vodulus.

Of course, Vodulus is not really fighting for freedom

and justice. But Sev only learns later what Vodalus really stands for.

--- thalassocrat at nym.hush.com wrote:

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