

The Two Severians

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 01 May 1998

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m.driussi — 02 May 1998, 01:04

vizcacha,

We are on the same page here.

Yes, even with the Claw and all bells and whistles, Severian can still blow it. Sometimes he does right all on his own, like refusing to kill Agia. At other times, just when he is about to blow it, *deus ex machina* saves the day: in the commotion at the gate of Nessus, for example, where he was about to gruesomely kill the drover whose whip had struck Dorcas, <shazam!> drover killed by his own horses.

The next question we have to tackle is: where is the "present" in such a system where future is so looped into past? The reason why I ask is that it seems that TBOTNS is always a step back from the "present" (ignoring the fact that it is a memoir, etc.).

See, it appears to take time to pass in the Urth Cycle, and time flows evenly (at the same rate) in the ages Severian visits. When Severian walks from Typhon Era to Valeria's Reign, he stops boom! Right at the deluge of the House Absolute. When Sev runs back into the deep past so very fast, he overshoots his white fountain link and is catapulted a bit further before emerging in real time. He has to wait decades (a hundred years?) before the light of the white fountain finally hits Urth, then he runs into the future to boom! Ushas. Where it seems that the same amount of time has flowed by (a hundred years?).

So. The white fountain forms endpoints for Severian's travel (since he is using white fountain energy to travel). He can only go so far into the past as the moment white fountain light hit Urth (plus a hundred years if "time velocity" is high enough to long jump), and he can't go into the future at all . . . he can only go to the Present as defined by the white fountain!

(That trip in the Last House was done using somebody else's machine.)

Anyway, for most of the Urth Cycle Severian is acting in a local present that is slightly behind the Real Present. But then in URTH, when he tells Juturna that she rescued him in the river (I, ch. 2), she says no I didn't but I will now. At that moment, it seems to me, Severian2 has become Severian1: he is clearly triggering an event which will shape his own past; he has finally come up to the Real Present. (This sense is reinforced by the notion that he just time walked to that time--it isn't the time he was born in, it is the future.) Up until that moment, the shade of some other future Severian, just over the time horizon, has been altering and shaping things. But maybe it is just a milestone rather than a real arrival at a new state.

Then there is the enigma of the Atrium of Time. Perhaps it resides in the Real Present . . .

=mantis=

C R Culver — 02 May 1998, 02:22 · follows m.driussi

Mantis hypothesised:

<where he was about to gruesomely kill the drover whose whip had struck Dorcas, <shazam!> drover killed by his own horses.>

I think myself that that was a more merciful death than the "two apricots."

< Where it seems that the same amount of time has flowed by (a hundred years?).>

Can it be that long? How have Odilo and Pega and the other lass lived so long?

<he can't go into the future at all . . . he can only go to the Present as defined by the white fountain!>

That is, perhaps, because the future hasn't happened yet, and a Severian³ hasn't come about.

<At that moment, it seems to me, Severian² has become Severian¹>

It's ever so nice to see you using my terminology, Mantis <g>

<Then there is the enigma of the Atrium of Time. Perhaps it resides in the Real Present . . .>

I've always thought of the AoT as being the same kind of place that Madregot flows through, i.e. outside the general scheme of Time. But, those people and houses had to come from somewhere.

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David Rolsky — 01 May 1998, 21:46 · follows C R Culver

At 10:22 PM 5/1/98 -0400, you wrote:

< Where it seems that the same amount of time has flowed by (a hundred years?).>

Can it be that long? How have Odilo and Pega and the other lass lived so long?

I don't think that they are actually alive. First of all, the Sleeper's priest says that he is the grandchild of the first people who came to Ushas (UOTNS, ch. 51. page 369 of the Tor paperback). Severian asks the priest "Was it you who came to Ushas?"

The priest shakes his head and responds "My father's father and my mother's mother."

We don't really get any idea how old the priest is but assuming that he is even just 20 (which seems young for a priest) and his progenitors each had kids at 20 years old then at least 60 years have passed since the coming of the New Sun. Given the fact that Odilo was at least in his 30s (given the life experiences he describes while on the raft) he'd have to be 90 when Severian returns.

Now lets assume that Odilo was in his 40s, as is the priest, and that the priest's progenitors were 28 when they had their respective children. This would make Odilo something around 106. Given the apparent low tech level of this culture, it seems very unlikely.

I think that when the priest says "There the other gods sleep" (last line of UOTNS) referring to the bowers he is speaking metaphorically and that these are the tombs of Odilo, Pega, & Thais, or at least monuments to them.

This would make sense since Severian's bower is said to look much the same, and its obviously a monument to his death, since it is believed that he drowned.

Plus think how much more interesting it is for Severian to return to a time where he has already passed into mythology (ok, that's not an argument for anything but I still think its cool).

-Dave