

Educating Agia

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 02 May 1998

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Charles Dye — 02 May 1998, 13:50

William H. Ansley <wansley at warwick.net> writes:

Agia has always struck me as being rather too well educated to be from the stratum of society Severian finds her in when he meets her. She seems to know quite a bit about the Conciliator and the Botanic Gardens. Her little speech about the Conciliator at the beginning of V. 1, Ch. 19 (p. 118, Orb ed.) has always seemed a bit odd to me, coming from her. But, then again, I don't believe we ever find out much about her past.

I've never seen Agia as being generally educated. Rather, she seems to have picked up a lot of odd historical facts, or factoids. Her offhand reference to the Conciliator living "say, thirty thousand years ago" (in Shadow, Chapter 19) is unusually precise for a Commonwealth citizen. And the odd phrasing "thousand years" instead of "chiliads" or "millenia" suggests to me that she heard it from someone who is not a Commonwealth citizen. Perhaps someone who was alive that long ago? I see one obvious suspect.

(Wild speculation: could Hethor have been the (unseen) soldier who betrays the chiliarch freed by Severian?)

raster at highfiber.com

William H. Ansley — 09 May 1998, 01:15 · follows Charles Dye

raster at highfiber.com (Charles Dye) writes:

William H. Ansley <wansley at warwick.net> writes:

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Now that I look back on what I wrote and your reply, I think I understand what really bothered me about Agia. I wasn't that I thought she was too educated, it was that she seemed to be too obviously a vehicle for exposition. It seemed to me that Wolfe was letting the seams show in this passage.

But you have answered my objections nicely already. Undoubtedly most of what Agia tells Severian she picked up from Hethor, which explains the "earthly" flavor of her facts. If I also assume that Agia wanted to show off her store of knowledge for Severian to let him know he "wasn't so smart," which seems likely enough, just about all of my problems with this passage of TBotNS disappear.

William Ansley