

Short Story 103: The Map

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Marc Aramini — 25 Aug 2014, 03:09

“The Map” first appeared in 1984 in *Light Years and Dark* and is collected in **Endangered Species**.

SUMMARY: Set after Severian has abolished the torturer’s guild (which was implied at the end of **Citadel of the Autarch** but which became “reformed” the guild by **Urth of the New Sun**), Eata makes his living as the captain of a small boat. In the wake of a beating by his lover Synteche and a man named Laetus in which they break into his chest and steal Eata's map (Eata wanted them to take it and left the key in his pants on the floor), he is commissioned by a man who calls himself Simulatio to take him far South of the Old Citadel of Nessus for an asimi a day to find a place where three roads meet. On the way to the brutal and primitive parts of the city, Simulatio keeps watch in the night and finds the body of Synteche in the river, killed by Laetus. When Eata relieves him on watch, Simulatio hears Eata sobbing in the night and smells perfume in the cabin of the ship.

Simulatio takes a pike on shore and assures Eata that he will return by none, after which Eata will leave. Searching down nebulous streets in search of a treasure indicated on a map he found in an ancient book, he foolishly loses his pike and is eventually accosted by omophagists. They chase and overpower him, but just as he is about to be killed by his own fancy dagger, their greed for the bauble lead them to fight amongst themselves, and Eata arrives to save him. They head back towards the Cygnet Inn, and Eata advises Simulatio to burn his map or to lock it away with a goldsmith and go home until he has recovered. Simulatio wants to continue looking, but Eata refuses to return and casts his silver coin into the river. As Eata casts off with Simulatio on the warf, he says, “You'll come back for me! ? Because I'll let you come with me! Because I'll give you a share!” Eata does not look back, “but his hand shook as it gripped the teller.”

COMMENTARY:

Repeatedly in “The Map”, the things that men value and seek after obsessively cause strife and conflict. Even though Eata planned to let Laetus and Synteche leave together, he still fights them when they wake him from his slumber, getting a beating. Even though the omophagists had their prey cornered and defeated, the attraction of Simulatio’s shiny knife causes them to fight among each other and lose their goal, giving Eata time to intervene. Moralistic themes in Wolfe can often be muted behind the ambiguity, but the concept of “The Map” is powerful without requiring much ambiguity — some obsessions can never come to fruition, and some hopes will never be real. Beyond this theme, there are several other important aspects of “The Map” that bear discussing.

Severian finally gets an objective description (recapitulated on the boat at the culmination of **Urth of the New Sun**), and it reveals that to external perceptions he is a hard man. “Severian would have been angry, too, to be sure, and Severian had beaten [Eata] more than once. He spat out clotted blood. Beaten him worse than Laetus and Syntyche had last night. — Now

Severian was the Autarch, Severian was the law, and murderers died under the law's hand."

This harsh image of black and white justice belies much of the interplay between Palaemon and Severian at the conclusion of **The Citadel of the Autarch**, when Severian returns to the Guild with the plan of abolishing it as something unnecessary. It seems that he has instituted something which even his old "friends" fear. Nevertheless, Eata is no longer a torturer, though murderers must die under the law.

The objective description of the Old Citadel is equally important. Simulatio notices it and comments how out of place it looks. Eata says, "They call it the Old Citadel — I don't know much about it."

Simulatio remarks, "You can almost imagine them going up, can't you" — Just taking off with a silver shout and leaving this world behind. Eata denies his ability to conceive of the Citadel taking off into the heavens — as someone who grew up in the halls, he knows that space flight has been eclipsed by alternative, pragmatic uses. Simulatio says, "That's what they're supposed to do, at the end of time. I read about it someplace."

Eata immediately says that paper has killed many more men than steel — something that we can see come true before the end of the story. Beyond the concept of ideologies promulgated through books and propaganda that inspire men to kill others both for causes and to persecute those not like themselves, we see two maps that hold the vague promise of treasure practically destroying the value of human life. When Simulatio (in the narrative always referred to as "the stranger") looks at the map, "Those spidery streets might — or might not — be the very streets that stretched before him. — The map presented an accumulation of detail, and yet it was detail of a sort that did nothing to confirm or deny location. He committed as much of it to memory as he could, all the while wondering what feature or turning might prove of value, what name of street or structure could have survived where there was no one left to recall it — For an instant it seemed to him that it was not the treasure that was lost, but he himself." He seeks "Life and mastery without limit." Looking at the map, its landmarks are so nebulous that almost any confluence of streets could match its contours. Thus are ideal dreams forced onto reality.

The description of dead Synteché is powerful in its imagery:

"The corpse performed a slow pirouette, like the half turn of a thrown knife seen by an ephemerid, or the tumbling of a derelict through the abyss that separates the worlds. — He tried to judge her as he had judged the women whose compliance he had secured for coins, to weigh her breasts with his eyes and applaud or condemn the roundness of her belly; he discovered that he could not do so, that in the way he sought to see her she was beyond his sight, unreachable as the unborn, unreachable as his mother had been when he had once, as a boy, happened upon her bathing."

Even though his name is given in dialogue, in the narrative text Simulatio's name is never used, while at the start Eata refuses to acknowledge his own name but is instead referred to as Eata in the narrative.

Maxellindis, who is briefly mentioned as a casualty of Eata's obsession, was the daughter of a boatman who appeared in **The Citadel of the Autarch** in Chapter 37: "Across the River Again". Mention of her was also made in Chapter 66: "The Runaway" of **Urth of the New Sun**, which causes extreme continuity problems. When he first sees her, Eata asks if she is in danger, and Severian remarks:

"She's not in as much danger as you are from her," I said. He did not know what I meant, but I

did. His Maxellindis was not Thecla; his story could not be the same as my own. But I had seen the revolving corridors of Time behind the gamin face with the laughing brown eyes. Love is a long labor for torturers; and even if I were to dissolve the guild, Eata would become a torturer, as all men are, bound by the contempt for wealth without which a man is less than a man, inflicting pain by his nature, whether he willed it or not. I was sorry for him, and more sorry for Maxellindis the sailor girl.

In his introduction to **Endangered Species**, Wolfe states he wrote "The Map" because "we have sought and not found, you and I."

CONTINUITY PROBLEMS AND URTH OF THE NEW SUN:

While this story was published in 1984 and **Urth of the New Sun** was not released until 1987, there are some severe continuity problems that are actually created BECAUSE Severian probes Eata for his story so thoroughly. If Eata simply appeared on the boat after the coming of the New Sun and Severian did not inquire about the timeline of his life so particularly, there would be no way to ascertain these inconsistencies. The first thing Eata says is that Severian "never did [Eata] much harm when [Severian] was real." He also says, "There was that time you pounded me. Remember, Severian?" The third person presentation of Severian in "The Map" is much more unkind, and the abuse seems to have occurred more than once.

There is also a rather insane moment in **Urth of the New Sun** when Severian speculates that Eata could have been the one to save Vodalus if things had been different, and Eata makes several of Jonas' Wellerisms, including: "That's what boys are like, like the skipper said when he showed his daughter." However, the timeline and the events presented by Eata don't seem to allow sufficient time to have passed for the events of "The Map" to ever occur if Severian left to bring the New Sun after about ten years as Autarch (Eata says that "a man can spend half his life looking, and never find a thing", and that he has wasted his life and Maxellindis' seeking the treasure of his map. Therefore, in "The Map", Maxellindis is probably already dead and he seems like a man much older than his late twenties).

In **Urth of the New Sun**, Eata says that he left the torturers instead of being elevated to journeyman, then worked with Maxellindis and her father until her father died after four or five years, then smuggled with Maxellindis until a cutter grappled their boat. This occurred about eight years after the ascension of Severian, and then Eata was shipped as a slave by the law to the Xanthic Lands and did not return for over two years, at which point Severian was gone and Valeria was Autarchia. When, then, could he have had his boat when Severian was Autarch and Maxellindis was already gone?

Why this difference in presentation? Maxellindis and Eata are an item in both, and he loses her in both, but are these differences truly only small details that are either easy to misunderstand or slight oversights in the construction of **Urth of the New Sun**?

Or are they evidence of an early iteration? Why does Eata speak in Wellerisms at the end of *Urth of the New Sun*, and why does Severian think of both "The Tale of the Student and his Son" when he sees Eata and also consider that in a different reality Eata saved Vodalus?

A WATERY THREAT:

Eata says, "If you see a face in the water than stares at the light and disappears, it's a manatee. Don't worry about it. But If you see anything that swims like a man, call me." In **Urth of the New Sun**, Eata posits that Maxellindis was pulled to her death by a nixie.

LITERARY AND MYTHIC ALLUSIONS

When Simulatio stands watch, he sees the green light of Lune come down, and thinks that the city on the east bank is merely asleep rather than dead. "Its towers were black, but their sightless windows, thus illuminated from behind, appeared to betray a faint radiance, as though hecatonchires roved the gloomy corridors and deserted rooms, their thousand fingers smeared with noctoluscence to light their way." Hecatonchires, or the hundred handed, were the allies of Gaia against Uranus. Later, Zeus freed them and they guard the Titans in their prison.

NAMES:

Simulatio has the most interesting name, as it is a rhetorical figure of speech, a type of irony in which one feigns great emotion as pretence. It can imply a facade or pretext. (As far as we can tell, Eata is actually engaged in the opposite, dissumulatio, most of the time, acting as if things which exist do not — denying knowledge of the Old Citadel, saying that he can't imagine the towers escaping into the heavens, and pretending that he has overcome his obsession.) There not seem to be a Biblical or Saint reference in the name, unusual for a "normal" citizen of Urth. Is Simulatio an assumed name? He remembers his father's estate in a dream.

Synteché means "fortunate" or "with fate" and is a New Testament name (in the world of Urth, normal citizens are named after saints or Biblical figures, but those from different epochs or origins have more mythic or fictional names). Synteché is famous for a quarrel with Euodia mentioned in Paul's letter to the Philippians, Chapter 4. Paul calls upon an unnamed person to intervene directly in their argument. Here, we have a third party intervening in the dissatisfaction Synteché feels for Eata (Even though Eata is based on his own saint, there is a close resemblance between the names Euodia and Eata). In addition, though Euodia is a female name, there has been some gender confusion and some sources translated the name as that of a male (Euodias)? even going so far as to claim that Euodia was the gaoler of Phillipi — something that would definitely resonate with Eata's old profession as torturer, with all the prisoners in the oubliette and the individual cells.

Laetus means "happy", and is the name of a saint (also known as St. Lie) who served as a guide to Leonard of Noblac (Leonard is the patron saint of prisoners — supplications to him are meant to break the bonds of their chains — which may or may not be relevant, as Laetus has taken broken the lock on Eata's chest and forever taken the physical representation of his obsession away from him, though in a very negative and violent way).

UNANSWERED QUESTION:

Is there any significance to Simulatio's memories of his father's estate? Why is he always called "the stranger" in the third person point of view narrative? Does he have an identity in **Book of the New Sun**?

Why does Eata speak in Wellerisms in **Urth of the New Sun**, when there is no evidence of those speech patterns in "The Map?"

Is there a way to reconcile the timelines for Eata and Maxellindis given in "The Map" and **Urth of the New Sun**?

CONNECTION TO OTHER WORKS:

"The Map" and "The Cat" are the only two "realistic" stories directly related to **The Book of the*

New Sun* (besides its series of sequels, "The Night Chough", and the miscellaneous Brown Book tales like "Empires of Foliage and Flower" which are more like allegories.)