

Severian and the white fountain

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 02 Jul 1998

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mary whalen — 02 Jul 1998, 22:08

This is Sean Whalen (prion).

In the Urth of the New Sun, when Severian goes back in time to the time when he becomes Apu-Punchau, I believe that when he is following the Brook Madregot that since he is not linked to any one place in Briah, he can draw power from the white fountain, even if he entered the Brook from a point that was too far away from the fountain to have yet been reached by its light. So even though he goes back in time when in the Brook, and the fountain thus moves farther and farther away from where Severian was when he entered it, the fountain still exists somewhere, and he can get power from it. However, when he reaches the point in the past where the fountain comes into existence, he can not use its power to continue his journey, as it does not exist beyond that time. He then enters into Briah on Earth and is again constrained by the distance he is from the fountain. It has just come into existence, and he can not come into contact with it's light until the light reaches Earth, traveling at the speed of light (which is much faster than the fountain itself moves). He has no powers at that place and time. After a while, though, he is killed and put in a sealed-up house. Sometime later Ossipago, Barbatus, and Famulimus come to that time and use their power to create an eidolon from his memory. Then he waits until the light from the fountain reaches him. It does, and he now regains his power, so he goes into the future, just as the power of the arriving light allows his old body to resurrect itself. Is this right?

prion

adam louis stephanides — 07 Jul 1998, 20:43 · follows mary whalen

After my most recent reading of *_Urth_*, I realized that I didn't know the answers to some fundamental questions: Why is it necessary for anybody to "bring the White Fountain" to Urth? Why can't the Hierogrammates just send it? And if someone has to bring it, why must it be an Autarch? And if it has to be an Autarch, why Severian in preference to Ymar or the old Autarch? Apheta tells Severian that he passed his examination because "'the chance [was] high that you would bring a fresh sun to your Urth,'" (ch. 22), and Tzadkiel says much the same thing at the "examination," but to the best of my recollection Severian doesn't do anything consciously to guide the White Fountain; he's not even there for most of the centuries during which the White Fountain is approaching. I did eventually come up with some answers. I can't cite texts from the book in support of them, though; they just make more sense than anything else I've been able to come up with. (Peter Wright, as part of his theory that the "religious" aspects of *_Book_* and *_Urth_* are conscious deceptions put forth by the Hierogrammates to hide their self-seeking motives, argues that Severian is made to "bring" the New Sun to convince the people of Urth that their destruction is part of the Increate's plan. I don't agree with this theory, but as will be seen it influenced my own.)

First of all, the White Fountain does not need to be guided by a human. Severian's function is rather to accept the White Fountain on behalf of Urth. Since the New Sun's coming will kill nearly all of Urth's current population, the Hierogrammates feel themselves morally obligated

to get the permission of a representative of Urth before sending it. This is why it has to be an Autarch: because, as Severian says a couple of times, the Autarch is the only inhabitant of Urth who is responsible for the well-being of Urth as a whole.

As for why Severian in particular, I'm not entirely sure about this. It may have something to do with the battle royal between the aquastors and the sailors, whose role I'm not clear on. But I'm inclined to think that the real answer is that Severian is more likely than the other candidates, not to guide the White Fountain successfully, but to accept it in the first place. The Hierogrammates may well have foreseen that had Ymar or the old Autarch been told of the consequences of the New Sun (as they would have to have been had they passed their "trials"), they would have turned it down, rather than assume the burden of responsibility for those millions of deaths. Severian, on the other hand, was indoctrinated as an apprentice torturer with the concept of inflicting pain for the greater good of the whole. Though he failed to act accordingly on two occasions, this indoctrination may have tipped the probabilities in favor of Severian's acceptance of the New Sun.

Any comments? Any better ideas?

--Adam

Marc Coleman — 08 Jul 1998, 08:04 · follows adam louis stephanides

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Well said. He walks down a hallway before his examination and has to see his "clients" from their point of view. When he killed the old Autarch and took the many Autarch's personalities, that seemed pretty symbolic of what comes later, once again doing "what had to be done".
marc

adam louis stephanides — 19 Jul 1998, 12:15 · follows Marc Coleman

On Tue, 14 Jul 1998 Christopher R. Culver wrote:
Adam asked:

Why is it necessary for anybody to "bring the White Fountain" to Urth? Why can't the Hierogrammates just send it?<

This is, IMHO, rather simple. The Hierogrammates are theological beings who serve the Pancreator. As such, they judge the sentient beings of their area and decide whether those people are deserving of a miracle.

What I meant to ask was not "Why don't the Hierogrammates distributes White Fountains to everybody who need one?" but "Having decided to give Urth a White Fountain, why don't they simply send Severian back to Urth, assuring him the White Fountain will be along shortly? Why go through this routine of having Severian "become" the White Fountain as well, which he then "guides" to Urth, or at least believes he does.

Also: > <And if someone has to bring it, why must it be an Autarch?>

Severian mentions on the Ship of Tzadkiel that the Autarch is by right the representative of Urth to the Hierodules, even though he rules a small portion of it.

True, but Severian's "trial" is not, as he originally believes, to determine his or Urth's moral fitness to receive the New Sun, but to determine the likelihood of his successfully bringing the New Sun. So it's not obvious why the New Sun needs to be brought by an ex officio "representative of Urth."

--Adam