

Scale and Focus

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 09 Jul 1998

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m.driussi — 09 Jul 1998, 20:41

Dan Parmenter,

Right, we don't have very clear pictures of the size of the citadel complex, beyond vague sizes: "citadel size" (as opposed to "town size"); "hill size" (as opposed to "seven hill size"). Even in Typhon's time, it is a place of derelict ships called the Old Port --which implies a "new" port, somewhere, presumably the Monarch's capital city (wherever that would be, and whatever it might be named, but there might be hints as to where it was located).

Likewise we know little about Nessus. Who is the ruler of this sprawling city? I'll bet that few have figured out that it is an archon, and that he probably allows each quarter to be run by local people. But where is the archon's palace, how many are in his court? And what was the Wall built for?

Then there are other things: what crimes cause perps to be sent to the Matachin Tower? Political reasons and civil crimes, including arson, child abuse, perhaps embezzlement, maybe even prostitution . . . so why was monial Catherine hauled in? Political or criminal? (Because it has been pretty well established in the text that everybody hauled in has been hauled in for something fairly serious but not necessarily murderous.)

There are tons of details to sift through. Values are assigned to ambiguous details based upon the application at hand. Something like an archeologist assembling a pot from some ancient shards.

So in the case of the Atrium of Time, as all other cases, each "assigned value" can be switched over to its antithesis or just plain "ambiguous neutral." The "pot" of "the Atrium is a time structure like that of Inire's Botanical Gardens and Ash's Last House" can be disassembled until there are just free floating ambiguous elements again.

Such seems to be the case with those early critics who couldn't see what appears so blindingly obvious to most of us today: that Dorcas is Severian's grandmother. Well, the text never =says= that she is! The concept is a pot reconstructed of pieces (in this case, very large pieces found close together, producing a pot with no huge gaps--i.e., it holds water, and is aesthetically pleasing).

For example, people who claim the mandragora is Severian's twin are convinently ignoring the textual facts that the chamber was long sealed, covered in dust, filled with oddly old fashioned furniture; all of which can imply that nobody has entered in living memory. Yet of course this is arguable--that Severian knows the word key for the door means that the old Autarch did too; he may well have visited it once or twice, twenty-three years ago, just to put a stillborn twin baby in brandy on the shelf . . .

=mantis=