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The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 11 Jul 1998

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adam louis stephanides — 11 Jul 1998, 10:34

What a daunting task, pitting my feeble knowledge of the New Sun cycle against mantis's! But I still think I'm correct on the regency issue.

On Thu, 9 Jul 1998 mantis wrote:

Re: Valeria's Regency in the Valeria entry. Do you consider it an error because technically she became regent the moment Severian left Urth? Rather than "during the decades of [Severian's] absence" (which sounds vague and gradual)? Your question makes it seem more likely that you doubt Valeria was his regent while he was visiting Yesod.

Since I believe that Severian stopped being Autarch when he left Urth, I don't think he had a regent, neither Valeria, Father Inire, or anyone else.

I'm nearly positive that Severian uses the term "regent" or "Valeria's regency" somewhere in URTH.

Possibly, but scanning the pages following Severian's discovery of Valeria on the Phoenix Throne, I didn't find any reference to Valeria being a regent. Nor is it likely that there would have been such references before, since not Valeria but Father Inire was Severian's designated successor (despite your cryptic comments in "Regency Plot Thickens").

Nor am I convinced by your ingenious analogies to show that Severian could have still been Autarch even though he speaks (on board the ship) of his Autarchy in the past tense.

In the general case, again using the analogy of a king going by ship to the holy land:

Passenger: "So you still claim to be king of England while you are on this ship out in the middle of the Mediterranean?"

King: "I was king--now I'm on holiday, so I'm the grand poobah of partydom. Good thing my regent is minding the kingdom while I'm away!"

I think the king, if he had not abdicated, would have said he was still king. If someone had asked Clinton, in China, "Are you the President of the United States?" would he answer "I was" or "I am"?

Or, to put it in a skiffy way: if John F. Kennedy gets into a time machine and travels to the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, is he still "President" while he sits there eating his meal and watching the universe collapse in the Grand Gnob? His nation is gone, his planet is gone, his solar system is gone.

This idea--that Severian is taking time-travel into account and being pedantic--is one I hadn't thought of, but I'm inclined to reject it, for three reasons. First, when Gunnie asks Severian if he's aware of the ship's time-travelling properties, Severian says "'Yes, I'm coming to understand so.'" (ch.16, p. 116), with the implication (at least to my ears) that this "understanding" is recent. But Severian first refers to his Autarchy in the past on p. 20. Was he aware of the time-travel aspects then? Second, does Severian know--can he know--that the

Commonwealth is in the ship's past, if in fact it is? My impression is that it goes both forward and backward relative to Briah's time. Third, and this is vaguer than my other points, my feeling is that if Severian were going to make this sort of pedantic distinction, he would say so: something like "I am the Autarch--or rather, I was, but in this time my realm doesn't exist."

And as for the pharaoh analogy you use later, Severian doesn't regard his Autarchy, or former Autarchy, as "just another prop" to be let go of in Yesod. On the contrary, his Autarchy is the reason he's facing "trial," and he knows it. And he's careful to make clear to Gunnie that he "was the legitimate head of the whole of" Urth, despite the de facto limits of his rule. (ch. 3, p. 20)

As for how to designate Valeria (and Father Inire): well, Father Inire has obviously not eaten Severian's brains; and Severian never refers to him as Autarch, so maybe there's a specific title we never hear of for those who rule the Commonwealth without being full-fledged Autarchs. OTOH, Severian has no qualms in referring to Valeria as Autarch (ch. 42, p. 298; ch. 44, p. 315), even though she hasn't received her predecessor's memories and doesn't know the words. He knows more about the constitutional arrangements of the Commonwealth than we ever will, so maybe we should follow his example.

--Adam