

Cenotaph, Regency

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 12 Jul 1998

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adam louis stephanides — 12 Jul 1998, 14:30

On Sat, 11 Jul 1998 mantis wrote:

As I pointed out, Severian has =just seen his cenotaph=, so he knows that something is afoot. Something rotten in the state of Denmark, er, the Commonwealth. OTOH, he seems to assume that only the 100 days he has experienced subjectively have passed in the objective universe

I'm still not sure why you say this. First, I don't see any evidence for it in the text. Second, he knows that since he returned to Briah, he's been bouncing back and forth in time, and (from his conversation with the small Tzadkiel in the previous chapter) that how much time has passed in Briah has nothing to do with how much time has passed for him, but only with how far along the brook he has travelled. Severian can be slow on the uptake sometimes, but if he really thinks only 100 days have passed, he's denser than I've given him credit for being.

so he would figure that Valeria is not dead of old age, but he might worry for her safety as a prisoner of the warlord Agia, Baldanders, Loyal to the Group of Seventeen, or whoever else might have staged a coup, if there was a coup.

All he knows consciously is that he has been officially presumed and declared dead, which is by itself a very bad omen.

So you're now saying that Severian revived the assassin not against Valeria, but against whatever unspecified enemy he believes has displaced him (and declared him dead as a propaganda tool)?

Re: Severian not knowing the ship was traveling through time. Huh. So all that talk about the centuries washing against the hull (even mentioned in TBOTNS, iirc) was just poetry that he didn't really believe?

Okay, you're right on this. In fact, on p. 10 he apparently believes he's the ship has "passed across" the end of our universe and the beginning of the next one. But there's still a problem for your position. You say he describes his Autarchy as being in the past because he believes his Commonwealth is in the past, e. g. Ch. IV, p. 27. But on the previous page he says "'Lune? It's the moon of my world, the moon of Urth.'" Since he believes Urth no longer exists either, according to your position he should say "'It was the moon of my world, the moon of Urth.'"

Re: Clinton in China, and other mundane examples of 20th century technology. The problem here is that, with telecommunications and all, Clinton doesn't have to have to name a "temporary president" to govern while he's gone--and besides, the chain of command has been so hammered out that there is a vice president, and speaker of the house, and so on down to the janitor. So if (when) Clinton has to have surgery to remove the alien implants, what do you know! For the few hours when he is under general anesthesia there actually will be a "temporary pres" in charge of the USA, running breathlessly to a press meeting where (s)he will say, "I'm in charge!"

Which is why I was trying to use medieval and mythological models.
The universe is a big place, Horatio, and when you go to another one,
that's another big place, further still.

Which are good reasons why Severian should appoint a regent (as you assert) or abdicate and appoint a successor (as I assert). I don't see why it's a reason for him to remain Autarch, but then talk as if he isn't.

Your regentless and successorless Commonwealth of Severian's swift
silent abdication is sounding more and more fascinating.

Successorless? Silent? What did I say to give you the idea that that was what I thought? This is what I think happened: immediately before leaving Urth, Severian abdicated (possibly at the point when, he says, he "must don robes of argent," IV, ch. 38). He has already designated Inire his successor, either with the title Autarch or some lesser title. And he expects to be able to reclaim his throne if he fails the test, though not if he succeeds (though by V, ch. 42 he has changed his mind on this latter point). Why Severian doesn't simply appoint a regent, I don't know; maybe the Hierodules required him to abdicate as a precondition of his "trial." This is supported by his fantasy at the end of Ch. 23 that he has failed and "would now be permitted to reclaim the Phoenix Throne"; permitted, presumably, by the Hierodules. If it were his successor he had in mind, I doubt if "permitted" is the word he would use. He would expect his successor to renounce the throne on command.

Anyway, Severian is gone, and Inire is ruling the Commonwealth under whatever title. How we get from Inire to Valeria, I don't know either: either Inire dies, or Valeria decides she's tired of taking orders from some old cacogen. In any case, Valeria takes over, declares herself Autarch, and after it's been concluded that Severian is dead, remarries.

But still, is the main argument Valeria's =regency= rather than
=autarchy=? I'm more interested in piecing together the events.

Well, yes and no. I think that she's either an Autarch or a usurper, not a regent. But the reason I think so is because I think Severian abdicated, which is an event. But I certainly don't regard it as crucial to the understanding of _Urth_.

--Adam