

Il (Peter) Principe

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 14 Jul 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/976>

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m.driussi — 14 Jul 1998, 01:48

Adam,

Actually I believe raster's primary concern re: authentic autarchs is the same as my own--the brain eating bit. It seems to define "autarch" as distinct from "monarch," "suzerain," "dictator of the proletariat," etc.; it also seems to figure into the equation of "how one person can represent many" in a concrete way rather than just the lip-service paid by representative democracy. The autarch
=is= legion--it isn't just a metaphor.

And thus, it doesn't matter what Valeria calls herself, she isn't a real autarch. The higher ups of Yesod would know it if they cared to look, and issues of sovereignty aside (though I agree with you on all or nearly all the points you've made--my intended point was that "Conan the Nomarch of Urth" and other pseudo-autarchs aren't going to be allowed to take the Test: the only recognized representative of Urth is the real autarch), that the common people know Valeria isn't a real autarch is extremely damaging to the domestic situation.

I agree with you that Ymar's test was a put-up job (but he was also hardly an "autarch" in the way I've been arguing, being the first, so there's one excuse for his failure right there) as much as Appian's was. I'll also agree that the autarchs inbetween were told that they would fail if they tried--this may be straight from the text (in any event, I know I've talked with people about it).

Furthermore, Severian's unusual memory might be the one vital thing that makes him the one to succeed (as many have argued), but I would add: "In addition to being the cerebral heir of umpteen autarchs."

That two men lost their procreative ability for a "game" of course seems unnecessarily cruel (discounting all the inbetween autarchs who were spared) and leads like an expressway to the Peter Wright theory of megaconspiracy godless godgames. However, I'd like to point out that Venant didn't lose his manhood, he actually died in the "game"--which is "overcompensation" to one way of thinking (Briah vs. Yesod), or "one greater evil does not cancel out two lesser evils" (mutilation and death vs. life). (Or Venant's death was all just "faked.")

Re: the rickety nature of the autarchy. I wouldn't try to dissuade you from this at all--it is prone to accident, just as you say. We even have text (in URTH) to show what that is like: the old autarch(s) gather up and say, "Find somebody else right now (because you are dying)."

The Byzantine model fails at this level, since Byzantine emperors had to be cunning, ruthless, etc., clawing their way to the top. Whereas we know that the autarchs often enough just stumbled into it--the Peter Principle crafts a "Claudiarchy" of common men and women, including second-rate scholars, farmwives, wantons, sailors, and artisans (V, ch. 34). (Again leading back to "one representing many," and "one person embodying the common people" threads.)

Also note: the very literal OEdipal rites of those "dynastic autarchs." Eeuuw! (Well, you don't have to sleep with your parent--just eat the one's living brains. And then have them yakking in your head for the rest of your life--and beyond!)

So yes, yes, very rickety. I imagine Inire stepping out of the shadows to help along a situation that requires a deus ex machina to deliver a brain-eater--that is, Inire won't allow the system to fail; the autarch breaks his neck, a scullary maid becomes Autarch. Unless, perhaps in the case of Valeria, if the system has outlived its function and has ceased to exist as far as Yesod is concerned (except in the sort of "opium for the masses" Urtheopolitique sense that Wright argues it was all along anyway!). (Even then, it seems to fail as the masses aren't opiated enough for Valeria's Reign--they are agitated. But I'm sure Wright would say, has said, that this indicates how deeply they've bought into the sham religion from Yesod--they really think it matters who is on the throne and they think they won't get their hyperspace-sent apocalypse if it ain't a genuine autarch!)

=mantis=

adam louis stephanides — 19 Jul 1998, 16:35 · follows m.driussi

mantis,

I was away for a few days, or I would have responded to your post earlier. I have a few minor cavils, which I'll discuss elsewhere, but I found it admirably clear and enlightening.

Unfortunately, it only leaves me more baffled regarding _Urth_ as a whole. In fact, it now seems to me that _Urth_ is at least as obscure as _Castleview_. To start with, the Hierodules have been supporting the "rickety" political structure of the Commonwealth for a thousand years or more, apparently solely so that at the end of this time Severian, the man destined to bring the New Sun, will be Autarch. This is too reminiscent of _The Sirens of Titan_ for my taste. More to the point, it makes even more urgent the questions I asked in an earlier post: why must an Urthman bring the New Sun, why an Autarch, and why Severian? I'm not as confident that the answers I gave are correct as I was then, but I haven't seen any better answers. For that matter, I'm doubtful about the whole punishment-and-redemption-of-Urth schema: if the "redemption" involves wiping out 99.9% of Urth's population, one would think the "punishment" could be dispensed with as superfluous.

I'm also baffled by the course of events surrounding Severian's "trial." Why is he led to think that his trial will be like his predecessor's? Is it just so he will be a more humane ruler as Autarch? But then why isn't he told the truth as soon as he leaves Urth?

And what is the function of the battle royal between the sailors and the aquastors? Were the Hierogrammates really willing, after all those years of preparation, to risk the survival of their race on the outcome of that battle?

In short, your post made me realize that so far, the first half of _Urth_ doesn't make sense for me. Any help you, or anyone else of course, can give me would be most appreciated. (If this post seems querulous, it's a reflection of my desperation.)

--Adam