

Digest Urth, or brains thereof

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 14 Jul 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/990>

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Charles Dye — 14 Jul 1998, 15:57

adam louis stephanides <astephan at students.uiuc.edu> explicates:

raster argued that, as long as Severian was still alive or if he'd been lost at sea, nobody could be a legitimate Autarch. It's not clear to me whether this is because a legitimate Autarch must eat his predecessor's brains ...

Such an ugly phrase, that. Can't we come up with some polite euphemism? "Breakfast for your head" ... no, wait, I like "eating brains" better. Never mind. Yes, that was my point: you need a body for succession to proceed.

... or simply that a legitimate Autarch must be chosen by his predecessor. If the former, it would seem that the Autarchy runs a grave risk of being permanently lost, either through the Autarch being captured by the enemy, or killed in battle or by assassination with the designated successor unable to arrive in time.

But note that ol' Appian has been captured by the enemy! It's made pretty clear that Severian is the "designated successor," but I'm not certain that there always is one. Alls ya needs is a corpse, a knife, and the drug -- all provided by Appian -- and instructions, which presumably Inire would have provided had A been unable to. The next- in-line may be a randomly chosen bystander, if you don't have a designated successor handy.

(You'll notice that after Appian's injury and capture, Inire can be seen skulking about. Severian thinks he's trying to carry out a rescue. Fat chance -- Appian's as good as dead. I believe Inire is there to ensure the continued dynasty.)

That said, yes, the regime does have some problems. It also has a few advantages. Fr'instance, it's easy to decide whether or not an individual claiming the Autarchy is the real McCoy. He knows the words!

m.driussi at genie.com writes:

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 also provides a slick justification for the royal plural.

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.

Or a honey steward, of course.

mary whalen -- well, okay, prion -- notes:

Has anyone noticed that the Autarch Appian's name is a homophone for apian (bee-like)? Any connection with the Honey Steward?

Bingo! Name pun -- Wolfe loves 'em. Also, of course, another Claudian reference.

raster at highfiber.com

Michael Straight — 15 Jul 1998, 11:17 · follows Charles Dye

On Tue, 14 Jul 1998, Charles Dye wrote:

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I have to admit some confusion on that point. Wouldn't anyone judging the Autarch also have to know the words in order to recognize them? Shouldn't any such person be able to speak "the words" and pose as the Autarch?

Are they perhaps some sort of hypnotic triggers that people recognize but are unable to remember?

-Rostrum

Mark Millman — 15 Jul 1998, 12:04 · follows Michael Straight

On Wednesday 15 July 1998, Rostrum wrote:

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This seems entirely possible, though if I recall (and you've all just had a taste of how bad my memory can be) we're really given no evidence of how the castellan of the Citadel reacts to Severian's word of command--whether, that is, he jumps to an implanted compulsion or simply recognizes the password, as it were (ignoring the possibility you raise, Rostrum, that he recognizes a word that deliberately has been made unavailable to his conscious mind, which I'd call a special case of the latter situation).

However, I don't think this is an insuperable obstacle. For one thing, many of the words command mechanical contrivances, so all a putative Autarch would have to do, for example, would be to open the door behind the throne and maybe operate a couple of other devices to prove his or her legitimacy. Or the words of command for three or four subordinates could be employed; even if the officers are consciously aware of their passwords, they may only be inherited, so to speak, in the line of succession for each office. The person who knows several must therefore be the Autarch.

Or (and to me this seems most likely) Inire, who seems to be as ubiquitous as flan in Spanish restaurants, could assert the legitimacy of each successor based either on his having witnessed the essential act of succession or on a test of the individual in question. It seems as though he must know a great many, if not all, of the words of power; and one would think him, in this context at least, to be for all practical purposes incorruptible.

Mark Millman