

Valeria and Catherine and Peter and Doug

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 10 Oct 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1157>

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Charles Dye — 10 Oct 1998, 20:31

Robert Borski writes:

Of course, that would require original thinking, and since it's much easier and cheaper to shoot at other people's clay pigeons...

Touche; that's fair, I guess. I'd hoped to simply delurk and plug a clay or two, then relurk; but I guess it's not to be. Okay, here are what I see as the most parsimonious explanations. (Call it "biblical literalism" with a lowercase b, or perhaps "lupine fundamentalism.")

raster does not like the Corridors/Atrium of Time escape clause, but I'm sticking with it. Or to quote the LEXICON URTHUS entry for A of T: "A time traveling structure, like the Last House, located in the heart of the Citadel. Inhabited by at least Valeria and her old servant, it may also house Catherine." Like mother, like daughter, eh mantis (whose second larva has recently emerged: Congrats!)? Of course we could both be wrong.

It seems to me that the Atrium and Valeria are time-travelers, but only in the sense that the Acropolis and William F. Buckley are: fossils, reminders of a distant past. Severian can enter the Atrium from below, but can't find it from the air: sure, this is reminiscent of Master Ash's abode, but there are simpler explanations. Severian is not a veteran aviator; he has difficulty with directions; the Citadel is a big place, and the Atrium is a small place, and none of the old maps fit.

Severian enters through the tunnels, but it doesn't appear that he exits through them. He seems to get back to the Matachin tower he knows anyhow.

Second larva: Why haven't we heard this from mantis? (Not that I automatically reject everything you write, Robert.) Congratulations from me also.

raster also brings up the claw-has-never-vanished argument. To my mind, if someone steals my wife's wedding ring and I knew who it is, the ring has not vanished. It's been stolen by a definite individual (as opposed to it simply dematerializing, or burning, since diamonds, the hardest substance known to man, are flammable). I also think the answer to the Hierodule's twice asked question (it's even repeated once in italics)--"Where did you get it?" (i.e., the Claw)--and which is later revealed to be a test that Severian has failed--is: "I didn't get the Claw, it got me." It gets Catherine in the same way, I'd argue.

I truly don't think the Pelerine uses "vanished" to mean "dematerialized" -- she knows someone has it, she just doesn't know where. I also get the distinct impression that this has happened in the past, perhaps more than once (the Pelerines regard it as part of the Master Plan), just not recently enough for Severian's mom to have been the culprit. Unless we invoke time travel, of course.

Then too, in the tradition of American statesmen, I have to ask: How do you define the word "is?" <g>

Also in regards to Caesidius resembling Severian (as Eata notes), this is because he is Severian's maternal grandfather. And Catherine, his daughter, is easily adult-age when the deluge strikes. Severian's been gone several decades, after all.

Caesidius clearly does resemble Severian. This could be because of some family connection. It could also be pure coincidence -- my boss and I look similar enough that folks mistake us for brothers, but it's not so. But the solution that makes the most sense to me is that Valeria simply preferred, consciously or unconsciously, to remarry someone who looked like her first husband. It couldn't have been too difficult; there are on the order of 1500 noble families extant in the Commonwealth. Call me old-fashioned. I prefer my causes to precede my effects, only invoking time travel where absolutely necessary.

I noticed the other day that Peter Falk strongly resembles detective Columbo. A close cousin, perhaps? Which brings me to:

Question for raster, then (or Kieran M or anyone else.): who's the woman arrested by the Praetorians in the loggia when Severian returns to the House Absolute (Urth, Ch. 41) since you seem to think my theory's full of balloon juice? I still say it's the *original* Katharine, she of canonical fame to the Torturer's guild. Who do you?

I nominate the Contessa Carina.

"But she's a fictional character!" Yes. So are Severian, and Thecla and Dorcas and all the rest. They are all creations of Gene Wolfe. Why shouldn't they meet one another?

Or, if you prefer, she is a metafiction: a story within the story which is Severian's "reality." If Severian can billypilgrim through time, surely he can also slip between the "layers of reality beneath the reality we see" which he mentions in Chapter 16 of *Shadow*. This contact between metafiction has a definite Borges or Douglas Hofstadter feel to it. On a more prosaic note, it could simply be an early warning sign of Severian's developing messianic insanity. [1]

I'd also like to point out that two of the actors in Dr. Talos's play go on to live the roles they previously acted. Perhaps the play is the "reality," and Severian's entire life a fiction constructed around it.

Also, I'd be very happy to entertain anyone's else's notions of who Sev's maternal grandparents might be. Of course, that would require original thinking, and since it's much easier and cheaper to shoot at other people's clay pigeons...

Many of the puzzles in the Book have answers, but I don't think that all of them do. What's the name of the mason outside Jader's hovel? And even if we can all agree on a canonical set of grandparents (unlikely), is it necessary to go further and name the great-grandparents?

Short answer: I don't know. I'm not sure we're meant to.

raster at highfiber.com

[1] Has anyone seen Bruce Willis in "Twelve Monkeys?" I thought that flick has a pronounced wolvish feel to it. I spent most of the movie wondering whether Willis's character was a time traveler or just insane, before realizing that he could be both....

Raster spoke:

<Severian is not a veteran aviator; he has difficulty with directions; the Citadel is a big place, and the Atrium is a small place, and none of the old maps fit.>

Yes, and Severian does mention that he must have seen the place he sought many times.

And continued:

<I nominate the Contessa Carina.

"But she's a fictional character!" Yes. So are Severian, and Thecla and Dorcas and all the rest. They are all creations of Gene Wolfe. Why shouldn't they meet one another?>

The events of the latter half of the UotNS are indeed in Canog's Book of the New Sun, from which Dr. Talos drew his play. I favour the idea that Severian, who can now walk the corridors of time, met Canog once again and filled him in on the latest happenings.

To Kieran: As for the idea that Wolfe is making use of cheap writing elements when he makes Severian's family the way it is, I offer this explanation: Wolfe is fallible. Aren't we all? And he does much the same thing in the BotLS.

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"The darkest dreams are the ones that come true."
-Warren Defever

Peter Stephenson — 12 Oct 1998, 07:46 · follows CRCulver

Charles Dye wrote:

[1] Has anyone seen Bruce Willis in "Twelve Monkeys?" I thought that flick has a pronounced wolvish feel to it. I spent most of the movie wondering whether Willis's character was a time traveler or just insane, before realizing that he could be both....

For a time I thought so, but I finally found the film wasn't ambiguous enough: there seemed to be just the one interpretation that finally worked, unless he had some impressively consistent fantasies. Maybe I've read too much Wolfe? But it's normal for films to be much more explicit than books, it's the nature of the medium. That would be the real problem with a New Sun film, even more than the casting. The only ambiguities filmmakers tend to let through are walloping big ones made with a sledgehammer, this_is_ambiguous_. I felt that a bit about Blade Runner, for example: it doesn't make any kind of sense to me for Deckard to be a replicant but look! We've made an ambiguity. (Too cynical? Never mind the cyn, write it anyway.)

corncrake

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