

Imps

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 15 Oct 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1183>

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Robert Borski — 15 Oct 1998, 13:20

When Severian as a very young boy runs his first errand to the Witches Tower, he tells us "I was ushered into the presence of an old woman who sat in the only chair I had yet seen there, staring through a glass tabletop at what appeared to be an artificial landscape inhabited by hairless, crippled animals."

But what might these hairless, crippled animals be?

Of course, Severian at this age may not fully appreciate what he's seeing, but it does seem the Cumaeen may be attempting some sort of clairvoyance, looking at something a good deal away in time or space.

If there were only one hairless, crippled animal, I'd suggest it was the bottled mandragora Severian finds in the long-abandoned autarch's quarters in the Citadel. But there's more than one.

Now to backtrack a little. Of the over 400 characters in New Sun, only two of them speak in blank verse, and I think this is meant to suggest the two are linked. They are the Cumaeen and Famulimus. So could therefore the Cumaeen be attempting to link up clairvoyantly with Famulimus, who I propose is a relative? Famulimus and Barbatus are named, after all, after Roman gods who look after children--just as they're looked over by Ossipago, their robot babysitter. In other words they're children and the Cumaeen is their mother. As for the artificial landscape and immobility I'd like to suggest Famulimus and Barbatus are in their refrigerated berth aboard the Quasar/Flying Cloud, which as we see in UotNS, appears to be filled with water--hence their immobility.

That or they're the prototypes for Josepha's toy imp, which is replaced by a frog when Thecla and Thea are young girls (not that the two are mutually exclusive).

Robert Borski

John Gersten — 15 Oct 1998, 11:36 · follows Robert Borski

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I always thought this was just a large microscope, which Sev would perforce see as a thing of wonder. After a quick glance, I could see someone with no knowledge of bacteriology or cell biology interpreting this as an "artificial landscape inhabited by hairless, crippled animals."

Of course, this "view-from-above of crippled animals" may well be how the spacefaring characters in the book regard the denizens of Urth (or even how Wolfe views them <grin>)...

John