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The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Apr 1999

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Robert Borski — 08 Apr 1999, 20:06

Thank you for your kind words about the Lexicon. It doesn't give the name of the boatman, I don't think, but Robert Borski and I are in the habit of calling him one version or another of "Charon," since he is so obviously linked to the ferryman of the dead.

mantis favors Charonus, if I remember correctly, while I like Caron, because there's a saint by that name. I also believe it's possible that Becan's father is named similarly. Granted, he's no ferryman figure; but his son and granddaughter do wind up being eaten by the alzabo, a houndlike beast that in all probability has come to Urth from Saint Anne, one of the sister worlds in Wolfe's THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS. So the Stygian connection, although different in context, is still preserved.

I suppose when we all grow up and get serious we will call him "Boatman I, XXII" ("boatman eye-twenty-two") in contrast to "Boatman I, II."

Actually, I argue elsewhere they're both the same--Severian having an enormous amount of difficulty in recognizing members of his own family (which may explain the Contessa in the Path of Air enigma, since with raven hair and a dark complexion she resembles Mom). And the woman Boatman I asks about may be (or so he hopes) Dorcas, who if she's drifted free of the Lake of Birds (since he can't find her there) may have wound up in the river.

She not only grasps his hand, she is pulling him _down_. Next thing we know, he is near-drowned at the edge of the water, with barely enough strength to save his sword. Dorcas is already out of the water and helps him to safety. When Sev raises the dead it always weakens him, and the newly-risen dead are always befuddled. So what happened between chapters, when they were both underwater?

Roy raises an interesting point here, and my take on it is unorthodox. I believe that the hand pulling him down belongs to Juturna or one of the other undines--remember, we've already been told "There's been some sort of trouble on the river" (similar words underscore the appearance of undines late in CITADEL) and what others describe as manatees--the very human faces of which may have inspired our legends of mermaids--may be one of the Brides of Abaia. The same attempt to mate may also have been extended later to Baldanders (remember the dream Sev co-opts when they're sleeping in the same bed?), only Baldanders accepts, and the result is the child Severian later describes as Baldander's catamite. At least this makes more sense to me than arguing that the hand which is pulling him down is also the one that later pulls him up.

She regurgitated some of the lead weights on the night she and Sev parted ways in Thrax.

Anybody willing to buy that this may also be symptomatic of morning sickness? Severian and Dorcas have been having sex long enough for her to be entering this stage of pregnancy, and it's interesting to note that nine or so months later, when Severian sees Dorcas for the last time

in Oldgate, "on the floor near her was a basket, not small yet not large either." Could this basket perhaps contain a baby?

And last but not least let me add my welcome to Dr. Gevers (I loved the Nova Express review, and like all good reviews it made me want to reread tBotLS) as well as applaud the new Laidlow project. Long may you both contribute to the fruitful study of Gene Wolfe.

Robert Borski