

Specula Speculations: Where Hethor Hides His Mirrors

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 03 Jul 1999

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Mitchell A. Bailey — 03 Jul 1999, 14:00

While I haven't fathomed where Hethor came from, nor his real name (and if it's Kim Lee Soong, why is he never described as resembling a Xanthoderm, as Agilus and Agia were?), but I don't think it's any great mystery how and where he came by his mirrors or how he transports them, once one reads the fourth chapter of UNS. There it is explained that the "apports" are teleported randomly and spontaneously by the action of the molecule-thin specula-sails of the Ship. It is not much of a stretch to suppose that any reasonably intelligent and motivated sailor might obtain some spare "sailcloth" and teach him/her/itself its use in deliberately summoning critters.

It is practically stated that Hethor came out of the deeps of the "Age of Myth" as a career astronaut on forgotten space flights probably on ships very like the towers of the Citadel. It is reasonable to suppose that at some point he found himself on The Ship of Tzadkiel, one of the countless crew members drawn from all of space and time.

There was some speculation, I can't seem to find it in the archives now, that the "little man with dirty gray hair like Hethor's" who translated for the leader of the jibers who kidnapped Severian in UNS, actually was an earlier avatar of Hethor himself. I can't rule that in or out but I do think that passage signals something important about Hethor: he not only was at some time in his subjective life present on The Ship, but he was a jiber!

If you accept that Hethor could have been a jiber, most likely in my opinion after having served a sailor and getting into trouble, then his state of mental health and his experimentation with mirror thaumaturgy seems to fit right into the picture. Let's see, he got the brig for stealing sailcloth and apportioning dangerous creatures so he joined the jibers and continued his experimentation; or, he was written up for something more mundane and learned about sailcloth after he joined the jibers...

His mental state probably ties in with a possible explanation for the apparent fact that such catoptrismancy is not in more widespread practice: it is exceedingly hazardous and only someone deranged would dare attempt it on a trial-and-error basis, even if perhaps Hethor had a competent mentor. The deadly creatures such as notules and corrosive slugs and salamanders one deals with is just the start of it; one could accidentally apport oneself somewhere unpleasant or summon wild Urthshattering energies such as stellar cores or black-hole gravitational fields or hunks of antimatter or even more exotic things. It is apparent that the Ship is not merely a lightsail propelled craft, but actually uses the exotic properties of its mirror sails to in effect teleport itself FTL.

Anyway, it would appear friend Hethor somehow escaped the Ship with a quantity of specula-sail folded into a compact bundle like a "Space Blanket" and some knowledge of how to exploit its properties.

Perhaps he learned to access the Corridors of Time, as has been hinted. He could have returned to his own age for awhile and served on a human ship again, perhaps at which point his love-doll was stolen. I thought Peter's suggestion that he murdered his shipmates for this deed intriguing, especially the reasoning behind it. Who knows, maybe he got hold of some alzado before eating his dead friends? Then, he escapes to Nessus and meets Agia.

It seems nearly obvious that Hethor's "mirror" is specula-sailcloth stolen from the Ship. As such it would pose no conventional problems in transport or concealment. He might merely need to find privacy and perhaps a jerry-rigged temporary framework of whatever was handy (such as trees, the wall of a closet, etc) to support his mirror.

(but unconventional problems: would folded sailcloth not tend to spontaneously operate in Hethor's pocket? That could be uncomfortable...)

A better question: once Hethor summons these beasties, how does he command them and motivate them to obey him? Are the notules and salamander intelligent enough to comprehend "if you don't do this for me, you'll never see your home again?"

P.S. Hethor apparently is a square dance leader or talk-radio aficionado as well as sailor and catoptrimancer; Father Inire referred to him as a "caller".<g>