

Bullets of power? Lead poisoning?

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 30 Sep 1999

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Mitchell A. Bailey — 30 Sep 1999, 21:50

Greene, Carlton wrote:

Fortunately for Dorcas, they were not of the pyrotechnic variety described elsewhere in TBOTNS -- otherwise, her regurgitation of them in Thrax might have sent her the way of little Severian -- gone in a flash.

Um, are you referring to the "bullets of power" Baldanders provided for the lake people? Baldanders told us what they were: "Natrium" - i.e. sodium metal. `_Sword_` contains a pretty good description of what happens when a slug of sodium about the size of your thumb or more contacts water: there's a violent explosion, the sodium partially melts and breaks up, and each piece falls and repeats the cycle until it is spent. Very sudden and energetic reaction, comparable to a partial stick of dynamite. Sev's act of jumping into the water to set off the explosion that ripped the reed boat to shreds was quite realistic, except I don't see how Sev could have known to do that! I have worked as a chemist in chemical disposal, so I'm acquainted with the phenomenon. I was told someone once attempted to dispose of waste sodium by throwing a sealed drum off a surplus PT boat and then withdrawing to extreme range to shoot holes in it with a sniper rifle. They almost didn't make it, running away at wide open throttle!

No, I think these bullets are of the sort the kelau use in their slings. The firework arbalests used a type of bolt or dart.

It also raises some rather odd toxicology questions -- could a normal human being really walk around for as long as she did with a belly full of lead shot without suffering brain damage or, at the very least, a really bad tummy ache?

Now THAT's a great question! Gastric juices would surely leach lead, and Dorcas walked around for about 3 months like that? Perhaps her illness could be interpreted as lead poisoning? It would be pretty rough on a hypothetical fetus, too.