

The Conation of Catodon; Severian's skull (long)

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 21 Oct 1999

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Greene, Carlton — 21 Oct 1999, 20:38

In TUoTNS (at 306 Tor Hardback), Juturna the undine explains to Severian that Abaia's a good guy whose been trying to help out the people of Urth all along. When Valeria asks "When has Abaia sought our good?", Juturna replies ...

"He might have destroyed you ... He's tried to tame you instead. Catch Catodon ... cast out his conation. What good? Abaia would make of us a great people."

Webster's defines "conation" as an attempt or, alternatively, as inclination, instinct, drive, wish, or craving.

So who is Catodon and what exactly was he attempting or driven to do? By saying "cast out," Juturna suggests that Catodon has already performed some specific acts as part of his attempt that must be undone.

It is interesting also that Juturna says Abaia would make of "us" a great people. Are humans and the brides of Abaia born of the same stock? The existence of Idas certainly suggests this is so. Also, Baldander's growth and eventual migration to the sea suggest a link between humankind and beings like Juturna. I have also speculated earlier that some of Typhon's family (Scylla, e.g.) may have remained on Earth, growing monstrous in a gambit to achieve immortality a la Baldanders (I do not know if this has been suggested before).

One other interesting tidbit. Many people on this list have discussed the various "alternate Severians" -- the branchings that substantiate in part Severian's claim that he is "rooted in eternity." In this regard, I was fascinated by the skull Sev finds at the bottom of the Gyoll after the Flood. (see p. 333) Sev speculates that it is the skull of a boy apprentice who died many years ago (the skull is yellowed with age), and that the boy died for Severian so that he might cheat Gyoll of his own death (i.e. his death by drowning in Book 1). Sev. places the skull at the gate of his mausoleum in the (submerged) Necropolis.

Given other events in TBoTNS (Sev's death in Sidero, e.g.), this leads me to believe that Sev has found his own skull, and that he did in fact drown that day in Gyoll when he swam among the nenuphars as a boy, resurrected and "copied" as he was in the Sidero/Apu Punchau events.

One last, odd wrinkle: Sev's conversation with Juturna in the audience chamber of the House Absolute. Sev says of Juturna: "She saved me once when I was a boy" and then to her "Do you remember that?" Juturna replies "No. It hasn't yet occurred. It will, because you spoke."

What does this say about Juturna's actions throughout the novels? We now have reason to think that they were motivated in part by her encounter with Sev before the Flood. Why does she help him knowing the New Sun will come (and Abaia be destroyed) if she does? And earlier, what help does she think she can bring to humans about to be drowned in the HA? (see 305-06). Why isn't Juturna concerned about Abaia's demise both just before and after the flood?

Was she somehow bound to go back and save Sev because of his words about it, but still hoped to manipulate him in Abaia's favor in the past?

Just a few thoughts. My apologies if "Sev's skull" has been dealt with before.

Jim Henley — 21 Oct 1999, 23:24 · follows Greene, Carlton

-----Original Message-----

From: urth-errors at lists.best.com [mailto:urth-errors at lists.best.com]On
Behalf Of Greene, Carlton

Why

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Well, here's another one: why would massive flooding kill a bunch of giants who _live in the
water_? The only thing I figure is that if you're a giant who lives in the water and get caught
above a sea bottom that decides it wants to be a continent now, you've got problems.

Something else?

Best,

Jim

What if we only get what we deserve?
Somehow, I couldn't quite summon the nerve"
-- Costello/Bacharach