

Severian's Daughter

The Urth list — 7 messages, 5 voices, 13 Jul 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3349>

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Jennifer Van Goethem — 13 Jul 2002, 16:23

Just a thought, but it seems to me that Thais (isn't that a Jack Vance character?) at the end of Urth has some striking similarities to Severian.

She's tall, "dark and hollow cheeked".

She sleeps on her stomach, cradling her head in her arms, as Severian "has so often lain".

She seems about to tell Severian something when he offers up his blanket, but is stopped short by Pega. Perhaps, "no, Pop, here take my blanket."

Anyway, I realize it's thin, but I've seen stranger theories, supported with less. So...

Jenn

servo — 27 Jul 2002, 16:07 · follows Jennifer Van Goethem

Just a thought, but it seems to me that Thais (isn't that a Jack Vance character?) at the end of Urth has some striking similarities to Severian.

Yes! Of Dorcas, with her leaden morning sickness! Why else would Severian be delighted to meet anyone? And why else would Wolfe had put her on the "boat," and not had her talk?

Hmm... perhaps...

Servo

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Alice K. Turner — 28 Jul 2002, 00:42 · follows servo

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

From: <servo at Robot.Com>
To: <urth at urth.net>
Sent: Saturday, July 27, 2002 12:07 PM
Subject: (urth) Severian's Daughter
Just a thought, but it seems to me that Thais (isn't that a Jack Vance character?) at the end of Urth has some striking similarities to Severian.

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Alice K. Turner — 28 Jul 2002, 01:03 · follows Alice K. Turner

Just a thought, but it seems to me that Thais (isn't that a Jack Vance character?) at the end of Urth has some striking similarities to Severian.

Yes! Of Dorcas, with her leaden morning sickness! Why else would Severian be delighted to meet anyone? And why else would Wolfe had put her on the "boat," and not had her talk?

What an interesting and original idea! Now that you bring it up, it seems very possible, given Thais's description. Here, from the Penguin Dictionary of Saints is some info about Thais:

"Her legend relates that Thais was a notorious harlot, very beautiful and very wealthy, who lived in Egypt during the fourth century. St. Pahnutus, or some other desert monk, was fired with the idea of bringing her back to a virtuous life, an enterprise in which he was successful at their first meeting. She made a public bonfire of her wardrobe and jewelry, and was then taken to a house of nuns, where she entered on a penitential course, never leaving her cell. After three years, she was readmitted to the church's communion, and died a fortnight later. It is the general opinion of scholars that this is nothing more than a moral tale, written for edification; its starting point may have been the Egyptian mistress of Alexander the Great, whose name was Thais."

That Thais was one of those notoriously witty courtesans. Legendarily, she persuaded Alexander to set fire to Persepolis--this is the subject of Dryden's "Ode to St. Cecelia's Day." (Britannica).

-alga

Jennifer Van Goethem — 28 Jul 2002, 01:50 · follows Alice K. Turner

Yes! Of Dorcas, with her leaden morning sickness! Why else would Severian be delighted to meet anyone? And why else would Wolfe had put her on the "boat," and not had her talk?

Well, as I glance back over UTNS, it seems unlikely that Thais could be Severian's kid by Dorcas. The

last he saw of her was a decade or so before leaving to get the New Sun, and he returns several more decades latter, if poor shriveled Valaria is any indication. Thais is in Severian's estimation "fairly young", so perhaps a grandchild?

She does seem to know her way around a boat, being a "sensible woman...bailing downwind." She is remarkably quiet in the discussion of the hypothetical, illegitimate heirs of Auturch Severian. And even more quiet after they're all reunited on the boat. Seems some discussion was had in Severian's absence, huh? And what was she going to say before Pega elbows her in the ribs? For that matter, what's the secret exchange between Pega and Odillo just prior to that?

More questions than answers I'm afraid.

Good Luck to anyone willing to try on this one.

J

James Wynn — 29 Jul 2002, 14:37 · follows Jennifer Van Goethem

Hmmm... well if she's a former sailor, perhaps her sailing experience is not limited to the water. If she's been a crewman on a ship like Severian was on to retrieve the New Sun.....

You are right more questions than answers... so far.

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

From: Jennifer Van Goethem [mailto:screeminwillie at yahoo.com] Sent: Saturday, July 27, 2002 8:50 PM To: urth at urth.net Subject: Re: (urth) Severian's Daughter Well, as I glance back over UTNS, it seems unlikely that Thais could be Severian's kid by Dorcas. The last he saw of her was a decade or so before leaving to get the New Sun, and he returns several more decades latter, if poor shriveled Valaria is any indication. Thais is in Severian's estimation "fairly young...

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Robert Borski — 29 Jul 2002, 18:23 · follows James Wynn

J-the-Genealogist having self-corrected herself:

Well, as I glance back over UTNS, it seems unlikely that Thais could be Severian's kid by Dorcas. The last he saw of her was a decade or so before leaving to get the New Sun, and he returns several more decades latter, if poor shriveled Valaria is any indication. Thais is in Severian's estimation "fairly young", so perhaps a grandchild?

Glad you caught this, because any daughter by Dorcas would be at least 50 years old (Severian making the trip to Yesod in the tenth year of his Autarchy and returning 40 years later), and while the granddaughter postulate is interesting, it is also flawed. This is because Severian and "Thais" have met at least twice before.

Bear with me here as I attempt to explain why I believe this is so.

Shortly after Severian joins Odilo, Pega, and Thais on their makeshift raft, Odilo begins an anecdote about how his father once encountered Severian in the secret passageways of the House Absolute. Severian, dressed in the fuligin of a carnifex, is thought by Odilo père to be on his way to a masque, "of which there are several in one part or another of the House Absolute on any given night. Yet," as Odilo fils continues to explain, his father "knew none was to take place in our Hypogeum Apotropaic, neither Father Inire nor the then Autarchy having much fondness for those diversions."

Notice now both Severian's and Thais's reaction:

"I smiled, recalling the House Azure. The dark woman shot me a significant glance and ostentatiously covered her lips with her hand." Severian thinks Thais wants him to cut Odilo's anecdote short here, but I believe she's attempting to enjoin his silence, fearing he's recognized her. Thus the significance glance.

There are also clues in the House Azure and Hypogeum Apotropaic references--these being the two places Severian and Thais have encountered each other previously.

The second of these takes place in CLAW. Severian, having escaped from the antechamber where he and Jonas have been imprisoned, is now looking for Terminus Est.

"I ascended some distance, reconnoitered the corridor there until I was certain I was still lower than the antechamber, then began to climb again when I saw a young woman hurrying down the stair toward me.

"Our eyes met.

"In that moment, I felt sure, she was as conscious as I that we had exchanged glances thus before. In memory I heard her say again, "My dearest sister," in that cooing voice, and the heartshaped face sprung into place. It was not Thea, the consort of Vodalus, but the woman who looked like her (and no doubt borrowed her name) whom I had passed on the stair in the House Azure--she descending and I climbing, just as we were now."

Thea/Thais and Severian each continue on their respective ways. But then who is the very next person Severian encounters? Odilo père--who will then pass on the anecdote of their meeting to Odilo fils, who will then tell the story to Severian on the raft fifty years hence. (Obviously, all the stairs in the House Absolute are designed by M. C. Escher.)

As for the first encounter in the House Azure, once again Severian is ascending a stairs, this time with his inamorata-of-choice, who asks: "'Aren't you coming?' She had already reached the top of the stair, nearly out of sight. Someone spoke to her, calling her 'my dearest sister,' and when I had gone up a few steps more I saw it was a woman very like the one who had been with Vodalus, she of the heart-shaped face and the black hood. This woman paid no heed to me, and as soon as I gave her room to do so hurried down the stairs."

Thus Thais/Thea appears at the very least to be a khaibit--perhaps assigned to a Mata Hari role.

She is, after all, encountered in the Hypogeum Apotropaic, which belongs to Father Inire, and who better to function as putative spymaster? And is it khaibit technomagic that accounts for how Thea/Thais is able to preserve her youth (there being at least fifty years between encounters 2 and 3) or has Father Inire simply taught her how to access the Corridors of Time? Both seem possible, but I like another theory better still.

Given how Thais is "tall, dark and hollow-cheeked" like Severian himself, and recalling that witch-prostitute connection, as well as the Cumaeian's words about how "there are those who ride the night air who sometimes choose to borrow a human seeming," then factor in the twice-echoed "My dearest sister"--well, is it possible that Thais is Merryyn?

(Not that there may not be still another relative of Severian's aboard the raft, but I'll save my Pega-Pelagia-Agia speculations for elsewhere.)

Robert Borski