

Le Esprit de Escalier

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 29 Jul 2002

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Jennifer Van Goethem — 29 Jul 2002, 19:09

Whoa.

Actually, Merryn had been my first choice, but the time thing got in my way. Wouldn't she be pushing 90, as Severian points out in the discourse on the boat regarding the "real" Severian, as his father? ("Severian the Great would be eighty or more if he were alive.") Of course she is a witch and all, so who knows.

For that matter there's a pointed pause at her introduction on the boat. "And this, ah, female will not introduce herself..." Perhaps Thais is an emasculated Severian returned from his mission in failure. Hell, if we're going to go nuts analyzing every ellipses and turn of phrase, might as well pull out all the stops.

I do love all the House Azure, "dearest sister" stuff. I'll have to reconsider my whole take on the Merryn theory. However, Thais-Thecla-Thea? Weren't Thecla and Thea blonde and fair? I don't actually recall.

Also, I believe Mantis pointed out a third de ja vu encounter like the ones you describe, where Severian in UTNS sees a dark, weeping woman, surrounded by Praetorians, as he makes his way back into the House Absolute. Thais? Katherine? Both?

Severian's genealogy is so completely whacked it's a difficult knot to unravel. He's his own grandfather, his mother might be his sister, and so on.

I need an advil.

And now Pega-Pelagia-Agia? Make that three advil.

J

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 Cumaean'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 Merryn?

(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 elsewhen.)

Robert Borski

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