

The Piteous Gate

The Urth list — 21 messages, 11 voices, 21 Feb 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4539>

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Tony Ellis — 21 Feb 2006, 23:30

Mournings glory wrote:

If it's illegal to travel via the roads, how exactly are
all these people planning to get to where they're going?

And Rob Davies:

Why have a gate if no one is allowed to use the road to
pass through it?

Chris's post - that the law is only enforced now and then - answers both these points.

Indeed, it could hardly be enforced any other way. Travel is not forbidden. The law, we are told, simply demands that you travel across the countryside. You leave the city then get off the road as fast as you can. Only in this particular instance there was a patrol of uhlans waiting.

mournings glory — 22 Feb 2006, 02:08 · in reply to Tony Ellis

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the countryside. You leave the city then get off the road as fast as you
can. Only in this particular instance there was a patrol of uhlans
waiting.

This seems somewhat contradicted by what Severian is told by Master Palaemon in Chapter 13
of -Shadow_ (part of which has already been quoted).

"You know of the roads?"

"I know they must not be used. Nothing more."

"The Autarch Maruthas closed them. That was when I was your age. Travel encouraged sedition,
and he wished goods to enter and leave the city by the river, where they might be easily taxed.
The law has remained in force since, and there is a redoubt, so I've heard, every fifty leagues.
Still the roads remain. Though they are in poor repair, it is said some use them by night."

"I see," I said. Closed or not, the roads might make for an easier passage than traveling across the countryside as the law demanded.

"I doubt you do. I mean to warn you against them. They are patrolled by uhlans under orders to kill anyone found upon them, and since they have permission to loot the bodies of those they slay, they are not much inclined to ask excuses."

Notice how Palaemon says nothing about how you might be able to use the roads if you wish to indulge in travel Russian-roulette style. So while Chris's notion has a certain appeal to it, there is absolutely no evidence that the uhlans only selectively enforce the law when they feel like it. In fact, the only time we hear that travel by road is otherwise expressly permitted by day is in the war zone, although apparently the Pelerines can provide safe conduct.

Also, why we're discussing the ending of *_Shadow_* I still do not understand the purpose of the Autarch's pandours--the cacogen warriors who stand watch inside the honeycombed Wall. Dr. Talos thinks they're looking for a specific miscreant (Osama Binlanders? Feh!) But Jonas's tale of the black beans seems to hint at the Megatherians. The fact that they're aliens as opposed to humans puzzles me too, especially since the only other aliens we meet are Father Inire, the Cumaeen, and Ossipago, Barbatus and Famulimus--all Heirodules. Are the pandours from Yesod as well? And is it Father Inire they obey and not the Autarch? Aren't the cacogens generally disliked/feared? And what is it they're on the watch for that humans couldn't detect? The Ascians--who are far to the north? Or something even more dastardly?

em

Maru Dubshinki — 22 Feb 2006, 02:41 · in reply to mournings glory

On 2/21/06, mournings glory <mourningsglory at hotmail.com> wrote:

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em

I think they are on watch for old things, revenants, things yet to be perhaps... like Jonas.

~Maru

Roy C. Lackey — 22 Feb 2006, 07:08 · follows Maru Dubshinki

msg quoted and wrote:
Mr. Ellis writes:

The soldiers are driving people off the road, because it's illegal to use the roads of commonwealth.

We're given all the facts we need before Severian even sets off on his journey. Master Palaemon tells us: "...there is a redoubt, so I've heard, every fifty leagues... [the roads] are patrolled by uhlands under orders to kill anyone found on them, and since they have permission to loot the bodies of those they slay, they are not much inclined to ask excuses." Shadow, XIII

Here's something I don't understand, however.

If it's illegal to travel via the roads, how exactly are all these people planning to get to where they're going? On the day in question Severian claims the highway leading to the Piteous Gate is "**crowded** with carts and wagons and traffic of all kinds." Surely, most of these people are aware that traffic is prohibited on the Commonwealth's roads. So what will they do once they've passed beyond the Gate? Jump into the Gyoll and start swimming? (River traffic does seem to be tolerated.) Melt into the woods and follow crude dirt paths--with carts and wagons and beasts of burden? Hide in the bushes whenever they sense a uhlan nears?

The question of what happened at the Piteous Gate has, indeed, been the subject of sometimes heated debate here over the years. So far as I recall, however, Mr. Ellis is in the minority regarding his rather mundane explanation. <g> Most seem to believe that something happened to spook the stream of travelers just as Sev's party was entering the gate. Explanations for the panic vary; naturally, I prefer my own, which is that Hethor precipitated the panic, probably by unleashing one of his mirror beasts.

I would have sworn that I made a rather longish post a few years ago about Hethor, in the course of which I addressed this issue, but I can't seem to find it in the archives. Maybe I only sent it to a couple of people. In any event, here is the relevant paragraph from the original, fwiw.

"The dialogue at Casdoe's also goes a long way toward explaining the why, if not the exact how, of the events at the Piteous Gate. Sev notes, in SWORD, how Hethor never seemed to come near him when Jonas was close by, speculating that this was because Jonas, like Hethor, had been a sailor on a starship, and that Hethor feared that Jonas might recognize him in some way. Why Hethor should fear that recognition is another issue. Jonas makes his first appearance in the story as the company of players, Hethor with them, nears the city gate. As they enter the gate Hethor walks with his head down. Most of the speculation about why he does that centers on a supposed fear of being recognized by some authority watching from within the walls of the gate. I find that prospect doubtful. Dr. Talos's comment about the pandours possibly watching for a particular miscreant was aimed at Sev, not Hethor, because Sev had just told him that he had unfinished business with the Pelerines in the city, whose tent-cathedral had just gone up in smoke. Given the unreliability of space/time travel, some version of Space Rangers on the lookout for intergalactic desperadoes is untenable. I believe that Hethor is trying to avoid the notice of Jonas, who has unexpectedly attached himself to the group, if only temporarily. Further, I believe that Hethor, possibly by means of one of his creatures, caused the disturbance within the gate for two reasons: one, to create a distraction so that Jonas would not notice him, and, two, to possibly cause Sev's death, and/or Jonas', either by being trampled in the stampede of vehicles and animals, as some were, or killed, as many more were when they were caught up in the panic and ran out onto the road, by the soldiers stationed on the other side of the gate to keep people off the road. It was not a good plan, but it was the best he could

do on the spur of the moment."

-Roy

Tony Ellis — 23 Feb 2006, 00:14 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Mornings glory wrote:

while Chris's notion has a certain appeal to it, there is absolutely no evidence that the uhlans only selectively enforce the law when they feel like it.

Well, there is evidence in the fact that the Piteous Gate is packed with a multitude of travellers - including experienced wanderers such as Dr Talos, Baldanders and Jonas. No one expresses any concern at taking this route out of the city, so clearly most of the time the enforcement is at least lax enough to allow people to enter and leave unmolested.

I don't think the uhlans are necessarily being selective, however. The simplest explanation is that there just aren't enough men to patrol 150 miles of open road properly, especially with a war on.

Roy wrote:

So far as I recall, however, Mr. Ellis is in the minority regarding his rather mundane explanation. <g>

I appreciate the smiley, Roy, but the fact is it's precisely because my explanation is mundane that I think I'm right. I sometimes get the impression that people feel some sort of inverse Occam's Razor principle applies to explaining the mysteries in Wolfe's work - that the more fantastic the theory, the more likely it is to be true. Crabtree's Bludgeon springs to mind.

If you accept that the soldiers on the far side of the Gate are there to keep people off the road, why do you need another explanation for the disturbance that is taking place? A big crowd and a bunch of people firing at it is all it takes.

Roy C. Lackey — 23 Feb 2006, 08:21 · follows Tony Ellis

Tony Ellis wrote:

Well, there is evidence in the fact that the Piteous Gate is packed with a multitude of travellers - including experienced wanderers such as Dr Talos, Baldanders and Jonas. No one expresses any concern at taking this route out of the city, so clearly most of the time the enforcement is at least lax enough to allow people to enter and leave unmolested.

And that's part of the reason why what happened that morning at the Gate was so unusual. The large volume of travelers waiting to exit the city when the gates opened each morning indicates that they had no reasonable expectation of being slaughtered by mercenary troopers waiting for them outside the Gate on the road. They would have to be idiots to routinely take such a chance, and many of the travelers were tradesmen, as indicated by the carts and wagons. It stands to reason that there was a similar volume of traffic each day streaming **into** the city. Those travelers waiting **outside** the Wall for the Gate to open could, and would, have provided ample warning to those exiting the city, had there been any unusual military presence to cause alarm.

No such warning was given. There had to be a common public area immediately outside the Gate, just as there was inside the Wall, where traffic could move freely without having to use the forbidden road. The flow of outbound traffic was moving steadily until something happened to panic the animals and people. Sev saw five armed riders on the road outside the Gate, with

people moving to either side of them, apparently going unmolested cross-country. The only people the riders killed were those who had panicked and who took off down the road. The five riders may have been waiting there since before the Gate opened that morning; they may even have been routinely stationed there. It doesn't matter, because, regardless of whatever paths the travelers normally took, either that day or any other, ****they did not routinely use the road****.

This fictive fact is proven on the first page of CLAW, where the road outside the Gate is described as "grown up in fresh grass". That road just wasn't traveled, regardless of how well it was patrolled.

I sometimes get the impression that people feel some sort of inverse Occam's Razor principle applies to explaining the mysteries in Wolfe's work - that the more fantastic the theory, the more likely it is to be true. Crabtree's Bludgeon springs to mind.

Generally speaking, I agree with you!

-Roy

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 23 Feb 2006, 12:19 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Thu, 23 Feb 2006 19:21:56 +1100 "Roy C. Lackey" <rlackey at stic.net> wrote:
And that's part of the reason why what happened that morning at the Gate was so unusual. The large volume of travelers waiting to exit the city when the gates opened each morning indicates that they had no reasonable expectation of being slaughtered by mercenary troopers waiting for them outside the Gate on the road.

<Snipped good argument>

And if there wasn't a permitted space on the other side of the gate, why were the guards letting people through it in the first place?

I prefer the looking-for-Hethor theory. The only other time we see a highway-guarding Uhlan in action, it's in Claw, when Sev by a strategem causes the death of one by Hethor's notules. On resurrection, the uhlan says, "I am to be especially vigilant", no doubt repeating his patrol orders. Perhaps the uhlans near the gate had been given the same order, and perhaps the vigilance in both cases was directed against Hethor.

On Hethor: Jonas says the notules are used somewhere in the universe for ritual combat. This ties back into the monomachy with avens. It's not hard to guess that Hethor taught Agia and her brother all about them.

James Wynn — 24 Feb 2006, 03:06 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Well, I'm torn. I find the "Uhlan" explanation attractive since it is mundane and doesn't require the invention of an entire narrative that is not reference elsewhere.

On the otherhand, I understand why a more elaborate theory is sought. If the explanation is so

mundane, why cover it up? Why not mention it? Severian and Jonas must have gotten some idea of what it was about by the time they passed the gate. But they didn't know at the end of SOTT. I reached the end of the fourth book convinced that there would be conversation that explained it. To no avail. I read UOTNS still hoping for a clue. Nope.

If they're looking for Severian, they didn't seem to find him because he and Jonas go through all right. If they're looking for Hethor...well, I don't see any evidence that he is on the run. Why wouldn't the possibility that they are looking for Jonas be just as reasonable? After all, he's an expensive piece of equipment. Or Baldanders! He and his butler seem to be on the run. There are a heck of a lot of miscreants on that road. But they could have gotten any of them better by waiting for to reach the end of the gate.

It was one of Hethor's pets? Come on. Nothing in the text says that; not that I know of. And why release one in the middle of the gate. To release one in that setting would be as dangerous for Hethor as anybody else. He could release them almost anywhere else without as much danger. One explanation, I guess, is that the authorities were on to Hethor and were about to catch him so he released the pet to cause the confusion and get away. But typically when you're tracking someone (as Hethor is tracking Severian), you follow BEHIND him so you can keep your eye on him. Up ahead is the wrong place for him.

Nothing so far satisfies me. I'm tempted to suggest that there is no Lupine "explanation". That it is just an awful traffic jam whose only narrative purpose is to split Sev and Jonas from the rest of their group. But Dorcas

says that they are turning around because they are frightened.

J

Chris — 24 Feb 2006, 04:54 · in reply to James Wynn

Well, logically we can separate the "how" and the "why" of the Piteous Gate incident, and perhaps that will help. (Though as a side note I do not understand the sort of universal fascination with this incident - which doesn't seem to be provoked by historical discussions on the list because it is shared by people who haven't read the archives - given that as far as I can tell it isn't crucial to the overall interpretation of the story.)

The "mundane" aspect of the uhlans and the laws concerning the use of the roads can be considered a fully adequate explanation as to how the incident came about. If uhlans were guarding the road to make sure that people coming out of the city didn't go any further on it, then even a small disturbance could provoke a reaction from the guards that would incite a general panic. It wouldn't take Hethor's extraterrestrial beasties, or any particularly devious physical means, to create the situation - though of course, such means could be employed.

The second aspect is the question of motive. If we press the mundane account, it is simply a random occurrence - there is no motive. If we don't accept this, then we look for a reason why some character in the story would want to incite such a panic. To get very specific on this count we'd have to come to some determination as to *whose* motive it is; instead let's remain general, and treat the question in terms of what the possible results of such a panic might be that would benefit anyone.

It might be that the goal was to kill one of the members of Severian's party, most probably Severian. If so, the prospective murderer chose a method so indirect that it couldn't possibly be very effective; the odds of your particular target being killed in the general chaos are rather low.

It could be that the goal was to escape apprehension by the guards waiting outside the gate. This could be a motive for a few people, but particularly I am thinking of Baldanders; he is of the same general type as the undines and Abaia et al., and if he believed he had been spotted by the cacogens in the wall he might have feared some kind of trap waiting outside the gate. This seems to be a live candidate, but I do not see any real evidence that points to it.

The third possibility (that I can think of, at any rate), is that someone wanted to split the party. This allows for a truly bewildering array of possibilities. One party member might have wanted to shake off another one, or on the other hand might have wanted to shake off most/all of the others, or might have wanted to get themselves alone with a particular individual. Another variation would be one in which a third party, like the current Autarch, wanted to separate Severian from one of the others who might cause him harm (Hethor, Baldanders). Here again we have discrete possibilities to choose from, and possible realistic motives, but not a lot of evidence for any particular one.

To me this seems like a dead-end question, there are too many possibilities with not enough evidence to make any one of them more plausible than the others. I guess the only vague clue I can come up with is that if I remember correctly the tone of the conversation, when the groups reunite, implies that one of the parties might not have tried as hard as they could have to reunite with the other one.

-- Chris

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J

pthwndxrcclzp — 24 Feb 2006, 06:11 · in reply to Chris

Ah, but stylistically, or perhaps "novelistically" would be a better term, the incident is placed to have the utmost importance. Not only is it the end of the first book, it is literally and expressly bookended as such -- what's the quote, "having taken you from one gate to another I will take a brief rest" or somesuch (I don't have my books handy). Thus, in an artistic light, the mysterious tumult at the Piteous Gate is situated to convey what I take to be a fair amount of importance.

With, of course, no subsequent explanation or even further questioning. Wolfe loves his myriad mysteries, but this one seems almost calculated to frustrate. And what *that* could be about, I have no idea.

So no, it doesn't seem crucial in terms of plot, but its placement really does make ya go "huh." Well, me, at least. Huh.

Aq

On 2/23/06, Chris <rasputin_ at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Roy C. Lackey — 24 Feb 2006, 08:49 · follows pthwndxrcclzp

I agree with what Aquastor said, and Crush had earlier implied much the same. Book one ended with a cliff-hanger. Readers expected to find out what happened in the next installment -- but it didn't happen. I know that Robert Borski, for one, was particularly put out with the lack of an explanation in the other books.

Crush also noted, "But Dorcas *says* that they are turning around because they are frightened." That serves to make a point about the timing of the events at the Gate. When Sev and his group first caught sight of the Gate and the travelers, they were still half a league away from it. Traffic was moving in a steady stream into the tunnel formed by the Gate. By the time Sev's group reached the Gate, the stream had been flowing for some time without any problems. Clearly, had the five uhlans been positioned on the road outside the Gate all morning, they hadn't been causing any difficulties for the travelers, who took whatever paths they normally took.

If we assume that the uhlans made a *sudden* appearance and started killing people on the road, causing the panic in question, then we have to account for a sudden appearance. So far as I can tell, that portion of road nearest the gate was straight. I don't think it reasonable that five mounted men could have come down that road so rapidly that any travelers who might have been on the road couldn't see and hear them coming in time to get off the road, particularly given the fact the travelers had every reason to be on the lookout for the troopers. It might be argued that the uhlans were hiding in the woods, just waiting to ambush the foolhardy. If that were the case, why didn't they act sooner, before Sev's group ever got to the Gate?

No, something happened inside the long tunnel through the wall that was so frightening and immediate a threat as to cause the travelers to panic trying to get away from it. They fled to the closest exit, some, like the man on the wagon who struck Dorcas, back to the city-side of the tunnel, those nearer the outside of the gate fled in a panic from whatever danger there was behind them. Some of them leapt from the frying pan into the fire, so to speak, and ran onto the road and were killed by the soldiers.

In Severian's dream at the opening of CLAW, the travelers are screaming and shouting, then he gains the farther side of the gate and sees the green road with five mounted soldiers on it. "On these riders, the tide of travelers broke as a wave on a rock, some turning left, some right. Dorcas was torn from my arms ..." This was *after* the panic inside the tunnel, when people were still running in a chaotic stream, that he got separated from Dorcas and the others. The panic was not caused by the uhlans, who were outside the gate, blocking access to the road. Sev and his group went forward in the tunnel *towards* the uhlans, not away from them and back to the city.

-Roy

Duncan Truter — 24 Feb 2006, 10:26 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Thanks for all of your responses.

do we even know, though, that the Uhlans were attacking anybody? Severian says that the crowd was breaking like a wave on the Uhlans, but all that that really means is that the crowd was moving and the Uhlans were staying in the same place. I think Severian also mentions that he takes his sword out and starts attacking everyone in between him and Dorcas, in order to get to her. Presumably something else dangerous is happening at the time, or he would have (we hope) just shouldered through the crowd.

On 2/24/06, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

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-Roy

Chris — 24 Feb 2006, 12:05 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Well, this may be irrelevant, but we are given to understand that destriers are quite fast. They are genetically engineered mounts that can run at least as fast as a speeding motor vehicle. Actually come to think of it, 5 of those coming down the road at full speed (if they were in fact doing that) would be a good reason for anyone in their way to panic.

Also FWIW the Wright book also mentions Aquastor's point about the thematic importance of the gate-to-gate thing. However I don't think this necessarily imparts the "mystery" of the gate with any extra importance unless there is some other reason to suspect that it is so, and as far as I can tell it isn't tied in to the story at ANY other point.

Attempts to analyze the incident further also run into the possibility that Severian may be deliberately hiding something.

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-Roy

James Wynn — 24 Feb 2006, 14:55 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy opines

If we assume that the uhlans made a *sudden* appearance and started killing people on the road, causing the panic in question, then we have to account for a sudden appearance....It might be argued that the uhlans were hiding in the woods, just waiting to ambush the foolhardy. If that were the case,

why didn't they act sooner, before Sev's group ever got to the Gate?

While reminding everyone that I'm not satisfied with the uhlan explanation, I'll say this: The uhlands had to show up sometime. It could have been a fluke. They showed up then. If they hadn't Severian wouldn't have recorded the event. The group would not have gotten split up. Book Two would have proceeded very differently from the way it did. (Seen the movie "Slackers"?) That's the way it happened.

Quite apart from the whys and wherefores, this event serves at least two purposes (as Roy said):

- 1) It is a cliffhanger. It encourages readers to go and buy the next book.
- 2) It separates the Severian and Jonas from the group for whatever purpose Wolfe wanted that to happen.

In the old serial Westerns, the movie would end with, for example, the hero riding off a cliff. How could he possibly escape? Often he couldn't. The next episode would be slightly changed from the previous ending allowing the hero to escape. Why? Because the cliffhanger was its own justification.

By not telling the reader what caused the foul-up, Wolfe ensures he will pay attention for the first couple chapters as he sets up a new narrative with a new rhythm. This way Wolfe doesn't have to top the suspense of the ending of SOTT.

There are lots of reasons why having the uhlands show up at the end of the book purely by coincidence makes perfect sense. There is even a reason for the foul-up not having the significance the book implied when SOTT ended. One last added benefit of the uhlan theory is that there is *sort of* a potential explanation for the foul up offered in COTC: the dream. As I said, I like the Uhlan theory for a lot reasons. But I find it unsatisfying.

J

pthwndxrc1zp — 24 Feb 2006, 17:23 · in reply to James Wynn

There's another possible scenario, though with the barest of textual support.

We are told, iirc, that some cacogens use the interior of the Wall as a way station. We also know that some of the cacogens have access to extra-temporal information about Urth (and Sev). It doesn't seem that much of a stretch to think that perhaps one of the cacogens, perhaps a particularly monstrous one, stuck in the Wall, and knowing that this passage might be his/her only chance to get an eyeful of the future Epitome of Urth, popped outside for a peek. The sudden appearance of such an alien would likely cause just the sort of panic among the walkers as we then see.

I know there's essentially no support for this, and it does move in a direction that would set William of Occam to shaking his unshaven head in dismay...but I can't escape the feeling that it is Severian's presence that sets the riot in motion, somehow.

On 2/24/06, James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net> wrote:

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Roy C. Lackey — 25 Feb 2006, 07:19 · follows pthwndxrcclzp

Chris wrote:

To me this seems like a dead-end question, there are too many possibilities with not enough evidence to make any one of them more plausible than the others. I guess the only vague clue I can come up with is that if I remember correctly the tone of the conversation, when the groups reunite, implies that one of the parties might not have tried as hard as they could have to reunite with the other one.

You must be referring to the brief exchange Sev had with Baldanders after escaping from the antechamber. It was only then that we learned that Baldanders had been with Sev "in the forest beyond the Piteous Gate." Baldanders left him there, presumably to search -- successfully -- for Talos, Jolenta and Dorcas. And Baldanders was burdened with all the troupe's theatrical properties. It makes you wonder how hard Sev really tried to find Dorcas. If slow, dim Baldanders could do it, why not he?

If Jonas was with Sev and Baldanders at that point, he fails to mention it. But he does at one point mention that he and Jonas were together at some point on the same path to Saltus. Hethor isn't mentioned either, but the fact that he showed up in the crowd at Morweena's execution indicates that he didn't have any trouble keeping track of Sev after the fracas at the gate.

Attempts to analyze the incident further also run into the possibility that Severian may be deliberately hiding something.

Why did he set his sights on Saltus?

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 25 Feb 2006, 07:59 · follows Roy C. Lackey

I wrote:

Why did he set his sights on Saltus?

Too late, I remembered that Saltus was on the river and Thrax was near its headwaters.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 25 Feb 2006, 19:12 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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Is this sarcasm? As I recall, Baldanders is quite brainy on matters that engage him, and it's no surprise that he and Dr. Talos were able to locate one another, given their origin of their relationship.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 25 Feb 2006, 20:22 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

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In the passage in question (CLAW, XXII), Severian remarks on Baldanders' slow speech and "dull eyes". He also writes, "I found it impossible to be angry with this dim, gentle giant." Baldanders had completely forgotten that Severian had even been with Talos and himself when they left the city via the Piteous Gate.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 28 Feb 2006, 07:31 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

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In light of what we know from the latter books that he's quite accomplished at the intellectual business of chemistry and biology, I've thought he was putting on a dullard act, or perhaps was showing the effects of Dr. Talos' medicine. Even before Lake Diuturna, he's demonstrates a grip

on pretend-vs-real stage acting, and even when it's appropriate to pretend to not know.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Adam Thornton — 28 Feb 2006, 15:25 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Feb 28, 2006, at 1:31 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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My belief is that he simply doesn't bother to pay attention to things that don't matter to him. What matters to him is extending his own life and power. To some degree he therefore pays attention to Dr. Talos, because he created Talos precisely to make sure that he stayed in adequate physical shape to pursue his real goals.

Think of Talos as an alarm clock, basically. Except that Baldanders, being very clever, has created an alarm clock that beats him with a stick until he gets up, and that manages most of the other annoying details of his physical existence for him, leaving him more time to think about the things that interest him.

Adam