

Piteous Gate- one last rehash

The Urth list — 11 messages, 7 voices, 15 May 2006

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b sharp — 15 May 2006, 03:49

In the vaults of this archinve there has been a fair amount of discussion centered on the disturbance at the Piteous Gate that ends Shadow. I had always felt it was something mysterious and worth knowing, as did some others. Mantis and Tony Ellis and perhaps others argued vehemently that it was merely the action of soldiers blocking the road and I think it was left at that.

I found a passage which convinces me otherwise. When Severian first talks to Agia in Casdoe's cottage in Sword, they have this exchange:

S- "You've been trying to kill me ever since I glimpsed you in the crowd at Saltus" A- "Is that an accusation? Yes." S- "You're lying." A- "What do you mean?" S- "Only that you were trying to kill me before Saltus" A- "With the avern. Yes, of course" S- "And afterward. Agia, I know who Hethor is"

I think this is author misdirection because on first reading I know I was then more interested in Severian's extended insight about Hethor. But the first part of that sentence says that Agia (with Hethor's help implied) tried to kill Severian somewhere in the time between the avern duel and Saltus Fair, which she doesn't deny.

I find no plausible setting for this attempt except the disturbance at the Piteous Gate. So Severian, in retrospect, has deduced that the cause of the disturbance, the appearance of some undescribed creature, was an attempt on his life by Agia and Hethor. Is there another possible interpretation?

-bsharp

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 15 May 2006, 05:12 · in reply to b sharp

By George, I think b's got it.

On 5/14/06, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

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mourning's glory — 15 May 2006, 05:15 · in reply to b sharp

From: "b sharp" <bsharporflat at hotmail.com>

In the vaults of this archive there has been a fair amount of discussion centered on the disturbance at the Piteous Gate that ends Shadow. I had always felt it was something mysterious and worth knowing, as did some others.

Agreed, and perhaps exactly what is meant when Severian writes about "certain dramatic pauses which shall signal to you that something of import is about to occur."

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I believe Mr. Lackey has postulated similarly, and while I think it's as credible as any other theory, I'm not sure your particular quote bolsters it in any fashion. You're assuming, I believe, that "afterward" comes relatively soon after the avern episode, whereas I believe it's referring to "after" the Saltus fair, when Severian and Jonas are attacked by Hethor's notules.

em

b sharp — 15 May 2006, 15:29 · follows mournings glory

mourningsglory responds-

I'm not sure your particular quote bolsters that idea in any fashion. You're assuming, I believe, that "afterward" comes relatively soon after the avern episode, whereas I believe it's referring to "after" the Saltus fair, when Severian and Jonas are attacked by Hethor's notules."

I must respectfully disagree that Severian could be refering to events after Saltus Fair such as the man-ape cave, the notule attack, the antechamber slug and the salamander. If he were, Severian's and Agia's exchange would read, simplified:

Agia: I've been trying to kill you since the Saltus Fair.

Severian: Liar, you've been trying to kill me since the Saltus Fair.

Which makes no sense. He must be refering to an attempt or attempts before Saltus Fair but after the avern duel. I think the only legitimate objection to my analysis would be if there was another plausible attempt on Severian's life in that time period. I don't have my books here but the episodes in that time frame I remember are: Severian in the recovery room, Severian with Agia and Agilus in his cell, the execution, walking with Dorcas, performing the Talos play, packing up the play properties and then walking to the Piteous Gate.

The only other candidates for murder attempts in this period I can think of are very weak: 1. In the cell, Agia attacks Severian scratching at his eyes, and grabbing at his sabretache. 2. Later, as they are walking toward the Piteous Gate, Hethor asks if he can carry Severian's sword. I don't think it is in Hethor's repertoire to be swinging swords. But if Hethor knows an attack is coming soon, I can see why he would want to take Terminus Est from Severian.

Severian phrases his statements in the exchange to knock her off balance (as he has physically, a couple times) by calling her a liar after she has told the truth. I think Wolfe's purpose is much the same, to knock his reader off balance so the solution to one puzzle (Piteous Gate) is masked by the solution to another (the source of the creatures).

-bsharp

Tony Ellis — 23 May 2006, 18:16 · follows b sharp

Apologies for dredging this up yet again, but I missed b_sharp's post when it appeared.

b_sharp wrote:

S- "You've been trying to kill me ever since I glimpsed you in the crowd at Saltus"

A- " Is that an accusation? Yes."

S- "You're lying."

A- "What do you mean?"

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<snip> ...the

first part of that sentence says that Agia (with Hethor's help implied)

tried to kill Severian somewhere in the time between the avern duel and

Saltus Fair, which she doesn't deny.

Actually, what that sentence says is that Agia was *trying* to kill Severian between the avern duel and Saltus Fair, not that she 'tried' to kill him. Yes, I know, I'm pedantic, but the distinction is crucial, because 'tried' requires a specific attempt on Severian's life, whereas 'trying' offers rather more leeway. If, for example, last week I hired an assassin to kill you, then that week I was trying to kill you.

And this exchange is all about Severian building up to the fact that he knows Agia hired Hethor to kill him. He's effectively saying: "Agia, I know you've had a hired killer on my trail since before Saltus."

It's also worth noting that nothing in the way this conversation continues suggests that anyone thinks Hethor used one of his creatures at the Piteous Gate. Agia says: "He followed you for me after you killed Agilus; with his silver I hired the men you killed at the old mine, and the creatures he commands will kill you for me yet."

Not "He followed you for me and tried to kill you at the Piteous Gate," you notice. And the order in which Agia puts these events also makes sense if Hethor didn't start using his creatures until after Saltus. Followed. Used silver. Used creatures.

After this, Agia asks Severian how he guessed about Hethor. Severian proceeds to list all the monster attacks we know of, in order: notules, slime monster, salamander - explaining how each betrayed a connection to Hethor. No mention of any monster at the Piteous Gate.

This is precisely my problem with the whole monster-at-the-Gate argument: why does Severian never mention it? A monster is a pretty big deal, especially when it's the first one you've ever seen. Why, when Severian dreams about the Gate at the start of Claw of the Conciliator, does he remember uhlands but not a monster? Why, when he meets Baldanders again, does he refer to them getting separated but never say "And wow, what about that monster in the Gate - that was really something, wasn't it?" Why, when very other attack by Hethor's creatures gets written up, is this one omitted?

The fact is, we don't need a monster to explain the disturbance at the Piteous Gate. If you have a lot of people crushed into a confined space, that's *all* you need to create a disturbance. If a bunch of armed guards turn up and start throwing their weight around, then it's just about inevitable.

b sharp — 23 May 2006, 19:34 · follows Tony Ellis

I think Tony makes good points in his last post. He pokes a few holes in what I thought was an airtight case.

The problem as I see it is that Tony can't see the holes in his own theory, which I believe Roy and others have most eloquently presented (Feb 2006, The Piteous Gate).

I think Tony considers his Uhlan explanation so clear and obvious that it explains why the incident isn't discussed further in detail. So that satisfies him.

But so many others disagree and feel more explanation is needed. Severian doesn't mention

the appearance of a monster or man-ape soldiers swarming toward Hethor or the cruel behavior of 5 uhlands who almost got Dorcas killed or any explanation whatsoever. It is always "the incident" or "the disturbance". If we ask "why didn't Severian or anyone else explain the incident?" the only sure answer we can make is because Wolfe won't let them (or per Tony, Wolfe doesn't see any need).

To me it is like seeing a blacked out portion on a page of text. We can dismiss it as nothing, just part of the text. Or we can deduce that someone blacked it out on purpose, wonder about the purpose and wonder what was erased.

If Wolfe is true to form on this mystery, there is one big, fat hint hiding somewhere in the text, out of context, and a lot of small vague hints. I guess if we can't find it then Tony might be right.

-bsharp

Perhaps if it can't be found, then Tony is right.

mournings glory — 24 May 2006, 00:30 · in reply to Tony Ellis

Mr. Ellis' counterfactual to the Hethorgate Theory is excellent and I hope that he will consent to its points being incorporated into the Piteous Gate summation should the wiki ever come to pass.

But now for my own belated attempt at solving the mystery -- one semi-based on an already extant theory.

Would a sighting of an undine in the river Gyll be enough to sally the Autarch's troops, both within the wall and without?

I've been doing a lot of background reading on undines given the recent spate of posts about them, and one of things I learned about Juturna is that "After successfully keeping her brother Turnus away from Aeneas, who she knew was ordained to kill him in single combat, Juturna, who had disguised herself as his charioteer Metiscus and *had restored to him his lost sword made by Vulcan,* was compelled by the warning of a Fury (sent by Jupiter) to give up the struggle to save her brother, and sank lamenting into her spring at Lanuvium." [From _Who's Who in Classical Mythology_]. Now if Wolfe is staying true to the model, this means that it's Juturna who's returning Terminus Est to Severian when he falls into the Lake of Birds ("it seemed the hand's owner was returning my property to me") -- just as Severian will return the broken pieces of TE at the end of _Sword_ to Lake Diuturna, which as has been recently pointed out is an alternate name for Juturna.

We're also told that the avern -- an extremely deadly plant -- has been planted by Father Inire to keep manatees out of the Botanic Gardens, but this seems like a rather dire method for keeping out simple sea cows, whereas if they were meant to delimit undines and possibly Abaia...well, it seems like a much more effective and logical defense.

Also: since the undines experience time backwards, and their past is our future, could the incident at the Piteous Gate be caused by Juturna entering Nessus by the river conduit, on her way to retrieve Terminus Est for Severian -- an event for him which has already taken place, but which for her looms on a different temporal horizon?

mourning s glory

Thomas Bitterman — 24 May 2006, 01:37 · in reply to mournings glory

mournings glory wrote:

We're also told that the avern -- an extremely deadly plant -- has been planted by Father Inire to keep manatees out of the Botanic Gardens, but this seems like a rather dire method for keeping out simple sea cows, whereas if they were meant to delimit undines

gigantic underwater women == sea cows. Father Inire has a droll sense of humor.

enamel

Roy C. Lackey — 24 May 2006, 18:15 · follows Thomas Bitterman

mourning s glory wrote:

But now for my own belated attempt at solving the mystery -- one semi-based on an already extant theory.

Would a sighting of an undine in the river Gyll be enough to sally the Autarch's troops, both within the wall and without?

The main problem with this theory (as with the Borski version you allude to) is one of logistics. I know of no river conduit anywhere near the Piteous Gate. It required an afternoon's walk from the Botanic Gardens to reach the Inn of Lost Loves, which was near the Sanguinary Field. The Field itself was still "leagues" away from the Wall. The military compound where Severian was taken after the duel is on one side of the Field. After leaving the barracks, Severian and Dorcas had to walk for some time before they found Talos and his troupe. The next morning they had to walk some unspecified amount of time before they caught sight of the road and the gate, which was still "half a league" away. Best I can tell, the Gate was many miles away from Gyll.

-Roy

b sharp — 24 May 2006, 18:30 · follows Roy C. Lackey

mournings glory's theory on the incident at Piteous Gate is a good one.

Could the extant theory it is semi-based be Borski's idea that Baldanders mates with Juturna shortly after the group separation at the gate, thus giving him his underwater breathing ability? Hildegryn calls it "the affair at the gate". Watching Baldanders and Juturna mate might make me run away screaming also ;-).

I think Maxellindas' uncle makes reference to the undines in relation to manatees (and let's not forget nixies!) so I've long thought the averns were to keep out undines. How does Juturna get past the averns? I like the idea that it isn't Dorcas returning his sword. And, in Arthurian terms, Juturna (Diuturna) makes a very nice Lady Of The Lake, doesn't she?

-bsharp

Georg Schöneegger — 29 May 2006, 10:26 · in reply to mournings glory

We're also told that the avern -- an extremely deadly plant -- has been planted by Father Inire to keep manatees out of the Botanic Gardens, but this seems like a rather dire method for keeping out simple sea cows, whereas if they were meant to delimit undines and possibly Abaia...well, it seems like a much more effective and logical defense.

maybe this has been brought up before, but: is it sure the manatees were 'simple sea cows'? i had the opposite impression; nearly every mention of them refers to their near-human features. i could very well imagine them to be a kind of proto-undines (in earlier times, seamen even

called them "sirenes").

georg