

Baldanders

The Urth list — 31 messages, 14 voices, 17 May 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4596>

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James Machin — 17 May 2006, 09:32

Apologies if this sounds like a facile question, but after searching the list, doing other web searches and reading Solar Labyrinth, I'm still at a loss as to what or who Baldanders is. The general assumption is that he is somehow related to the undines, but this is just an assumption (I think?) and there are other obvious possibilities (genetic modification, mutation, extrasolarian blood etc), but none are clearly indicated by Wolfe (and if I'm wrong about this please put me right). To my reading of BotNS, more so than any other character, Baldanders' origins and motivations remain profoundly mysterious. The only thing that really seems clear by the end of Sword is that he is at best morally ambiguous and at worse a monster. In a book full of characters whose purposes and even identities are obscure at best, he seems the most unreadable and, perhaps because of this, one of the most compelling. If anyone can shed any light on the matter for me, I'd be most appreciative!

David DiGiacomo — 17 May 2006, 14:31 · follows James Machin

Apologies if this sounds like a facile question, but after searching the list, doing other web searches and reading Solar Labyrinth, I'm still at a loss as to what or who Baldanders is.

I believe that he is a human who modified himself to extend his life (through the SFnal mechanism of unending growth). Otherwise he would not be a candidate for Autarch/epitome.

Macronaut — 17 May 2006, 14:56 · in reply to David DiGiacomo

I agree. And I would argue that, as a candidate for epitome of Earth, Baldanders represented the Earth-that-was-punished with a black hole: mankind as amoral exploiter of nature and enslaver of fellow man. In fact, the contrast presented when the heirodules bow down to Sev instead of Baldanders is pretty momentous foreshadowing because it ties so many inferences together, ie. that (a) Sev will be epitome of Earth; (b) Sev represents a different mankind than Baldanders; (c) judging by Baldanders' example ("human under glass, anyone?") that version is a kinder, gentler, more noble one; and (d) as such, he will succeed in expiating Man's sins and bringing the New Sun. Baldanders is a would-be Typhon -- his self-alteration is just one more clue tying the two together.

Finally, I think there's also something to be found in the fact that Baldanders starts off as a very small man who grows to bloated size as the result of his deprecations against his fellow man -- it suggests Napoleon, which if intentional can be read as a symbol of mankind's conquering arrogance. And is it any coincidence that Wolfe simultaneously casts Baldanders as the freak in a travelling road show (and one watched with dismay and amusement by the heirodules at the House Absolute)?

Macronaut

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pthwndxrc1zp — 17 May 2006, 15:16 · in reply to Macronaut

Wow. Now I'm *really* confused. I don't have text references available, but I always thought it was axiomatic that Baldanders was a baby Abaia -- and as such, an alien infant dropped or otherwise delivered to Urth. Obviously, that could be wrong, but I can't recall a single indication that he was originally a human being. Quite the opposite -- it seems like Wolfe takes great pains to show us that Baldanders is something very "other."

The things ya learn on this list....

On 5/17/06, Macronaut <macronaut at yahoo.com> wrote:

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Chris — 17 May 2006, 19:40 · in reply to pthwndxrc1zp

I also had the impression that he was a baby Abaia, though keeping in mind that we have only a hazy notion of what Abaia & co. *are* (if we take into account the nature of the sources we have for that info).

I think that the person who suggested a comparison with Napoleon was on to something, although I'd go further and associate him with a state - possibly the soviet union - or an ideology, most probably communism. In any event a potential further clue is his relationship with Talos; the scientist/artist is in service to the beast.

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Ummm ... no. Baldy is not a "baby Abaia," he is a human who aspires to the state of Abaiahood. Given that Abaia seems to be a kind of demonic being, this is equivalent to saying that Baldanders is almost utterly corrupt. He is, I think, an example of the "secular sorcerer" that affectionate uncle Screwtape tells his nephew will be Hell's ultimate achievement.

--Dan'l

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.

-- St Teresa of Avila

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

pthwndxrculp — 17 May 2006, 20:11 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

And you base your unequivocal conclusion upon...

On 5/17/06, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danlido at gmail.com> wrote:

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--Dan'l

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 17 May 2006, 20:22 · in reply to pthwndxrculp

The text, of course. Baldanders is a human scientist attempting to achieve a kind of godhood. If this isn't clear, I can only say, read more closely, especially the sequence (in CLAW) where the touring company breaks up and, of course, the sequence (in SWORD) in the castle by Lake Diuturna.

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Rob Davies — 17 May 2006, 20:26 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I agree with Dan'l. I have always read Baldanders to be a human who, like Typhon, used science/technology to enhance himself.

Rob

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

From: Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com>
Sent: May 17, 2006 4:22 PM
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) Baldanders

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--Dan'l

b sharp — 17 May 2006, 21:21 · follows Rob Davies

Well, some great discussion on this guy going on.

Kudos to mournings glory for noting the surely intentioned Frankenstein allusion (in a golden Severa etc. post)

Hence Baldanders (note the German name) is both Dr. Frankenstein *and* his monster -- a fact alluded to by Dr. Talos in his "The castle? The monster? The man of learning?" speech, found in Chapter XXXV of -Sword_.

My first clue to that allusion was the "strange scars around his neck and ears" of Baldanders that Severian notes on their first meeting. Yes, Baldanders is both monster and creator here. But with respect to Talos, I think Wolfe had a lot of fun in making this a reverse story with a monster who creates his doctor.

There does seem to be some misunderstanding of Baldanders' size, however. I forget which character first reveals that Baldanders' growing is for the purpose of keeping him long-lived not because he wants to be big. He wants to grow as little as possible. Growth is the only way for humans to retain youth (see exultants?)

As Sev himself notes on viewing the giant baby Catamite:

"it must have been that just as he (Baldanders) held his own growth in check, permitting only as >much as needed to save his mountainous body from the ravages of the years, so he had >accelerated the growth of this poor

boy in so far as was possible to his anthroposophic >knowledge."

on that subject, how could the product of sex between Baldanders or Severian with dark hair and Jurtuna with white hair and green eyes produce a blonde haired blue eyed baby? I still think it must be a Dorcas product.

mournings glory — 17 May 2006, 22:20 · in reply to b sharp

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

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What color eyes and hair did the father of Jesus of Nazareth have?

em

mournings glory — 17 May 2006, 22:34 · in reply to mournings glory

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

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with dark hair and Jurtuna with white hair and green eyes produce a blonde

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Even though I'm Jewish, I mean no disrespect here -- it's just that sometimes when supernatural entities bump uglies with us mortals, the results do not always conform to known genetics. At any rate Ouen has blue eyes, as does Dorcas, his blonde-haired mother -- so there's no strict violation of heritage.

em

Chris — 18 May 2006, 10:42 · in reply to b sharp

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forget which character first reveals that Baldanders' growing is for the purpose of keeping him long-lived not because he wants to be big. He wants to grow as little as possible. Growth is the only way for humans to retain youth (see exultants?)

Not quite, and I think this is the source of some small confusion here. One of the cacogens says that "for your species" it is the only way to extend life (or something along those lines). It is not entirely clear whether they are addressing Baldanders, Severian or both. Nor is it explicit whether "your species" = human.

As a separate question, would their statement be true of humans? Couldn't you, say, cut your head off and put it on someone else's body if you were really hard up?

But in any event the passage seemed to me a sort of metaphorical reference to expansionist states.

b sharp — 18 May 2006, 14:48 · follows Chris

Hoping to post correction of myself first ;). Juturna has red eyes, not green. Combining this with her white skin and hair (the green we learn is from algae) makes her and her kind true albinos I guess (like pet rabbits or lab rats?).

Regarding Baldanders, Chris writes:

One of the cacogens says that "for your species" it is the only way to extend life (or something along those lines). It is not entirely clear whether they are addressing Baldanders, Severian or both. Nor is it explicit whether "your species" = human.

It is Ossipago (of course! the bone grower and Baldanders' teacher) who first discusses growth as the way to restore youth. Dr. Talos soon corroborates that Baldanders' biochemistry must be carefully monitored and regulated so he doesn't grow too fast. So Chris is bringing up the question of whether Severian and Baldanders are of the same species. There has been some disagreement on whether Baldanders is human or not in recent posts. Chris are you suggesting Severian might not be human or that Baldanders isn't?

By the naming convention discerned by past masters of this archive, Baldanders is not an (urthly) human. He is not named for a saint but rather a giant from Borges' Book of Imaginary Beings (Wolfe himself confirms this).

Wolfe also says:

"I also gave the people and other beings in the book real names, with the exception of the Ascian >who appears in The Citadel -- Loyal to the Group Seventeen. As for the monsters' names, I simply >named them for monsters".

So Baldanders would seem to be either an "other being" or monster which may be the inspiration for some who feel he is a "baby Abaia". Nonetheless he seems to start out looking like a small man. There are some other characters from the stars who seem to appear as small men.....

Chris also writes:

As a separate question, would their statement be true of humans? Couldn't you, say, cut your head off and put it on someone else's body if you were really hard up?

By the naming conventions noted above, Typhon can't be human. A description of the mythological Typhon: "Typhon's hundred, horrible heads touched the stars, venom dripped from his evil eyes, and lava and red-hot stones poured from his gaping mouths. Hissing like a hundred snakes and roaring like a hundred lions, he tore up whole mountains and threw them at the gods". Sounds awfully monstrous to me.

But Chris' last note really killed me:

But in any event the passage seemed to me a sort of metaphorical reference to expansionist states.

Now when faced with Baldanders growth/aging issues my biological/anthropological background leads me to think of epiphyseal bone plates and chromosome telomere length. Chris immediately thinks of Adam Smith and Karl Marx etc. Fess up Chris,... economist? political scientist?

-bsharp

Adam Thornton — 18 May 2006, 15:15 · in reply to b sharp

On May 18, 2006, at 9:48 AM, b sharp wrote:

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I don't see why monsters can't be genetically human. Typhon and Baldanders both behave monstrously regardless of what their DNA looks like.

Adam

Macronaut — 18 May 2006, 17:24 · in reply to Adam Thornton

I agree -- and it's not just that they behave monstrously, but that this monstrous behavior is reflected in (and motivates) physical alteration into something monstrous we no longer feel comfortable describing as human. I think this is part of Wolfe's commentary, found throughout the books, on the morality of so-called "transhumanism." Depending on the morality that motivated the alteration, the alteration is beautiful (ie. the green man) or perverse (Typhon, Baldanders). There may be a third category, morality that is simply alien -- Im thinking of the undines -- reflected in characters who are sometimes beautiful, sometimes terrifying or ugly, sometimes both simultaneously.

Macronaut

--- Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 18 May 2006, 18:36 · in reply to Macronaut

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I had the impression that the undines were women once who'd gone through a process like-but-unlike what Baldanders is doing to himself: like, in its main physical effects; unlike, because they allowed it to be done to them in service to another, while Baldanders is doing it to himself in service _of_ himself. This takes on fuller meaning with what you've just said: they are both beautiful and terrifying, both transhuman and monstrous.

Clearly to a Christian (i.e. Wolfe), transhumance cannot be _of itself_ monstrous: the new body of the general resurrection is to be transhuman (though I distrust anyone's specific ideas of _how_).

Thought for rumination: in the Lupiverse, if you strive to be more than "mere" human, you become a monster; while if you strive to be more fully human, you become more than human.

--Dan'I

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.
-- St Teresa of Avila
<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

mournings glory — 18 May 2006, 19:39 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

From: "Dan'I Danehy-Oakes" <danldo at gmail.com>

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Nicely put, and as I've speculated recently

(<http://listserver.dreamhost.com/pipermail/urth-urth.net/2006-April/001892.html>), I believe a case can be made that the undines are actually serving the Hierodules rather than the Megatherians.

Further evidence can be adduced in the visit of Famulimus, Ossipago and Barbatus to Baldander's castle.

Says Famulimus to Severian at one point, "You know the water women, I believe." But how do the three Hierodules know this? Have they been monitoring Sev all along since his initial encounter with Juturna and the nenuphars? Were they present, if remotely, via long-range reconnaissance, at Cephissus? Or have they just read the reports, so to speak?

Also, when the Hierodule saucer is about to flit off from the castle, notice how Severian describes one of its crewmembers: "and then, just as I was wondering if the crew did not ever peer down to see us, *the mermen,* the strange, uncouth beings who for a time walked the bottom below their hull, one of them indeed came down, head foremost like a squirrel, wreathed in orange light and clinging to the hull with hands and feet, though it was wet as any stone in a river..."

em

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 18 May 2006, 19:56 · in reply to mournings glory

Ooooh. Nice detail; I'd forgotten that entirely.

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And we've had a previous significant encounter with a slippery wet stone in a river, which involved Juturna -- yes?

--Dan'l

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Roy C. Lackey — 18 May 2006, 21:47 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

mourning's glory wrote:

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Cephissus? Or have they just read the reports, so to speak?

Because they live counterclockwise. That meeting at the castle was supposed to be, from their point of view, the last with Severian -- and would have been if Wolfe hadn't written URTH. They had been his friends and counselors during the ten years of his autarchy and had doubtless heard his life story up to the day he left for Ushas.

It must have been pretty damn awkward for Severian to conduct a sensible dialogue with them during those years, because each day they would know less than the day before, from his point of view. I know it sounds goofy, but it had to be that way. Their first meeting with him was outside his stateroom on the Ship, and they didn't know anything about him, except possibly whatever they had been briefed on, presumably by the Hierogrammates.

-Roy

Chris — 18 May 2006, 21:48 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp says:

Regarding Baldanders, Chris writes:

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That is one of the questions implicit here. The second is whether one, both, or neither are human - which you also picked up on.

There has been some disagreement on whether Baldanders is human or not in recent posts.

Chris are you suggesting Severian might not be human or that Baldanders isn't?

I suppose the only answer I can give here is "yes" - I am suggesting both of the above, though I am not really arguing either. I am, though, saying that the significance we draw from this passage will depend on how we are inclined to answer these questions.

With regard to Baldanders this ground has been at least partially covered, although there is the additional odd significance of the dream when he and Severian were sharing the bed. Also, as you point out, his name, although I am wary of relying too much on Wolfe's naming conventions.

Intuitively it seems difficult to try and argue that Severian is non-human, but isn't Severian's nature constantly coming into question? I can think of some particular instances in UotNS, but if we don't want to go that far forward in the series, doesn't Severian (as Conciliator) have some kind of difference with normal humans?

I suppose I should also note, though this may lead us far astray, that the notion of humanity calls for clarification at some points in this series. Is the green man human? Wolfe's apparent answer is "yes". Is he more human, less human, or human to the same degree, as you or I? And

where would the humans of Severian's time - somewhere between ours and the green man's - fall?

By the naming conventions noted above, Typhon can't be human.

And yet his lineage seems straightforwardly human. Perhaps, as others have pointed out, the name has more to do with his actions than his species. As I mentioned earlier I think that an over-reliance on Wolfe's naming conventions (something that I think Borski is vulnerable to on occasion) can be misleading.

But Chris' last note really killed me:

But in any event the passage seemed to me a sort of metaphorical reference to expansionist states.

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Philosopher.

But in any event what I was probably actually thinking of when I came to that interpretation was not Marx but Hobbes. "Leviathan", natch. Even if my interpretation is incorrect, which it might be, the connection of Hobbes to Abaia & co. is not incidental, though it might take an entire thesis to fully explore it.

In my view the primary difference between Abaia and the Baldanders we initially meet is that Abaia has been swallowed up by the waters of the past, and has consequently grown under the surface - exerting an influence while being only dimly understood and recognized by the people of Urth. As Talos says in that same section of *Sword*, "Surely you know that just as momentous events of the past cast their shadows down the ages, so now, when the sun is drawing toward the dark, our own shadows race into the past to trouble mankind's dream." Baldanders fails, as eventually he must anyway - attempts to control his growth could keep him above surface without collapsing under his own weight for only so long - and takes his place under the water. The deluge that follows wipes the historical slate clean, leaving no apparent Abaia or Baldanders, only the primordial undines who themselves seem to be seen in a different light at that point.

Adam Thornton — 18 May 2006, 21:54 · in reply to Chris

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That the Conciliator may be both fully human *and* fully divine has not been viewed as problematic for Catholics since 325.

Adam

Macronaut — 18 May 2006, 22:35 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Thought for rumination: in the Lupiverse, if you strive to be more than "mere" human, you become a monster; while if you strive to be more fully human, you become more than human.

I think that's an excellent and intriguing observation -- it certainly applies to Sev, maybe to the green man, and maybe to others like Tzadkiel or the people of Yesod.

You might also be able to argue that this difference is reflected in where people draw their powers -- that when you become more human your power comes from the Increate rather than technology. Sev draws not on devices to do things but on star power that he uses by some unknown means. Sev and the green man travel the corridors of time without apparent aid of technology. People like Sev and the green man don't use devices to accomplish things -- they just have some innate or learned ability.

There are certainly problems with this theory -- the heirodules clearly use technology for time travel and all the rest, and are impliedly closer to the Increate. And the undines have innate power to travel time, invade dreams, etc. and yet are surely not very human (though I agree they may start out that way, albeit albino and with webby toes, a la Idas). Nevertheless, I think there's a kernel of something true there. Maybe the heirodules are less than human -- tools to help us evolve. And the undines can be ambiguous under this analysis too.

Macronaut

--- Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:
I think this is part of Wolfe's commentary, found throughout the books, on the morality of so-called "transhumanism." Depending on the morality that motivated the alteration, the alteration is beautiful (ie. the green man) or perverse (Typhon, Baldanders). There may be a third category, morality that is simply alien -- I'm thinking of the undines -- reflected in characters who are sometimes beautiful, sometimes terrifying or ugly, sometimes both simultaneously. Ooooh, nice take.

I had the impression that the undines were women once who'd gone through a process like-but-unlike what Baldanders is doing to himself: like, in its main physical effects; unlike, because they allowed it to be done to them in service to another, while Baldanders

is doing it to himself in service _of_ himself. This takes on fuller meaning with what you've just said: they are both beautiful and terrifying, both transhuman and monstrous.

Clearly to a Christian (i.e. Wolfe), transhumance cannot be _of itself_ monstrous: the new body of the general resurrection is to be transhuman (though I distrust anyone's specific ideas of _how_).

Thought for rumination: in the Lupiverse, if you strive to be more than "mere" human, you become a monster; while if you strive to be more fully human, you become more than human.

--Dan'l

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I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.

-- St Teresa of Avila

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 18 May 2006, 22:49 · in reply to Chris

On 5/18/06, Chris <rasputin_ at hotmail.com> wrote:

But in any event what I was probably actually thinking of when I came to that interpretation was not Marx but Hobbes. "Leviathan", natch.

Because Baldanders is nasty, brutish, and, uh, tall?

Even if my interpretation is incorrect, which it might be, the connection of Hobbes to Abaia & co. is not incidental, though it might take an entire thesis to fully explore it.

No; I think you're quite correct. This is one of those things that has been under our noses forever. D'oh! Of _course_ the Megas are "Leviathan"s.

Nonetheless: I don't buy Baldanders as a Megatherian. He's a human who is attempting to follow their pattern for immortality. I don't have copy here to refer to but I'm deeply certain of it, if only because it fits the moral structures (and strictures) of the Urth cosmology so well.

So why does he have a monster-name? Because he isn't human _anymore_. The convention is not one of the Commonwealth, after all; it's Wolfe's, a way of cluing us in to who's a monster and who isn't, part of the fiction of his "translation."

Baldanders is a self-made monster, and a reverse-image of the ... oh, heck, I've forgotten their name ... the humans who've had themselves decorticated so they don't have to be human anymore? In the forest near Little Severian's house? (Who are in their way also reverse-images of the alzado... There's a whole lot of mirroring goin' on in the

Urth sequence.) They have given up humanity in one direction; Baldanders gives it up in the opposite direction, aiming at "science" and knowledge ... yet becomes a creature of primal passion in the end.

In my view the primary difference between Abaia and the Baldanders we initially meet is that Abaia has been swallowed up by the waters of the past, and has consequently grown under the surface - exerting an influence while being only dimly understood and recognized by the people of Urth.

How much of an influence, I wonder, does he really have? What is his function in the Ascian's system of governance, anyway? Does he mind-control the Group of Seventeen? Or...

As Talos says in that same section of *Sword*, "Surely you know that just as momentous events of the past cast their shadows down the ages, so now, when the sun is drawing toward the dark, our own shadows race into the past to trouble mankind's dream." Baldanders fails, as eventually he must anyway -

... I had always read this (including Baldanders's failure) as mostly play upon the Frankenstein story, with perhaps a bit of "The Day the Earth Stood Still" thrown in. ("No, you misunderstand. Gort is the master." Michael Rennie might have made an excellent Severian, come to think of it...)

attempts to control his growth could keep him above surface without collapsing under his own weight for only so long - and takes his place under the water. The deluge that follows wipes the historical slate clean, leaving no apparent Abaia or Baldanders, only the primordial undines who themselves seem to be seen in a different light at that point.

I do wonder about this. Is there any specific (textual) reason to suppose that the Megatherians, at least some of them, don't survive the coming of the White Fountain? Thematically it makes some sense, but it also makes thematic sense that at least some do survive -- such events never solve the big problems, only put them on the back burner for a while. (Of course, it could be argued that the Megatherians aren't a big problem, only a symptom.)

--Dan'l

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-- St Teresa of Avila

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

Matthew King — 19 May 2006, 00:03 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On May 18, 2006, at 2:47 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:
It must have been pretty damn awkward for Severian to conduct a sensible dialogue with them during those years, because each day they would know less than the day before, from his point of view. I know it sounds goofy, but it had to be that way. Their first meeting with him was outside his stateroom on the Ship, and they didn't know anything about him, except possibly whatever they had been briefed on, presumably by the Hierogrammates.

Severian could get around the time reversal problem by planning (and then remembering) to tell the Hierodules everything important on his meeting/their farewell day. Then they would know everything by report from their first encounter with Severian.

Roy C. Lackey — 19 May 2006, 00:39 · follows Matthew King

Dan'I wrote:

So why does he have a monster-name? Because he isn't human _anymore_. The convention is not one of the Commonwealth, after all; it's Wolfe's, a way of cluing us in to who's a monster and who isn't, part of the fiction of his "translation."

I agree that Baldanders was just a man, at least to start with. On the last day of Urth, Severian saw him and thought he "was grown too large for me to think him human ever again, his face heavier still and more misshapen, his skin as white as that of the water woman who had once saved me from drowning." (URTH, 302)

attempts to control his growth could keep him above surface without collapsing under his own weight for only so long - and takes his place under the water. The deluge that follows wipes the historical slate clean, leaving no apparent Abaia or Baldanders, only the primordial undines who themselves seem to be seen in a different light at that point.

I do wonder about this. Is there any specific (textual) reason to suppose that the Megatherians, at least some of them, _don't_ survive the coming of the White Fountain?

None that I know of. As for Baldanders, just as the flood hit the throne room, these were his final lines in the story: "I will not drown," Baldanders rumbled. "And the rest do not matter. Save yourself if you can." (307)

That leads me to believe he had no particular reason to fear the flood, and that he believed he would survive it. We know Juturna did. Why wouldn't he? The water had been his home for fifty years.

-Roy

maru dubshinki — 19 May 2006, 01:49 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

On 5/18/06, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

On 5/18/06, Chris <rasputin_ at hotmail.com> wrote:

....

attempts to control his growth could keep him above surface without collapsing under his own weight for only so long - and takes his place under the water. The deluge that follows wipes the historical slate clean, leaving no apparent Abaia or Baldanders, only the primordial undines who themselves seem to be seen in a different light at that point.

I do wonder about this. Is there any specific (textual) reason to suppose that the Megatherians, at least some of them, _don't_ survive the coming of the White Fountain? Thematically it makes some sense, but it also makes thematic sense that at least some _do_ survive -- such events never solve the big problems, only put them on the back burner for a while. (Of course, it could be argued that the Megatherians _aren't_ a big problem, only a symptom.)

--Dan'I

I'd say that unless we have specific textual evidence to the contrary, we should assume they survived. After all, in the first flood, Noah did not need to carry on the Ark two of each kind of fish. And didn't Sev see one of the Undines in a ruined city in the sea?

~maru

mournings glory — 19 May 2006, 02:26 · in reply to maru dubshinki

I do wonder about this. Is there any specific (textual) reason to suppose that the Megatherians, at least some of them, don't survive the coming of the White Fountain? Thematically it makes some sense, but it also makes thematic sense that at least some do survive --

Survive, yes; thrive, no. "Their power surpasses understanding, and I know now that they could crush us in a day if it were not that they count only enslavement, and not annihilation, as victory." So if a flood wiped out all of their current slaves (the Ascians), as well as most of their potential future ones (everyone else), they probably wouldn't even stay -- certainly, unless they were irretrievably stranded, they would have little reason to prolong their mission.

M

Jeff Wilson — 19 May 2006, 04:51 · in reply to pthwndxrclzp

pthwndxrclzp wrote:

Wow. Now I'm **really** confused. I don't have text references available, but I always thought it was axiomatic that Baldanders was a baby Abaia -- and as such, an alien infant dropped or otherwise delivered to Urth. Obviously, that could be wrong, but I can't recall a single indication that he was originally a human being. Quite the opposite -- it seems like Wolfe takes great pains to show us that Baldanders is something very "other."

The question is more properly, "What sorts of things are Baldanders?" He isn't just one thing, and doesn't merely symbolize one thing. He's a tree, he's a man, he's a black magician who wants to take God's place.

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

pthwndxrclzp — 19 May 2006, 05:47 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Now I understand why Wolfe was so fond of Jennifer Stevens' psychosexual neofantasy Trash Sex Magic (he wrote the cover blurb).

On 5/18/06, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

pthwndxrclzp wrote:

Wow. Now I'm **really** confused. I don't have text references available, but I always thought it was axiomatic that Baldanders was a baby Abaia -- and as such, an alien infant dropped or otherwise delivered to Urth. Obviously, that could be wrong, but I can't recall a single indication that he was originally a human being. Quite the opposite -- it seems like Wolfe takes great pains to show us that Baldanders is something very "other."

The question is more properly, "What sorts of things are Baldanders?" He isn't just one thing, and doesn't merely symbolize one thing. He's a tree, he's a man, he's a black magician who wants to take God's place.

--

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

Chris — 19 May 2006, 07:55 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l said:

Nonetheless: I don't buy Baldanders as a Megatherian. He's a human who is attempting to follow their pattern for immortality. I don't have copy here to refer to but I'm deeply certain of it, if only because it fits the moral structures (and strictures) of the Urth cosmology so well.

Sure, the two assertions (about the nature of Abaia and Baldanders, respectively) don't necessarily stand together. On the other hand I think the case is relatively strong that even if Baldanders didn't start out as one of them, he nonetheless ends up with them. But again: who says that Abaia & co. started out the way they are now? The only thing we have about their origin is from a fairy tale, and even that...

But in any event I remember a very strong impression from my reading of those chapters of Lictor that the entire thing was verging on an overt metaphor for oppressive states - so much so that I considered the possibility that Wolfe intended us to see it as having been fictionalized by Severian. A little cautionary tale from the aspiring writer.

under the water. The deluge that follows wipes the historical slate clean, leaving no apparent Abaia or Baldanders, only the primordial undines who themselves seem to be seen in a different light at that point.

I do wonder about this. Is there any specific (textual) reason to suppose that the Megatherians, at least some of them, don't survive the coming of the White Fountain? Thematically it makes some sense, but it also makes thematic sense that at least some do survive

Well, I did simplify there. Thematically what makes the **most** sense, given the cyclical nature of the timeline (presented in Eschatology & Genesis and hinted at by the Hierodules), is that they survive in a sense, but as seeds that will grow over time (in the same way the originals supposedly did). This also has the advantage of adding a little sense to Talos's comment I quoted earlier - their proximity to the end of the cycle means that their echoes will reach the "past" similar to the way things past echo into the future.

The fact that the undines are present both at the beginning and the end of the cycle I think points to an important difference between them and the megatherians. I do not read them as simply the creatures or servants of Abaia.