

Dorcas and Fechin

The Urth list — 12 messages, 6 voices, 16 Jun 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5057>

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 16 Jun 2008, 10:55

While trying to think up a devastating rejoinder to Roy's cogent critique of my cosmic theory I took a break to wander through the quagmire of Sev's parentage.

If his Sev-mojo was bred into him, can we find any trace of the breeding?

I think Dorcas does display some signs. Her husband says that her eyes opened as her corpse was being lowered into the water. When Sev resurrects her, it seems he isn't doing all the work: she seems to rise to meet him, with his sword in one hand and clasping his with the other. In Hildegryn's skiff it is as if she has brought forth a flower on the water, where there are no others.

So it's possible to see her as possessing some Sev-mojo, kind of latent, brought out more strongly in the presence of Sev himself.

Moving forward a generation, Ouen seems like a total loss as far as this goes. But his cloisonne enamel locket of Dorcas reminds us that making these was the trade of Dorcas' father (and brother).

And I think there's at least a few hints that Dorcas' father was actually Fechin. She's a good painter (with the backdrops of Dr Talos' play); she is quiet and beautiful like the girlfriend of Fechin described by Becan's father (Dorcas' mother?).

As far I can recall we are told of four Fechin works: a portrait of Casdoe's father, a portrait of the girlfriend, a portrait of Rudesind and a group scene with girls decking another girl with flowers (conceivably, Dorcas on her wedding day?)

And maybe five if Ouen's locket is by Fechin too. Maybe Fechin did other work as well, but he was definitely a portrait artist.

From that to cloisonne enamel miniatures is maybe not a huge step.

Such miniatures often use a substrate of copper. Casdoe's father says that Fechin stole his family's copper pan ...

And we have the scene quoted by Dave earlier, where Casdoe's father recalls the old sick sun as briefly re-invigorated, when "the light of it on Fechin's face was more than I could stand."

b sharp — 16 Jun 2008, 14:23 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

I like Thalassocrat's post connecting Dorcas and Fechin. Some new wrinkles I hadn't considered. But if Fechin is Dorcas' father then Casdoe's (or Becan's?) father, as an age peer of Fechin, is REALLY

old. A generation older than Dorcas' husband who appears to be dead by the end of Citadel.

I'll resurrect some of my theory (as Dave Tallman remembers) that Fechin is Dorcas' husband,

with an additional twist:

DORCAS' HUSBAND FECHIN FATHER INIRE

always losing material always losing material
posessions posessions

hangs out a lot in museum curator has builds museums and is
a museum a special fondness associated with the guild
for Fechin of curators

lives in a loft; creative and artistic creative and artistic
married into an
artsy family

is short and bent is short and bent

resembles a monkey resembles a monkey

attracted to very attracted to very
young girls young girls

For me the shared constellation of traits ties these three characters together more than any two of them can be tied together. especially if the blanks in the chart are filled in. Perhaps all three are the same person. As the old Autarch fills multiple roles in Urth society, long lived Father Inire fills even more roles. And the alien element in Severian's family tree explains for me the Oedipal problem, the Zeus references, allusions to shapeshifters on Urth, and even all the different monkeys who seem to be peeking in on Severian during his adventures.

(is Thecla's heraldry book with enameled illustrations meant to be connected to cloisonne?)

-bsharp

Andy Robertson — 16 Jun 2008, 14:59 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com
thalassocrat at nym.hush.com writes:

a group scene with girls decking another girl with
flowers (conceivably, Dorcas on her wedding day?)

Refreence to Botticelli's ****Primavera****????

- hartshorn

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 16 Jun 2008, 15:39 · follows Andy Robertson

On Tue, 17 Jun 2008 00:23:30 +1000 b sharp

<bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

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But if Fechin is Dorcas' father then Casdow's (or Becan's?)

father, as an age peer of Fechin, is REALLY

old. A generation older than Dorcas' husband who appears to be dead by the end of Citadel.

I'll resurrect some of my theory (as Dave Tallman remembers) that

Fechin is Dorcas' husband ... [snip for formatting]

Neither the old boatman nor Fechin can hang on to stuff ... except (according to Casdow's f-in-law) Fechin always hang on to his art. I don't think Fechin would have pawned the locket with Dorcas' picture.

I think the ages work OK. We know Rudesind is 80+ at the end of Citadel - at which time he had been a boy "70 years ago". Fechin was presumably older than him - maybe not by much; say he was born 85+ years ago.

Dorcas seems to have been born about 55-60 years before the start of BOTNS (say Sev is about 18, Owen about 40, and that Dorcas had Owen when she was about 18). So say 25-30 years after Fechin. It's not an impossible age difference for them to have been husband and wife, but certainly she couldn't have been the girlfriend described by Casdow's father, and it's more consistent with her being Fechin's daughter.

This does make Casdow's father pretty old, but then I think he is the most decrepit & senile old man appearing in BOTNS; and it makes more sense for him to be in his 80's, than it does for the boatman.

Dave Tallman — 16 Jun 2008, 16:24 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

If his Sev-mojo was bred into him, can we find any trace of the breeding?

I think Dorcas does display some signs. Her husband says that her eyes opened as her corpse was being lowered into the water. When Sev resurrects her, it seems he isn't doing all the work: she seems to rise to meet him, with his sword in one hand and clasping his with the other. In Hildegren's skiff it is as if she has brought forth a flower on the water, where there are no others.

I think Dorcas was put into the time-stasis water alive (possibly because she fell into a coma and was thought dead). Her dream in Claw XXII seems to be not about her initial burial but about being moved closer to shore. (There's no doubt in my mind that she was moved so that Sev would find her.) In the dream her eyes were open before she hit the water. She may have been paralyzed from the lingering effects of the previous "burial." Her husband, old in the dream, seems to be chant-caught: "I know that he has never known that I was there at all." He denied that he once pulled her up and then put her back (in Shadow XXII), but it turns out to be ironically true. Sev's presence revived her, but this may not be a resurrection like the others.

The water hyacinth looks like a great clue that Dorcas has miraculous powers. Incidentally, most water hyacinths are purple, and a purple hyacinth means "I'm sorry" in the language of flowers. Is this another clue to a dark secret in her past?

Another possible "miracle" by Dorcas is the failure of Jolenta's blood to clot in Claw XXVIII. I believe the initial wound was a suicide attempt by Jolenta, probably by using Terminus Est. Sev would have noticed a trace of blood the next time he cleaned his sword, except that all traces were washed away when it was doused by the undine. Jolenta was sleeping (or pretending to sleep) on her side. That way she could keep the wound pressed to the sand and Sev might not notice when he checked her. Otherwise, there doesn't seem to be enough time for her to lose a lot of blood. The Cumaeen repeatedly said that Jolenta didn't want to live in Claw XXX.

Dorcas screamed when she saw Jolenta bleeding, but she may have decided to assist her former lover's suicide by preventing clotting. She was the one who came up with the explanation of blood bats. There's another possible explanation, though. Patients are often given anti-coagulants after major surgery to prevent blood clots. Dr. Talos operated on Jolenta to augment her body with wires.

And I think there's at least a few hints that Dorcas' father was

actually Fechin. She's a good painter (with the backdrops of Dr Talos' play); she is quiet and beautiful like the girlfriend of Fechin described by Becan's father (Dorcas' mother?).

My idea was that Dorcas herself was Fechin's girlfriend, even though it means her powers, if any, must be from another source. It would be a better age fit. Possibly she became pregnant with Ouen by him and was married off quickly to someone else. This fits her other dream where shopkeepers look down on her in Claw XXII. (I read b sharp's matching of Fechin with the husband also, but it doesn't seem compelling to me. There's no mention that the old man looks monkey-like. Would a famous artist's wife be a mere shopkeeper?)

b sharp — 16 Jun 2008, 19:25 · follows Dave Tallman

Just a few responsive blurbs:

Dave Tallman, to clarify, I don't see Urth as being the same as Earth nor Jesus appearing in Severian's universe, Briah. That universal history is similar to ours but not identical. Thus they have St. Katharine to our St. Catherine. Roses pop up on St. Katharine's wheel, not St. Catherine's. Moreover, given Father Inire's probably close association with the Torturer's Guild through the ages, couldn't that story be an import? I don't remember shewbread mentioned in the BotNS text but it doesn't necessitate Jesus, nor do altars or candles. I'm not saying my view of a Jesus-less Urth is correct, only that it is defensible.

Dan'l Oakes, I always thought the "Theoanthropos" as spoken by Agia referred to The Conciliator. Isn't he a God-Man and his purpose to reconcile the gods and men? The "Theoanthropos" as spoken by Marie is probably Jesus but I find it clear that the Jungle Hut does not exist in the universe of Briah. The time portals are shown to work by having the ground floors in the present and the upper floors in the future. I see the elevation of the Jungle Hut, the airplane, the Bible reference etc. marking it as existing in Briah's future ...i.e. our own universe...probably Yesod.

Thalassocrat if, as I'm suggesting, these characters are all one immortal, shape shifting alien then the time frames and lifespans cease to have much meaning. Regarding Rudesind, as an old, bent, monkey-like, art loving master of the mysteries of the Secret House, I tend to throw him into the Inire mix. [he calls himself Inire but everyone else calls him Father Inire...why?]. I once discussed why Fechin's portrait of Rudesind might be a self-portrait (<http://lists.urth.net/pipermail/urth-urth.net/2006-May/006350.html>). And I can make similar

arguments for Rudesind being Inire in his final scene in Citadel though I doubt anyone is interested. [How does Rudesind get that note?] It does rely on the Inire character referring to himself in third person quite often and some Talos-like confusion between servant and master.

Dave Tallman, that's an interesting thought about Dorcas. I'll note that Roy C. Lackey once developed an elaborate theory regarding the hidden messages to be found in Dorcas' choices of flowers. But a correspondence with Gene Wolfe let him know the flower choices were purely aesthetic. Also, I had thought Jolenta had tried to commit suicide at first also. But I want to note (on Earth, anyway) the saliva of vampire bats contains a very potent anti-coagulant called desmoteplase or DSPA. Dorcas surely has some dark secrets involving transgressions with family members that she feels bad about. Perhaps she even senses, at some level, she is currently being sexual with her grandchild or grandchildren. Perhaps their whole family feels bad about that peculiar sin they tend to commit.

Dave Tallman — 18 Jun 2008, 04:57 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

If his Sev-mojo was bred into him, can we find any trace of the breeding?

We've looked at Dorcas, but we shouldn't skip the next generation. Catherine seems to have considerable powers herself. She appears the same year after year at the Feast of St. Katharine, which suggests time-travel abilities.

Her beheading is first explained by Sev as a fake, but there are discrepancies. Sev's sword "met resistance" and her head seemed to be really gone (Shadow XI). Later he says "How could I refuse the Increate what I had willingly given the Autarch when I struck off Katharine's head?" (Sword XXXI). That doesn't sound like he was just participating in a fake ceremony.

Catherine was probably the third "witch" who hid when Sev appeared in Claw XXX, and left the Pelerine robe in Claw XXXI when she and the others fled. I believe she hid so she wouldn't be recognized. The three witches are like the weird (wyrd) sisters of MacBeth, the three fates. They are the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone. The Maiden is Merryn, the Crone is the Cumaean, so that leaves the Mother (Sev's mother, Catherine). She must have had power to assist in the time-warping spell.

Most Pelerines are exultants or armigettes, according to Ava (Citadel X). Catherine was tall (Shadow XI). so she was probably an exultant. Sev's memory as Thecla in Claw XXVII shows three exultant women with glowing eyes (and the ability to command small bats: "a heart-shaped patch beside the lips of the nearest spread web-fingered wings," which may throw more light on Jolenta's death). I wonder if these are the eyes of the Pelerines that Cyriaca never had but hoped she might get when she took her vows (Sword V)?

I don't think Catherine is the same person as the Holy Domnicellae of Shadow XVIII. Sev seems to have seen her face despite her hood, because he says "There was much beauty in her, but it was not the beauty of women who quench desire." The Domnicellae is another candidate for the third witch at the Stone Town ceremony, but I favor Catherine. I don't know why the head of the Pelerine order would participate in necromancy, but a run-away monial who worked for the torturers might assist her witch daughter, Merryn.

Roy C. Lackey — 18 Jun 2008, 18:24 · follows Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Catherine was probably the third "witch" who hid when Sev appeared in Claw XXX, and left the Pelerine robe in Claw XXXI when she and the

others fled. I believe she hid so she wouldn't be recognized. [snip]

Sev saw only three figures on the roof. The third figure who hid, and who was larger than the other two, was Hildegryn.

-Roy

b sharp — 18 Jun 2008, 19:59 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Dave Tallman, keep the ideas coming. I think some of your veins of thought are very fruitful!

From what I see, Catherine (and Severian and Jolenta) are tall but shorter than exultants, marking them as belonging to the armiger class. Only the lower classes sometimes think Severian might be an exultant, due to his height. But I do see many clues that suggest hidden connections between witches, Pelerines and exultants, especially the Autarch's inner circle of concubines. We have the red garb found in the Stone Town, the Cumaeen's artificial beautification skills, the artificial beautification of exultant women, Merryn's ageless face, the hints of the powers of the Pelerines, the Chatelaine Somebody's hairless rats and the Cumaeen's creatures contained in an artificial environment, etc. etc.

I've always assumed the old Autarch's explanation that kaibits were clones of exultant women used, through blood exchange, to prolong beauty to be Wolfe's attempt to give us one clear clue to a recurring mystery in this series. Both Catherine and Cyriaca (whom I suspect to be sisters), though armigettes have some means of prolonging their youthful appearance.

My impression is that Wolfe is a bit horrified by the potential of biological science more than physical science. The mysterious machinery in Master Ash's time travel house is not nearly as scary and forboding as the biological science equipment found in the witches' tower, Typhon's round building and Baldanders' Castle. I think this fear of stuff like human cloning (and advanced plastic surgery) produced Fifth Head of Cerberus and some of the subtext of this story also.

I've thought for a while that the issue of identity crisis from cloning found in 5HoC is embedded in BotNS. Thecla's dream of a room full of identical, tall, well dressed women seemed to tie into that. Why are exultants the newest group of people on earth and why was there "nothing like them" in the old days? But I always wondered what in the world that heart-shaped patch on the cheek of one of the women meant. It could make the connection to Thea's heart-shaped face. Why are they "half-sisters" anyway? But I never thought of the patch being a blood bat. But "web-fingered wings" just might be saying that.

Severian has his bloodstream linked to the boy Mamas by the old leech. It isn't explained how this is done but

I always assumed the kaibit-exultant blood sharing must be done in similar fashion. Is there any way a blood

bat could be involved? Seems implausible; but maybe. Perhaps the blood bat patch is meant to be symbolic and that dream and others are meant to symbolically represent the cloning and blood sharing and alien admixture that produces Thecla and her ilk.

The other season of giving begins 6/24/08. Check out the i'm Talkathon.
http://www.imtalkathon.com?source=TXT_EML_WLH_SeasonOfGiving

Dave Tallman — 19 Jun 2008, 06:49 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Sev saw only three figures on the roof. The third figure who hid, and who was larger than the other two, was Hildegryn.

Sev only saw three figures, and Hildegryn was the only one who came out of hiding, but the evidence of the Pelerine cloak suggests someone else was there that night. I don't think it was left by an earlier necromancy attempt by the Pelerines, as Sev seems to think. He touched it as soon as he started to get up (Claw XXXI). The location coincidence is too great. The person wearing it probably rushed out to help Sev, and perished like Hildegryn when she got too close.

That would explain a curious omission in Citadel. After speaking to Ouen and learning of Catherine, Sev never tells us that he followed up to see if the Katharine of the elevation ceremony was his mother. He might have omitted this if he didn't want to admit to himself and to us that he caused his mother's death.

I found another bit of evidence that I don't think has been mentioned about Merryn as Sev's sister. In Citadel IV, Sev has a fever dream and in it Merryn says, "Ah, sister, you have come at last." (Sev is Thecla at the time).

Dave Tallman — 19 Jun 2008, 07:20 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

Dave Tallman, keep the ideas coming. I think some of your veins of thought are very fruitful! /From what I see, Catherine (and Severian and Jolenta) are tall but shorter than exultants, /marking them as belonging to the armiger class. Only the lower classes sometimes think Severian might be an exultant, due to his height. But I do see many clues that suggest hidden connections between witches, Pelerines and exultants, especially the Autarch's inner circle of concubines. We have the red garb found in the Stone Town, the Cumaeen's artificial beautification skills, the artificial beautification of exultant women, Merryn's ageless face, the hints of the powers of the Pelerines, the Chatelaine Somebody's hairless rats and the Cumaeen's creatures contained in an artificial environment, etc. etc.

In Shadow XI, it says, "She was tall and slender, though not so tall nor so slender as Thecla, dark of complexion, dark of eye, raven of hair." I don't see that being shorter than Thecla excludes her from the exultants; there must be some height variation in that class.

My take on the exultant/armiger distinction is that exultants are descendants of space colonist stock, and their families probably had power under Typhon. That explains their intrigues against the new source of power, the autarchy. The armigers are probably descendants of high-ranking military officers of Urth stock. I don't remember the text saying they have an intermediate height between exultants and commoners.

The exultants probably have superior genetic engineering and/or alien blood. The legend of the Boy Called Frog shows that those with off-world blood are believed to have special powers. They also use high-tech means for longevity and beautification, as you mentioned.

My impression is that Wolfe is a bit horrified by the potential of biological science more than physical science. The mysterious machinery in Master Ash's time travel house is not nearly as scary and forboding as the biological science equipment found in the witches' tower, Typhon's round building and Baldanders' Castle. I think this fear of stuff like human cloning (and advanced plastic surgery) produced Fifth Head of Cerberus and some of the subtext of this story also.

At least he is horrified by such science in the hands of evil people like Typhon and Baldanders, who seem to practice brutal vivisection on humans.

Severian has his bloodstream linked to the boy Mamas by the old leech. It isn't explained how this is done but I always assumed the kaibit-exultant blood sharing must be done in similar fashion. Is there any way a blood bat could be involved? Seems implausible; but maybe. Perhaps the blood bat patch is meant to be symbolic and that dream and others are meant to symbolically represent the cloning and blood sharing and alien admixture that produces Thecla and her ilk.

Anti-coagulants extracted from the saliva of blood-bats would be useful in blood-sharing, but that would be a crude way of getting it. The memory of the women may not be a dream, at least not totally. Sev says "I sat up, uncertain of the point at which memory had become dream." (Claw XXVII).

Jeff Wilson — 19 Jun 2008, 20:20 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:
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I think it's been pretty well established that higher classes are literally heads above those below them, as average heights go. However, the exultants seem to do this artificially by creating a companion clone ("khaibit") of each exultant and using the clone as a source of additional growth hormone ("royal jelly") to achieve an extra several inches of height. Thus exultant's aren't really of greater stature than armigers, and their bastards and other cast-offs will be equal in height as armigers. This also makes them pretenders to nobility who literally must put others down to raise themselves up.

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