

Sev's common lineage

The Urth list — 52 messages, 8 voices, 29 Jun 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5073>

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 29 Jun 2008, 05:25

Sev's lineage is a problem which I'm sure Wolfe intended people to drive themselves crazy over, and I don't think there's enough info to get really definitive. But on the flip side, I think he's inviting us to have fun making up stories, so what the hell ...

I want Sev to be related to Casdoe and Li'l Sev. "Casdoe" is so similar to "Dorcas", with the syllables reversed. Li'l Sev asks Sev if he's his uncle, which I don't think makes a lot of sense unless Li'l Sev does in fact have an Uncle Sev. If I'm right and Fechin is Dorcas' father, then at the very least the families have known each other for 70+ years.

Most characters, even if relatively minor, get named. Two exceptions are Casdoe's father and Dorcas' husband. I don't know what the first was called, but I think I know the name of the second: Severian.

Here's how it works. Say Fechin is Dorcas' father. The ages work out OK. Base-lining against the time when Sev left the Citadel, we have Dorcas born 55-60 years previously (she died 40+ years ago, according to her husband, and I think we can assume that Sev is 17-18). Rudesind was painted by Fechin as a boy; Rudesind is 70 years + a boy's age old, say early 80's. Estimate Fechin as having been born 85-90 years ago, so he had Dorcas when he was 30-40.

Casdoe's father is a contemporary of Fechin, so he's 85-90 also. Quite old enough for Dorcas' husband, the old boatman, to in fact be his son. Eg: say he has the old boatman when he's about 20, which makes the guy 65-70.

It's a very plausible story: Casdoe's father is close to Fechin, and obviously neighbors, at least when young. Their kids grow up together and marry each other.

Casdoe must be a late offspring for her father: she has twins who seem to be about 6 years old. Say she was born 26 years ago; or when her father was around 60. Not impossible, of course, but it does perhaps suggest other things which I won't go into here.

In any case, this ties everybody together, and the guess of "Severian" as Dorcas' husband's name explains why Li'l Sev asked Our Sev if he was his uncle. Dorcas' husband is his uncle, on this theory, and Li'l Sev presumably knows he has an uncle with this name. Our Sev and Li'l Sev are in fact second cousins.

Dave Tallman — 29 Jun 2008, 12:56 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

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Dorcas' father, then at the very least the families have known each other for 70+ years.

Usually Wolfe tries to provide a family resemblance between related characters. Fechin was "a tall, wild boy with red hair on his hands, his arms." Dorcas is gold-blond, with no mention of hairiness. Sev and his potential sister Merryn aren't hairy either. Dorcas has artistic talent, but I don't think that's enough of a connection.

You don't deal with b sharp's identification of Fechin with Father Inire and Rudesind. One or both of those could be true, given their monkey-like characteristics. But if so, chances are that the alien could not have children with human women.

I'm not sold that "Are you my uncle?" means that little Sev knows of an uncle named Severian. He's just hoping for a relative to take care of him since he lost his family, in my view.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 29 Jun 2008, 13:14 · follows Dave Tallman

On Sun, 29 Jun 2008 15:25:42 +1000 thalassocrat at nym.hush.com wrote:

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Here's how it works. Say Fechin is Dorcas' father. The ages work out OK. Base-lining against the time when Sev left the Citadel, we have Dorcas born 55-60 years previously (she died 40+ years ago, according to her husband, and I think we can assume that Sev is 17-18). Rudesind was painted by Fechin as a boy; Rudesind is 70 years + a boy's age old, say early 80's. Estimate Fechin as having been born 85-90 years ago, so he had Dorcas when he was 30-40.

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It's a very plausible story: Casdow's father is close to Fechin, and obviously neighbors, at least when young. Their kids grow up together and marry each other.

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Pushing this story along, let's make Catherine Ouen's sister. Dorcas died in childbirth, after 4 years or so of marriage, during part of which Ouen was a toddler. If the child lived, she would be about 40 when Sev leaves the Citadel. If it was a girl, she would have been the right age to be Sev's mother: a couple of years younger than Ouen.

The story: Old Boatman falls to pieces when Dorcas dies. Baby Catherine is taken by Dorcas' family - (ie, Fechin's family, in my story, but Fechin as Dorcas' father isn't essential for this part). Old Boatman slides down to skid row & is lost to them.

Fechin etc are the same kind of optimate family as Ava's. They are religious; witness eg the notorious enamelled religious work which Thecla requests, no doubt a piece produced by Fechin & son. Dorcas reborn seems to retain a religious sensibility.

Agia seemes to know more about religious matters than you'd expect from somebody like her, and it's at least plausible that Agia & brother are Dorcas' brother's grandchildren (their shop, inherited from their mother like the shop given by Fechin to Dorcas; an eye for quality craft work; a hint of more education than you'd expect from guttersnipes etc.)

So Fechin's family may well have had the kind of long-standing relationship with the Pelerines which Ava describes as necessary for an optimate daughter to be accepted into the order.

As Ava, so Catherine. She joins the Pelerines, and however it happens, she and Ouen meet, not realising they're siblings. Sev results.

This doesn't seem to deliver us any exultant genes for Sev, but you can't have everything :) Anyway, there's nothing which suggests any particular exultant characteristics for Catherine, and it's hard for me to imagine an exultant being sent to the torturers for any crime less serious than treason or lese majesty.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 29 Jun 2008, 13:26 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On Sun, 29 Jun 2008 22:56:59 +1000 Dave Tallman
<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
Andrew wrote:

I want Sev to be related to Casdoe and Li'l Sev. "Casdoe" is so similar to "Dorcas", with the syllables reversed. Li'l Sev asks Sev if he's his uncle, which I don't think makes a lot of sense unless Li'l Sev does in fact have an Uncle Sev. If I'm right and Fechin

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Fechin = Rudesind would mean Rudesind is lying about having been painted by him, and I don;t
see any reason for Rudesind lying. Fechin = Inire IMO is frankly absurd.

On the resemblance argument Sev couldn't be the grandchild of Dorcas, so this argument has
little weight. Red haired hairy great grandfathers have dark depilated great grandchildren,
routinely. Pace Ultan's comments.

My Dorcas = child of Fechin story doesn't rely just on Dorcas' little artistic talents. The cloisonne
trade of her father and brother carry more weight with me. In these kinds of socieies you don't
make big money as a "great artist" without a patron and position. I think it's very plausible that
Fechin's son might enlist his father's talents in a trade making ornanments for well- off
customers.

Anyway, I'm not claiming any of this as anything like an absolute certainty; I don't think that's
possible. But it does make a lot more sense to me than any other theory I've read.

Roy C. Lackey — 30 Jun 2008, 01:53 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

Fechin = Rudesind would mean Rudesind is lying about having been
painted by him, and I don;t see any reason for Rudesind lying.

You left yourself vulnerable to the self-portrait gambit. <g>

Fechin = Inire IMO is frankly absurd.

FWIW, I agree. I'm sure I said so the first time that theory surfaced.

-Roy

b sharp — 30 Jun 2008, 03:23 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Regarding Dave Tallman's Catherine scenario, I just have a gut feeling that if there is an exultant cell donor for the Catherine maids, Wolfe wouldn't be so unfair as to not toss her name out somewhere. Haven't found it and haven't had as much time to read and ponder this as I'd like. I hope to soon. Having Sev do the healing of the beheading seems more plausible than Catherine (or is it Carina? or Lybe?).

Roy writes:

Nessus was already two days drowned when Sev saw the woman, and the House Absolute was shortly to be inundated, so where was she being taken, and how?

My impression is that the woman Sev sees from the loggia is not from the future but rather being taken back to the past where she belongs. I think this because the woman in the pale gown in the coffin appears in the first chapter of the first book of the series and the woman Sev sees from the loggia appears in UotNS, an afterthought book by Wolfe to help explain the first four. I don't get the sense from the first 4 books that Catherine (or the coffin woman) is from the future, quite the opposite. I think Wolfe put the woman in UotNS on the Path of Air mostly to connect her to the Play and Countess Carina, (whom Dave, through her maids, has neatly connected to Catherine, even without the physical resemblance).

So anyway, if she is from the past, and weeping now, I think she is being brought back to face her necessary destiny, to be tortured to death in Allowin's Necklace. If forced to speculate on her crime I think it might be the same as her sister, Cyriaca's.

In my view, we are sort of told that Ultan's Library, which is at basement level, extends from the Citadel to the House Absolute (in hyperspace or something?). Rudesind's art gallery at ground level, has a similar connection. I see the Path of Air as a similar portal but with a terminus at the top of a Citadel tower (probably Valeria's). I'm sure Roy would argue that the flood would have covered even the tallest Citadel tower but I'm happy enough with this interpretation that I'm willing to consider a Wolfean goof there, or some sort of waterproofing by Father Inire.

Dave Tallman, I too have thought the morning glory comment was a clue. Didn't know moonflowers were a kind of morning glory! And I still think maybe Valeria is daughter (perhaps clone) to Catherine.

Responses to Roy:

Obviously Thais isn't in her 70's so if she is Thea's kaibit, she, like the loggia woman, had access to the Path of Air or some other time portal. I'm not sure why else a girl in her 20's on flood day would have any reason to give Severian knowing glances.

The "self-portrait gambit" (hah!) is not so loony...if we see an artist in a painting and there are brushes present it could be a self-portrait. A quick Google produces numerous examples of artists who some very famous like Chagall and Munch and one not quite so famous self-portrait with a brush by Russian artist Nicolai Fechin. Coincidence? (triple hah!) You be the judge.

Marc Aramini- Roy's nuts and bolts interpretations and insistence that real-world logic should be obeyed

might leave gaps in understanding. Surely Eschatology And Genesis is best interpreted as symbolic art within art rather than as a mechanical reality. Still without Roy, theories can (and do despite him) spiral out of control. I think his input is especially apt for a story written by an engineer.

Dave Tallman — 30 Jun 2008, 07:35 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

My impression is that the woman Sev sees from the loggia is not from the future but rather being taken back to the past where she belongs. I think this because the woman in the pale gown in the coffin appears in the first chapter of the first book of the series and the woman Sev sees from the loggia appears in UotNS, an afterthought book by Wolfe to help explain the first four. I don't get the sense from the first 4 books that Catherine (or the coffin woman) is from the future, quite the opposite. I think Wolfe put the woman in UotNS on the Path of Air mostly to connect her to the Play and Countess Carina, (whom Dave, through her maids, has neatly connected to Catherine, even without the physical resemblance).

Since UotNS was an afterthought, Wolfe must have expected us to be able to construct the loggia scene from the play alone. What is the Contessa doing in the play? She seems like a throw-away character until we examine clues like her maid's names, the morning-glory reference, and Meschia's comment about her prolonging her life by wandering Urth and being unable to return home. Note that he said Urth, not Ushas; this implies time-travel to the past.

So anyway, if she is from the past, and weeping now, I think she is being brought back to face her necessary destiny, to be tortured to death in Allowin's Necklace. If forced to speculate on her crime I think it might be the same as her sister, Cyriaca's.

This theory involves two or more time-travel trips to my one. I invoke Occam's razor; time-travel should be used sparingly in theories. Here is your scenario:

- 1) An adulteress from the past time-jumps to the last days of the autarchy to escape her death sentence.
- 2) In spite of an imminent flood, a squad of Praetorians escort her to the already-flooded Atrium of Time so that she can be executed in her own time. (Why not just kill her then and there?)
- 3) She sees Severian and for unknown reasons looks at him with mingled hope and fear.
- 4) Back in the year before Sev is elevated she is buried in the necropolis. For unknown reasons, she is interesting enough to Vodalus for him to dig her up in person.

I see no clues that give the impression that the Contessa had her origin in a different time period. In the play she's an ordinary exultant with an apartment in the House Absolute, a favorite of the current autarch. In my theory she escapes to the past (actually she is forced to do this), lives about seventeen years there as a prisoner, and finally dies to become the corpse in the necropolis. Her destiny is crucial enough to be enforced even when the whole world is about to collapse.

Marc Aramini- Roy's nuts and bolts interpretations and insistence that real-world logic should be obeyed might leave gaps in understanding. Surely Eschatology And Genesis is best interpreted as symbolic art within art rather than as a mechanical reality. Still without Roy, theories can (and do despite him) spiral out of control. I think his input is especially apt for a story written by an engineer.

I think it is reasonable to look for clues in the books that go beyond real-world logic. For example, there's no reason to believe Dr. Talos knew the history of the saint names he selected for the maids. That has to be a clue from Wolfe to us, or nothing. It's a meaningless coincidence

in the nuts-and-bolts world of the story.

The context of the argument was whether we should trust the play for specific details about the real Contessa. The details may have been made up by Talos. On the other hand, Sev might have carried back to Canog a few more specifics than what he told us in UotNS, such as the woman being of exultant height.

Jeff Wilson — 30 Jun 2008, 07:46 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

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If this is true, wouldn't that mean that Vodalus (and the others who presumably later share her memories) would have knowledge of the future era's general public, like Agia disposing of him in a coup? Wouldn't he want to stop that?

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

Dave Tallman — 30 Jun 2008, 08:42 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote:

If this is true, wouldn't that mean that Vodalus (and the others who presumably later share her memories) would have knowledge of the future era's general public, like Agia disposing of him in a coup? Wouldn't he want to stop that?

Catherine might not have sufficient knowledge of the exact history of the Vodalarii to give Vodalus forewarning about Agia. Vodalus might learn that he didn't become autarch and that Sev did, but probably not the exact reason for his downfall. Catherine had many unpleasant memories of her years in the dungeon -- she probably went insane there, as most long-term prisoners did. That would mask any good information that Vodalus might obtain. Before he could sort it all out, the memories would fade.

The identity of the corpse in the necropolis with Catherine is not a requirement for the rest of the theory to be true. Catherine could come back to the past, have Sev, and die soon after. Her khabits need to stick around for years to be the Katharine players, but she doesn't. I still support that part of the theory, however, because it gives an ending to Catherine's story and a reason for her khabits to be there.

Jeff Wilson — 30 Jun 2008, 09:41 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Jeff Wilson wrote:

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That's pretty iffy, given the popularity of political assassination stories and the large numbers partaking of her memories. How likely would they all be to miss it? I also don't see her madness masking details of Vodalus' future history if she is still able to express suitable political sentiment to be chosen to bolster the loyalty of the Vodalarii. Why would someone from 40 years post-Vodalus take up the cause in prison?

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< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 30 Jun 2008, 10:29 · follows Jeff Wilson

A couple of other things I like about my little Sev-lineage story. First & most obviously, it explains Sev's silence about Catherine: he's just not letting on that he's the product of an incestuous union. We don't have to try to guess whether Cathreine committed some discreditable crime that he's hiding.

But she probably was a bit of a thief; it seems to have run in the family, and it's hard to imagine that she was sent to the torturers just for running from the Pelerines. Fechin was always stealing stuff, according to Casdoe's father. Demure Dorcas herself seemed rather blasé about the prospect of whoring and stealing her way back to Nessus from Thrax. Ouen had trouble with the law. Agia & bro, enough said. Sev of course is a murderer, as well as being a stealer of library books :)

Dave Tallman — 30 Jun 2008, 11:57 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote:

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You're assuming that all corpses that Voldalus took were like Thecla's and used for the same purpose. His grave-robbing was more general than that. The citizen volunteers were concerned for their own dead; probably not all of them were Voldalarii loyalists. Voldalus might not share a body with future knowledge among a large number of followers.

Catherine was about 20 when she came back (8 years from puberty, if we believe the play). Sev had reigned for 10 years and Valeria for 30. The assassination of Voldalus was old news in her time. She might not know much about it.

Besides, her entry to the past was carefully planned by the Heirogrammates. No doubt she was programmed to carry out the affair with Ouen, for example. Knowledge that might change the future could be removed at that time, if not right before her death when it was decided to put her in the path of Sev and Vodalus.

Dave Tallman — 30 Jun 2008, 12:49 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew says:

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he's just not letting on that he's the product of an incestuous
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some discreditable crime that he's hiding.

And if my theory is correct and Sev is the product of a time-traveler he has an even stronger
motive for reticence: self-preservation. He doesn't want to give his enemies scope for
terminator scenarios which attack his mother before he can be conceived.

b sharp — 30 Jun 2008, 12:59 · follows Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman, to continue the debate:

Yes, my scenario involves two time travels, one forward, one back, while yours involves one. I
don't see mine being so very unparsimonious. Moreover, along with Jeff Wilson's concerns, your
scenario seems to allow no explanation for why Catherine, as a complete stranger to all in the
past,
is imprisoned for years, cloned repeatedly then tortured to death. You imply yours does explain
why
she is cloned but I don't see it.

She is chosen for her healing power genes? It seems clear to me that
Severian's gifts come from the gods and he is chosen for his role as Conciliator and New Sun
because
of his decision making ability borne of a torturer upbringing. No coincidence that Ymar had a
good shot
and the kindly old bee keeping Autarch failed miserably.

In my scenario, Catherine is forced back to her own time to fulfill her destiny. Probably by
Father Inire,
who, as you argue, is probably still the secret power behind the throne. If the Praetorians killed
her in
the future, she wouldn't have the same destiny, wouldn't be in the coffin in the necropolis,
Severian never
meets Vodalus or Thea, doesn't fall in love with Thecla, etc. etc. Surely Inire knew this.

I still don't see that any effort should be made to find a source of exultant blood for Severian.
He is tall
compared to most people but at least a head shorter than every single exultant he meets. In
other words,
he is of armiger height just like (who I think are) his family members, Catherine, Cyriaca and
Jolenta.

Thalassocrat:

I agree that unnamed major characters such as Dorcas' husband, (and the St Katharine maid,
and the Castellan) send up a red flag. Some of the age issues seem to bend your family theory
almost to
the breaking point, though I've always thought of Casdoe as being in her 30's. Old boatman as
Uncle
Severian is an interesting twist. Catherine and Ouen as siblings certainly fits my view of the
incestuous

family curse (as does the impending relationship between Ouen and Dorcas at the end of CotA).

I do favor the view that Casdoe and little Sev are family members of Severian (though I tend to think

the relationship extends from Cyriaca and Herais, in Thrax). The incest angle here is with little Sev.

Severian twice gives unprompted denials of pedophilia, once to us and once to Mannea (or was it Ava?).

Severian, with regard to the Old Leech, makes it very clear that an unprompted denial of pedophilia is a sure sign of guilt.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 30 Jun 2008, 13:15 · follows b sharp

On Mon, 30 Jun 2008 22:59:47 +1000 b sharp

<bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

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the breaking point, though I've always thought of Casdoe as being in her 30's.

Which ones in particular? The only odd part I can see is that Casdoe, whether in her 20's or in her 30's, seems young compared to her father's age. But that's not anything to do with my interpretation: it's in the text. Assuming nobody's lying about anything, he certainly has to be over 80.

(The question is: how old was Rudesind 70 years ago, when he was a boy? If he was 12, say, that makes him 82, and Fechin has to be older than that, assuming your self-portrait interpretation isn't correct. And Casdoe's father is a contemporary of Fechin's.)

Everything I've made up seems to fit together quite nicely as far as I can see, in terms of ages. And it's certainly simpler (for whatever that's worth) than having to bring in time travel and khaibits.

Mark Millman — 30 Jun 2008, 16:05 · in reply to b sharp

Dear b sharp:

On Monday 30 June 2008, you wrote:

I still don't see that any effort should be made to find a source of exultant blood for Severian.

Severian is the Epitome of Urth, and possibly of humanity, if Urth be taken to be the epitome of the human worlds of the galaxy. The exultants are of Urth and have been since the time of the Monarch a thousand years earlier, but originated off-world. It's possible that among the reasons that Ymar and the Old Autarch failed is that they did not represent the exultants. If Severian has exultant heritage, then he does.

He is tall compared to most people but at least a head shorter than every single exultant he meets. In other words, he is of armiger height . . .

I have yet to see any evidence that armigers are, on average or as a whole group, taller than optimates. Can anyone provide documentation, or is this an idea that has become enshrined in the common understanding without actually having any support in the text?

I know it's been posited in the past that armigers may be taller than optimates because their social class is higher, which by this argument would imply that they should, on average, be able afford to nourish themselves better, but I don't think this follows. (My bet would be that in reality there are many more wealthy optimate families than armigerous ones, and that many--even most--of the latter have declined and retain hardly more than their rank, and certainly very little wealth; but I wouldn't suggest that there's much evidence to back this view.) I think that the only systematic difference in height between classes for which evidence exists is that between exultants and everybody else, and that the roots of exultant height precede their return to Urth. (I speculated many years ago on alternative explanations for the exultants' height; that posting is in the archives.)

Best,

Mark Millman

Jeff Wilson — 30 Jun 2008, 16:35 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Andrew says:

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And if my theory is correct and Sev is the product of a time-traveler he has an even stronger motive for reticence: self-preservation. He doesn't want to give his enemies scope for terminator scenarios which attack his mother before he can be conceived.

Severian's remarks in the ms indicate he has no worries that anyone else will ever see the book he is writing. I suppose that could be a ruse to fool spies, but then the entire Book is suspect as a tissue of lies and we might as well give up now.

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

Jeff Wilson — 30 Jun 2008, 16:46 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Jeff Wilson wrote:

That's pretty iffy, given the popularity of political assassination stories and the large numbers partaking of her memories. How likely would they all be to miss it? I also don't see her madness masking details of Vodalus' future history if she is still able to express suitable political sentiment to be chosen to bolster the loyalty of the Vodalarii. Why would someone from 40 years post-Vodalus take up the cause in prison?

You're assuming that all corpses that Voldalus took were like Thecla's and used for the same purpose. His grave-robbing was more general than that. The citizen volunteers were concerned for their own dead; probably not all of them were Voldalarii loyalists. Voldalus might not share a body with future knowledge among a large number of followers.

- What else would Vodalus be doing with freshly dead bodies of specific people?
- The volunteers are likely on guard against graverobbers in general, as there are other motives that wouldn't apply to Vodalus (anatomy studies, thaumaturgy, fencing of grave goods).
- If the information is likely to be missed for whatever reason, it would be vital to share a body known to contain future knowledge among as many followers as possible to ensure that that future knowledge is recovered for the cause.

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

Dave Tallman — 30 Jun 2008, 17:08 · in reply to Dave Tallman

b sharp wrote:

Yes, my scenario involves two time travels, one forward, one back, while yours involves one. I

don't see mine being so very unparsimonious. Moreover, along with Jeff Wilson's concerns, your scenario seems to allow no explanation for why Catherine, as a complete stranger to all in the past, is imprisoned for years, cloned repeatedly then tortured to death. You imply yours does explain why

she is cloned but I don't see it.

In the Commonwealth, long prison sentences are usually the result of confusion and neglect, as witness the waiting room prison in the House Absolute. Sev says something similar about the insane long-term prisoners in the third level. Catherine's lack of contemporary contacts actually works against her. She might be arrested on a minor offence like breaking Pelerine vows or stealing from them. The police try to check out her background and find that she's nobody, yet clearly of exultant blood. She is sent to the Citadel prison, with instructions to keep her alive until the Autarch has time to deal with her. He never gets around to it.

The guild, in literal-minded obedience, extends her life using khabits. Since they have to maintain the khabits (off-site, since they aren't technically prisoners), the guild decides to put them to work in the annual Feast of St. Katharine. Having an identical maid year after year will increase the mystery and awe for the new apprentices.

Catherine-1's child, Sev-1, goes on to show promise of bringing the New Sun, so time-travelling interference begins. Someone investigates and finds his mother in prison. A plot is hatched to bring him into contact with her body; therefore she is finally executed. The original plan may not have predicted exactly what happened with Vodalus, Thea, and Thecla -- that seems very far-fetched. Perhaps they were testing the possibility that he could resurrect his mother, just as (in my theory) they later tested him with the beheaded Katharine.

In my scenario, Catherine is forced back to her own time to fulfill her destiny. Probably by Father Inire,

who, as you argue, is probably still the secret power behind the throne. If the Praetorians killed her in the future, she wouldn't have the same destiny, wouldn't be in the coffin in the necropolis, Severian never

meets Vodalus or Thea, doesn't fall in love with Thecla, etc. etc. Surely Inire knew this.

Careful of the time paradox here. Catherine can't be forced to fulfill her destiny the first time, because her destiny can't be known until it has happened once. Before the fact, it's highly uncertain what a meeting with Vodalus in the necropolis will do to Sev's life. If the graveyard scene is the result of temporal interference, then Sev1 somehow got sent north (or ran away there) even without that meeting, and went on to become Autarch by chance. I like Andrew's suggestion that the dog Triskelle was more deeply involved. Say Sev1 was seen feeding a pet in the oubillette, and he knew the dog would be killed. He might escape with Triskelle and run

north to become a soldier, eventually meeting the Autarch at the front.

Sending Catherine back to bear Sev is crucial, well-worth the time of several Praetorians on flood day. Sending her back to be a corpse in the cemetery? Why bother? Any other corpse of interest to Vodalus would do just as well.

I still don't see that any effort should be made to find a source of exultant blood for Severian. He is tall

compared to most people but at least a head shorter than every single exultant he meets. In other words, he is of armiger height just like (who I think are) his family members, Catherine, Cyriaca and Jolenta.

Being a cross between an exultant and a commoner (Ouen) would also make him shorter.

I agree that unnamed major characters such as Dorcas' husband, (and the St Katharine maid, and the Castellan) send up a red flag. Some of the age issues seem to bend your family theory almost to the breaking point, though I've always thought of Casdow as being in her 30's. Old boatman as Uncle

Severian is an interesting twist. Catherine and Ouen as siblings certainly fits my view of the incestuous family curse (as does the impending relationship between Ouen and Dorcas at the end of CotA).

What evidence is there for Ouen/Catherine being an incestuous relationship? There's a lot of guesswork in this theory about Ouen's losing track of his sibling. I don't see the merit in trying to bring in as much incest as possible into Sev's family tree.

Dave Tallman — 30 Jun 2008, 17:35 · follows Dave Tallman

Jeff Wilson wrote:
Severian's remarks in the ms indicate he has no worries that anyone else will ever see the book he is writing. I suppose that could be a ruse to fool spies, but then the entire Book is suspect as a tissue of lies and we might as well give up now.

I think that reference was to the copy he sealed in a lead casket and launched into space/time. There was another copy, the one he sent to Master Ultan's library. Well-connected people like Thecla could request books from there, so it could certainly be read.

Roy C. Lackey — 30 Jun 2008, 19:42 · follows Dave Tallman

Mark Millman quoted and wrote:
He is tall compared to most people but at least a head shorter than every single exultant he meets. In other words, he is of armiger height . . .

I have yet to see any evidence that armigers are, on average or as a whole group, taller than optimates. Can anyone provide documentation, or is this an idea that has become enshrined in the common understanding without actually having any support in the text?

The latter, I'm afraid. As you say:

[snip]

I think that the only systematic difference in height between classes for which evidence exists is that between exultants and

everybody else, [snip]

The armigers are a social class, and that class is not defined by crossbreeding between exultants and ordinary humans. When such crossbreeding does occur, the offspring are automatically excluded from the exultant class but do not, by default, become an armiger. Such offspring often produce people of greater than average height, such as the fat guy outside Agilus' cell who was taller than Severian, referred to as "surely the illegitimate son of some exultant". (SHADOW, XXX) IIRC, Gurloes also makes reference to some tall person as being an exultant's bastard. I can prove your point with a quote from Agia to Sev.

"To confess the truth, I wanted them to go on thinking you might be an armiger. Armigers go about in fancy dress so much because they're always going to fetes and tournaments, and you have the face. That's why I thought so myself when I first saw you. And you see, if you were, then I was someone that somebody like that, an armiger and probably the bastard of an exultant, might care for." (ibid., XIX)

If you will pardon my tendency to read what the text actually says, rather than what I might like it to say, it seems perfectly obvious to me that Agia found it necessary to distinguish between armiger dandies and exultant bastards. In context, when she first saw him outside the rag shop wearing his torturer's cloak, she thought he was an armiger in costume. His height was just the icing on the cake, not the cake itself.

FWIW, Valeria was an armiger, but I don't believe she was unusually tall. Neither did Sev note that Lomer or Nicarete, also armigers, were particularly tall.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 30 Jun 2008, 20:16 · follows Roy C. Lackey

b sharp wrote:

I still don't see that any effort should be made to find a source of exultant blood for Severian. He is tall compared to most people but at least a head shorter than every single exultant he meets. In other words, he is of armiger height just like (who I think are) his family members, Catherine, Cyriaca and Jolenta.<<

Uh, Jolenta ain't no armiger, if that is what you are implying. She is specified in the appendixes to CLAW to be one of the "commonality"

-Roy

David Wells — 30 Jun 2008, 20:36 · follows Roy C. Lackey

From: "Mark Millman" <markjmillman at gmail.com>>Dear b sharp: >On Monday 30 June 2008, you wrote: >> I still don't see that any effort should>> be made to find a source of exultant>> blood for Severian. >Severian is the Epitome of Urth, and possibly of humanity, if Urth be>taken to be the epitome of the human worlds of the galaxy. The>exultants are of Urth and have been since the time of the Monarch a>thousand years earlier, but originated off-world. It's possible that>among the reasons that Ymar and the Old Autarch failed is that they>did not represent the exultants. If Severian has exultant heritage,>then he does.

It seems to me that it could be seen exactly the opposite way round.

The exultants are not really Of This Urth. You point out that they originated off-world.

As others have said, the mating of Men and Monsters (or Angels?), and genetic engineering in general, seems to be generally disparaged. Perhaps it was necessary for Severian to be of the common(er) people?

newt

<http://clk.atdmt.com/UKM/go/msnnkmg10010000002ukm/direct/01/>

Mark Millman — 30 Jun 2008, 20:54 · in reply to David Wells

Dear Mr. Wells,

On Monday 30 June 2008, you quoted and wrote:
I still don't see that any effort should be made to find a source of exultant blood for Severian.

Severian is the Epitome of Urth, and possibly of humanity, if Urth be taken to be the epitome of the human worlds of the galaxy. The exultants are of Urth and have been since the time of the Monarch a thousand years earlier, but originated off-world. It's possible that among the reasons that Ymar and the Old Autarch failed is that they did not represent the exultants. If Severian has exultant heritage, then he does.

It seems to me that it could be seen exactly the opposite way round.

Indeed it could, depending on what interpretation you prefer. To go back to Mr. Tallman's statement, I don't really think that there's any need to make an effort to find a source of exultant blood for Severian; I think that Wolfe tells us he has it, and argument to the contrary is over-interpretation. But if a reason for effort were needed, the interpretation I've proposed suggests one.

The exultants are not really Of This Urth. You point out that they originated off-world.

Indeed I do. Please remember, however, that they're a strain -of humanity- that diverged off-world, and that they have integrated themselves into the life of the Commonwealth and, presumably, the other states of Urth as well. (For example, there's some evidence to suggest that exultant bloodlines persist in Ascia.) Having done so, they've returned to being part of the humanity of Urth. At the very least, we know that they're not a distinct species of humans, since they can interbreed with the commonality.

As others have said, the mating of Men and Monsters (or Angels?), and genetic engineering in general, seems to be generally disparaged. Perhaps it was necessary for Severian to be of the common(er) people?

Perhaps it is. I doubt that you will be surprised to learn that I prefer my own interpretation, to the (slight) extent that I think it's relevant.

newt

Best,

Mark Millman

Roy C. Lackey — 01 Jul 2008, 04:20 · follows Mark Millman

b sharp quoted and wrote:

Nessus was already two days drowned when Sev saw the woman, and the House Absolute was shortly to be inundated, so where was she being taken, and how?

[snip]

I think Wolfe put the woman in UotNS on the Path of Air mostly to connect her to the Play and Countess Carina, (whom Dave, through her maids, has neatly connected to Catherine, even without the physical resemblance).<<

[snip]

Marc Aramini- Roy's nuts and bolts interpretations and insistance that real-world logic should be obeyed might leave gaps in understanding. Surely Eschatology And Genesis is best interpreted as symbolic art within art rather than as a mechanical reality.<< [snip]

What I find ironic in your disagreement with Dave Tallman is that his identification of the woman in the loggia with the Countess in the Play is due, in part, to trying to "map" (my term) information garnered about the Countess in the Play onto the loggia woman (who is presumed to be Catherine), such as her age. The numbers in the Play, if the "map" is valid, and real-world logic force him to the conclusion that the loggia woman was born during the forty years Sev was gone.

In my view, we are sort of told that Ultan's Library, which is at basement level, extends from the Citadel to the House Absolute (in hyperspace or something?). Rudesind's art gallery at ground level, has a similar connection. I see the Path of Air as a similar portal but with a terminus at the top of a Citadel tower (probably Valeria's).<<

In the Play, the Praetorians were only escorting the Countess to her suite after Meschia had knocked her down. She reappeared in another scene with the torturers, but she was not there to be tortured, and wasn't. That's not a very good map from which particulars of Catherine's life can be extrapolated.

No one is going to get to have it both ways. Either mapping an Urth Cycle character to someone in the Play is valid, or it isn't. You can't pick which literal items suit a given theory and dismiss whatever doesn't fit with so much hand waving about symbolism.

Responses to Roy:

Obviously Thais isn't in her 70's so if she is Thea's kaibit, she, like the loggia woman, had access to the Path of Air or some other time portal. I'm not sure why else a girl in her 20's on flood day would have any reason to give Severian knowing glances.<<

Are there any characters in the Urth Cycle who *don't* have access to one of these increasingly ubiquitous and textually elusive time machines? Why on Urth would anyone have had any reason to preserve one of the Old Autarch's old whores by spiriting her away in time somewhere, so she can pop up on Ushas fifty years later?

-Roy

brunians at brunians.org — 01 Jul 2008, 04:25 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Are there any characters in the Urth Cycle who *don't* have access to one of these increasingly ubiquitous and textually elusive time machines?

I think there's just the one, in Father Inire's apartments in the House Absolute.

So no, not everyone, but people who know the House Absolute well would.

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Dave Tallman — 01 Jul 2008, 06:51 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

In the Play, the Praetorians were only escorting the Countess to her suite after Meschia had knocked her down. She reappeared in another scene with the torturers, but she was not there to be tortured, and wasn't. That's not a very good map from which particulars of Catherine's life can be extrapolated.

No one is going to get to have it both ways. Either mapping an Urth Cycle character to someone in the Play is valid, or it isn't. You can't pick which literal items suit a given theory and dismiss whatever doesn't fit with so much hand waving about symbolism.

Actually, I can have it both ways very easily. We know for a fact that Sev saw a woman in the loggia near the Path of Air, and certain details about her. We also know that the play contains a description of a similar scene. The first issue is whether this is coincidence or whether Sev carried a description of this event back to the past. I think we are forced to the conclusion that he did. A description of a throne-room scene with the autarch, the giant Nod (Baldanders), Jahi (Juturna), and the prophetess is also uncannily accurate to the point where it cannot be coincidence.

At issue is whether Sev told Canog (or someone who told Canog) additional details besides the ones in UotNS:

- 1) Her height. Is she an exultant?
- 2) Her apparent age. Is she young?
- 3) Her physical condition. Is she injured?

Details like this were either told by Sev or invented by Talos. I choose to accept them as possible new facts. Sev might also have deduced that she was his mother from investigations he didn't tell us about, and he might have chosen to provide cryptic hints about this to Canog.

Talos used the raw material to weave a consistent back-story for purposes of his play. He is more likely to be correct about physical details than about the context. We also, with more information, can weave a consistent back-story for our theories. We are free to accept his physical details and ignore his context. As another example, we can accept the giant Nod as Baldanders without believing that Baldanders had a character and motivations exactly like the ones given him in the play.

Jeff Wilson — 01 Jul 2008, 07:26 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Are there any characters in the Urth Cycle who *don't* have access to one of these increasingly ubiquitous and textually elusive time machines?

I think there's just the one, in Father Inire's apartments in the House Absolute.

So no, not everyone, but people who know the House Absolute well would.

What means of time-travel or at least exceptional egress from the here-and-now are there in the Book vs _Urth_?

In roughly ms order:

- The vicinity of the Atrium of Time
- Inire's mirrors
- Inire's Botanical Gardens
- Jonas' ship and other relativistic vessels
- Master Ash's home
- FB&O's saucer
- The Ship Tzadkiel
- Alpheta's portal
- the "Corridors of Time"/"the Brook Madregot"

and Hethor may have a set of mirrors.

So - one "time machine" in the House Absolute, one "time complex" in the Citadel, publicly accessible doorways to other times in the Botanical Gardens, Severian broke Ash's place, and the rest require intervention by Yesodis, luck to catch one coming by, stealing a spaceship, or incredible psychic powers.

Piece o' cake!

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

Jeff Wilson — 01 Jul 2008, 08:36 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Jeff Wilson wrote:

Severian's remarks in the ms indicate he has no worries that anyone else

will ever see the book he is writing. I suppose that could be a ruse to fool spies, but then the entire Book is suspect as a tissue of lies and we might as well give up now.

I think that reference was to the copy he sealed in a lead casket and launched into space/time. There was another copy, the one he sent to Master Ultan's library. Well-connected people like Thecla could request books from there, so it could certainly be read.

It is interesting in that the one "no one would read" is apparently supposed to be the one that eventually made its way back to "G.W."

Say, maybe that "explains" some of the discrepancies in the Book vs URTH. The casket-copy was dashed off in a hurry on shipboard, rather than at leisure in the clerestory, so it would likely

have uncaught errors from a lack of time to review and inaccuracies from going by Sev's memory of the scribing of the original draft instead of by the memory of the original events, with both internal and external distractions, etc. URTH, meanwhile, is again writ at leisure in a considerably simplified environment.

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

Dave Tallman — 01 Jul 2008, 10:34 · in reply to Dave Tallman

There is another level of clues in the play that I take as direct hints from Wolfe to the reader. Saint's names with significant history are of this type IMOP. I looked up the name Carina in more detail:

St. Melasippus

Martyr with Carina, his wife, and Anthony, their son. They suffered at Ancyra. Melasippus and Carina died under torture. Anthony was beheaded.

So St. Carina was a mother, and her son is associated with decapitation. That's another good Catherine hint.

b sharp — 01 Jul 2008, 12:01 · follows Dave Tallman

Thalassocrat wrote:

The only odd part I can see is that Casdoe, whether in her 20's or in her 30's, seems young compared to her father's age. But that's not anything to do with my interpretation: it's in the text. Assuming nobody's lying about anything, he certainly has to be over 80. (The question is: how old was Rudesind 70 years ago, when he was a boy? If he was 12, say, that makes him 82, and Fechin has to be older than that, assuming your self-portrait interpretation isn't correct. And Casdoe's father is a contemporary of Fechin's.)

Yes, having a man in his 80's father someone in their 20's-30's is possible but a stretch. I was only hinting that my ideas might help: if Fechin is Dorcas' husband instead of father and the portrait of Rudesind is a self-portrait, then it rolls everyone's age back about 15 years and the ages fit nicely. That might mess up other aspects of your scenario though, not sure.

b sharp — 01 Jul 2008, 12:42 · follows b sharp

Roy, I not sure I understand the point of your previous post. Are you saying you see no connection between Severian's loggia scene and the Contessa's story in the play? If so that almost defies belief. I would think even the most tunnel-visioned skeptic could see the similarities between those scenes.

Regarding this statement:

Are there any characters in the Urth Cycle who *don't* have access to one of these increasingly ubiquitous and textually elusive time machines? Why on Urth would anyone have had any reason to preserve one of the Old Autarch's old whores by spiriting her away in time somewhere, so she can pop up on Ushas fifty years later?

I don't find them elusive and I think time "portal" is a more apt description than "machine". Master Ash's house is the archetype; a labyrinthine entranceway to a vertical structure. Is there any quibble about its function? I see obvious copies of it in the Jungle Garden and Atrium of Time tower. I assume Thais or Catherine or any other character who seems out of place in time would have no trouble climbing stairs or a ladder without assistance. Moreover the suggestions of horizontal portals connecting the House Absolute to the Citadel and even to the Botanic Garden and House Azure suggest to me that many could have access if they wandered to the

right place (as Sev and Jonas wandered to Inire's Mirror room). Sev's discussion in UotNS of the many who managed to get into the Secret House supports this.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 01 Jul 2008, 13:06 · follows b sharp

On Tue, 01 Jul 2008 22:01:06 +1000 b sharp

<bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

Thalassocrat wrote:

Yes, having a man in his 80's father someone in their 20's-30's is possible but a stretch. I was only hinting that my ideas might help: if Fechin is Dorcas' husband instead of father and the portrait of Rudesind is a self-portrait, then it rolls everyone's age back about 15 years and the ages fit nicely. That might mess up other aspects of your scenario though, not sure.

Hmmm, I must be missing something. How does this roll people's ages back by 15 years? We have Rudesind a boy 70 years ago, so I guess he has to be around 80. We have Dorcas born 55-60 years ago (her hubby has been trawling for her for 40 years or so, he says, when he meets Sev, who I assume is 17-18). So if nobody's lying in any of that, Dorcas is 20+ years junior to Rudesind, and even if he's Fechin, that surely makes her too old to be the quiet girl of Casdoe's father's story.

b sharp — 01 Jul 2008, 17:11 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Sorry Thalassocrat I think my brain has been too distracted and addled this week to write a good post. I'll get back when I can.

FWIW- In the vein of of a Thais connection to Thea's kaibit, I recently found that St. Thais was a reformed prostitute. Also, she shares a feast day with St. Pelagia. Also there is a novel and opera about her with cenobite monks and a character names Palemon. Maybe all that was observed before? Not sure what to make of it. Maybe Dave Tallman has some ideas?

-bsharp

Jeff Wilson — 01 Jul 2008, 17:33 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

Roy, I not sure I understand the point of your previous post. Are you saying you see no connection between Severian's loggia scene and the Contessa's story in the play? If so that almost defies belief. I would think even the most tunnel-visioned skeptic could see the similarities between those scenes.

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of place in time would have no trouble climbing stairs or a ladder without assistance. Moreover the suggestions of horizontal portals connecting the House Absolute to the Citadel and even to the Botanic Garden and House Azure suggest to me that many could have access if they wandered to the right place (as Sev and Jonas wandered to Inire's Mirror room). Sev's discussion in UotNS of the many who managed to get into the Secret House supports this.

Sev's movements in the Houses seem to be under manipulation by Inire, for example the forced perspective room covered by the drop-down painting is explicitly his work. It's possible he similarly employs transcendent doorways that are only there in order to steer Severian over long distances, and would not necessarily be available for anyone's use.

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

Dave Tallman — 01 Jul 2008, 18:12 · follows Jeff Wilson

bsharp wrote:

FWIW- In the vein of of a Thais connection to Thea's kaibit, I recently found that St. Thais was a reformed prostitute. Also, she shares a feast day with St. Pelagia. Also there is a novel and opera about her with cenobite monks and a character names Palemon. Maybe all that was observed before? Not sure what to make of it. Maybe Dave Tallman has some ideas?

There are two different legends for St. Pelagia. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Pelagia) Saint Pelagia is an Antiochene saint, a virgin of fifteen years, who chose death by a leap from the housetop rather than dishonour. The legend of the Saint Pelagia (sometimes called *Margarito*) who was a courtesan is famous.

The two legends fit nicely with the chatelaine/kaibit relationship, since some kaibits moonlight at the House Azure.

St. Pega herself is part of a pair with her brother, St. Guthlac. She was sent away from her brother's island when the Devil appeared in her form to tempt him.

I like the Thais = Thea's explanation I've seen. Saint Thea has a pairing in her history. She was bound together with St. Valentina and burned at the stake.

Thais seems much too young to be the kaibit Sev saw at the House Azure, but perhaps she is another kaibit of that line who was told of the encounter with Sev by her clone sisters. She doesn't want the others to know anything about her history, so she wishes Sev to say nothing. I'll reject time-travel for her as an unnecessary complication. Sev doesn't identify her as the same person, anyway.

Roy C. Lackey — 01 Jul 2008, 20:36 · follows Dave Tallman

b sharp wrote:

Roy, I not sure I understand the point of your previous post. Are you saying you see no connection between Severian's loggia scene and the Contessa's story in the play? If so that almost defies belief. I would think even the most tunnel-visioned skeptic could see the similarities between those scenes.

Of course they are similar, but that's not the point. I find it ironic that you accept many of Dave's undemonstrated (and textually undemonstrable) conclusions derived from projecting onto Severian's mother particular "facts" about the play's Countess, while at the same time disagreeing with him about those "facts", such as her exultant status and birth some thirty years after Sev became autarch. You can't have it both ways; either he's right or he's not.

Dave takes the mention of the names of two people who are not even in the Play and extrapolates a whole series of obliging khaibits, seventeen years for Sev's mother in the nut-case lower level of the Matachin tower, her execution and burial a year and a half before Sev's elevation (accomplished, apparently, without his knowledge), all of this orchestrated by unseen Hierogrammate agents and with the necessary complicity of the Guild and, presumably, the autarch they serve. He also requires an extra-textual trip in time to augment the Conciliator's speech for Canog's edification. It's just too great a leap and too much for me to swallow on faith.

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Are there any characters in the Urth Cycle who *don't* have access to one of these increasingly ubiquitous and textually elusive time machines? Why on Urth would anyone have had any reason to preserve one of the Old Autarch's old whores by spiriting her away in time somewhere, so she can pop up on Ushas fifty years later?

I don't find them elusive and I think time "portal" is a more apt description than "machine".

Never mind the time machines and teleporters. Why would Thea's khaibit be on that raft and a man with an eidetic memory not recognize her?

-Roy

Dave Tallman — 01 Jul 2008, 22:58 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Dave takes the mention of the names of two people who are not even in the

Play and extrapolates a whole series of obliging khaibits, seventeen years for Sev's mother in the nut-case lower level of the Matachin tower, her execution and burial a year and a half before Sev's elevation (accomplished, apparently, without his knowledge), all of this orchestrated by unseen Hierogrammate agents and with the necessary complicity of the Guild and, presumably, the autarch they serve. He also requires an extra-textual trip in time to augment the Conciliator's speech for Canog's edification. It's just too great a leap and too much for me to swallow on faith.

The extra trip or trips back in time are not extra-textual:

"Often I have dreamed of going back, and perhaps sometime I shall. Certainly more guests came to our aid when Zama broke our door than there was any reason to expect, and I would like to think that one or even several of them were myself. Indeed it sometimes seems to me that I caught a glimpse of my own face in the candlelight that night." (Urth XXXII).

I just extrapolated that Sev might have done some more talking to people, not just gawking in the hallway at the inn. It solves an otherwise serious continuity error. And it need not be Canog himself who recorded the extra details. Any other written source would do for Talos to consult in writing his play. Some other time traveller could have carried back the information, but it's

economical to use Sev himself since we have this reference.

We know that Catherine was confined in Matachin tower when she gave birth to Severian.
"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower." (Urth XLIV)

The idea that she was also the corpse in the necropolis is separable. If she was not, she could die much sooner. There are a few difficulties explaining the memories Vodalus and friends might ingest, so that part can be taken or left IMOP. It could be any ordinary corpse, and the recollection of the graveyard scene only suggested by the thought that Ultan has been "buried" in his underground library for years.

Where I insist on finding new evidence is in the names of the maids. It's not "two people who are not even in the Play," but three people, one of whom is portrayed and the other two called for by name. Why have the Contessa call out those other names at all? Gratuitous details are suspect in Wolfe books. When I find that all three name beheaded saints, I want to tie it into a theory. I also find that Saint Carina was a mother and her son was beheaded. A sequence of beheaded women to me suggests the Feast of St. Katharine. The unaging look of the woman could be explained by a series of khaibits. It could also be a single time-traveler, but I think you'd agree that's worse.

There are other indications in the play that I have mentioned: the Contessa's desire to get pregnant to save her life, and the morning-glory and moonflower metaphors. By themselves they might not mean much, but they add to the case for the theory.

One more thought -- there's a mention in both BotNS and UotNA of the arches in the loggia which make Sev seem to appear and disappear to the Contessa. ("I shifted from one arch to the next to keep them in view"). This may tie in with Master Ash -- he could only exist in a past where his future had a good chance to occur. Catherine could have an alternating existence depending on the varying chances of Sev bringing the New Sun. That might make it interesting to keep her around for observation.

Roy C. Lackey — 02 Jul 2008, 02:38 · follows Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman quoted and wrote:

Dave takes the mention of the names of two people who are not even in the Play and extrapolates a whole series of obliging khaibits, seventeen years

for Sev's mother in the nut-case lower level of the Matachin tower, her execution and burial a year and a half before Sev's elevation (accomplished,

apparently, without his knowledge), all of this orchestrated by unseen Hierogrammate agents and with the necessary complicity of the Guild and, presumably, the autarch they serve. He also requires an extra-textual trip

in time to augment the Conciliator's speech for Canog's edification. It's just too great a leap and too much for me to swallow on faith.

The extra trip or trips back in time are not extra-textual:

[snip of quote]

Yes, I am aware of that quote and there are other hints that Sev would make trips in time, eventually. But the trip(s) to that inn and those other prospective trips are not related in the

text of either of his manuscripts.

We know that Catherine was confined in Matachin tower when she gave birth to Severian. "Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower." (Urth XLIV)

I am *very* aware of that quote: It was the subject of some . . . spirited . . . debate not that long ago.

The idea that she was also the corpse in the necropolis is separable. If she was not, she could die much sooner. There are a few difficulties explaining the memories Vodalus and friends might ingest, so that part can be taken or left IMOP. It could be any ordinary corpse, and the recollection of the graveyard scene only suggested by the thought that Ultan has been "buried" in his underground library for years.

It could also have been the corpse of the mother of the unnamed volunteer who said, "I'm going to watch over my mother."

Where I insist on finding new evidence is in the names of the maids. It's not "two people who are not even in the Play," but three people, one of whom is portrayed and the other two called for by name. Why have the Contessa call out those other names at all?

She had just been assaulted. For all we know it was just an interjection along the lines of, "Saints preserve us!" or "God help me!". Abban invoked St. Amand at the Inn of Lost Loves, but that's pretty feeble. <g> I don't have a problem with the maids having the names of martyred saints angle; it's the rest I balk at.

Gratuitous details are suspect in Wolfe books.

Yeah, but sometimes a cigar is only a cigar. <g>

When I find that all three name beheaded saints, I want to tie it into a theory. I also find that Saint Carina was a mother and her son was beheaded. A sequence of beheaded women to me suggests the Feast of St. Katharine. The unaging look of the woman could be explained by a series of khaibits. It could also be a single time-traveler, but I think you'd agree that's worse.

Martyrdom, torture and beheadings are common to many Saints in the catalogue, too many.

[snip]

One more thought -- there's a mention in both BotNS and UotNA of the arches in the loggia which make Sev seem to appear and disappear to the Contessa. ("I shifted from one arch to the next to keep them in view"). This may tie in with Master Ash -- he could only exist in a past where his future had a good chance to occur. Catherine could have an alternating existence depending on the varying chances of Sev bringing the New Sun. That might make it interesting to keep her around for observation.

The simplest explanation is the one given in both the Play and URTH. In the Play she called the arches "windows". Just as Sev moved from arch to arch to keep her in view as she was escorted along, so the Countess in the Play perceived the man's movement as shifting from window to window. No need to complicate matters. Strop that Razor!

Look, I knew from your first few postings that you had been through the archives and were

trying very hard to come up with something new to say about all the stuff we have been arguing about here for years. That's commendable on both counts. I am also aware that few of the things we argue about here (and that's the right verb; it's seldom discuss) are amenable to clear-cut answers or it would have all been sorted out years ago. Hell, I think there are some people here who won't even agree that Dorcas is Severian's grandmother. Other people have their pet theories that owe more to imagination than the texts will allow, and no amount of contrary evidence or reasoning will dissuade them. You haven't asked my opinion, but I hope you don't get carried away with trying too hard. FWIW.

-Roy

b sharp — 02 Jul 2008, 04:14 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy, in saying to me:

I find it ironic that you accept many of Dave's undemonstrated (and textually undemonstrable) conclusions derived from projecting onto Severian's mother particular "facts" about the play's Countess, while at the same time disagreeing with him about those "facts", such as her exultant status and birth some thirty years after Sev became autarch. You can't have it both ways; either he's right or he's not.

and to Dave:

I hope you don't get carried away with trying too hard. FWIW.

I think you are missing the point of the discussion. OF COURSE he can be both right and not right. He can be simultaneously dead on correct, merely "on to something" as I described it, and way off track.

The judgement is in the domain of each individual reader here. And as I see it, the purpose of this sort of brainstorming activity is to bring up new fresh ideas and sift them, wheat from chaff. You have your role as guardian of the text but perhaps others have different roles which are important...unless you are resigned to the the sad reality that all the mysteries of this story are either solved or remain ambiguous by design. After 12 years that might be the case but I can't shake a nagging feeling that there are still a few solvable puzzles here. And I think open thinking and discussion is the only way to get to them.

-bsharp

b sharp — 02 Jul 2008, 05:14 · follows b sharp

Dave Tallman, to really give my theory about the Rudesind, Dorcas' husband and Fechin a chance of plausibility, it must be understood that they are all versions of immortal, shape-shifting Father Inire. It is more of a thought exercise than a rock solid "belief" or something I "buy into" and I'm not so sure it is fully defensible. But, if I may submerge in it anyway for a post:

The scenario uses the model of the old Autarch, who serves as ruler, third bursar, pimp and several other roles in society. Where did he get the idea of doing that? If he, being human, can play all those roles, I can imagine a shape-shifting immortal with access to time and space

portals with the ability to play far more roles. It requires more deception than the old Autarch uses and requires that when the Inire is discussing a different version of himself he uses that version's name instead of "I".

We could leave Rudesind out for now and focus on Dorcas' husband who says,

"..Father Inire had the gardeners plant the averns. I was here and saw it. Just a little man he is, with a wry neck and bow legs."

I could translate to:

"I had the gardeners plant the averns. I was here and saw it. Just a little man I am, with a wry neck and bow legs".

And of course that description does fit Dorcas' husband speaking it. Severian specifically notes his small size and bow legs. I notice Severian encounters both Isangoma and Dorcas' husband immediately after telling the Father Inire-Domnina story. As you suggest, Dave, I think there are portions of this story which are meant as direct hints from author to reader without particular

regard to the actual plot. And given Father Inire's apparent attraction to very young women, I don't think his love for Dorcas is a contrivance for the New Sun at all. He really is sad and misses her.

We know that restoring life to the dead is not one of his race's powers but it is one of Severian's. There might be a different purpose than the New Sun for manipulating Severian to the Lake of Birds.

If I was Roy I might ask why Severian, with the old Autarch's memories, doesn't know more about

Father Inire and his many roles. I could try to invent an answer within the storyline but I think the

better answer is: Because Gene Wolfe intends to trick us and leave us in the dark, half-hiding things.

Tantalizing us with edge-of-meaning and almost-comprehension as a technique for imbuing a timeless

quality to his story. But to successfully do this there has to be a real solution most of the time.

And

that's a view of Wolfe one either has or doesn't. That's the impression I get from studying so many of

the Wolfe interviews- that he isn't just splashing words on a page for effect. He has a tangible concept

in mind as a basis for most of his vague, strange allusions.

-bsharp

Jeff Wilson — 02 Jul 2008, 07:36 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

Dave Tallman, to really give my theory about the Rudesind, Dorcas' husband and Fechin a chance of plausibility, it must be understood that they are all versions of immortal, shape-shifting Father Inire.

Er, how do you explain Docas' husband being dead *and* immortal? Or the well-connected Inire handicapping his earnest search for Dorcas' body by doing it manually and alone, one body at a time?

"..Father Inire had the gardeners plant the averns. I was here and saw it. Just a little man he is, with a wry neck and bow legs."

This could be just ironic. The younger husband saw the scrawny Inire, then became scrawny with age himself, but still remembers Inire as smaller.

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

Dave Tallman — 02 Jul 2008, 08:06 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

The simplest explanation is the one given in both the Play and URTH. In the Play she called the arches "windows". Just as Sev moved from arch to arch to keep her in view as she was escorted along, so the Countess in the Play perceived the man's movement as shifting from window to window. No need to complicate matters. Strop that Razor!

I agree with that simple literal explanation, but I was looking beyond that for a symbolic meaning. They both appear and disappear to each other, which I speculated could refer to the contingent appearance of Master Ash.

Here is another clue. Compare this, from UotNS:

"Hers was a lovely face of that complexion called olive and as smoothly oval as an olive, to, with something in it that tore at my heart; and though it was strange to me, I had the sensation of return once again. I felt that in some lost life I had stood just where I was standing then; and that in that life I had seen her standing beneath me in just that way... If I had understood her expression at all, it had been one of mingled hope and fear, and perhaps she too had some sense of a drama being played upon a second occasion."

to this, from "House of Ancestors":

"He could sense her beside him in the blackness; and unexpectedly, overwhelmingly, the certainty came to him that they had waited together like this before, and that the sensation he now felt was familiar through countless repetitions."

In "House of Ancestors", the protagonist Joe interacts with robots that tap into the memories of his mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, etc. They not only read these memories, but they somehow rewrite them into the past. Joe gets these memories as part of himself through Lamarckian inheritance. The science is suspect to me, but Wolfe's idea in that story is that if one interacts with one's mother before the time of one's conception, then there is a "deja vu" effect. I suggest a similar idea is being used here.

<snip> You haven't asked my opinion, but I hope you don't get carried away with trying too hard. FWIW.

As you know from our "Seven American Nights" debate, I do try very hard to support my theories. I'll try not to get carried away. :)

Dave Tallman — 02 Jul 2008, 08:40 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

"..Father Inire had the gardeners plant the averns. I was here and saw it. Just a little man he is, with a wry neck and bow legs."

I could translate to:

"I had the gardeners plant the averns. I was here and saw it. Just a little man I am, with a wry neck and bow legs".

Does he also have a wry neck (torticollis, a condition in which the head is held stiffly to one side)?

Roy C. Lackey — 02 Jul 2008, 20:02 · follows Dave Tallman

b sharp wrote:

I think you are missing the point of the discussion. OF COURSE he can be both right and not right. He can be simultaneously dead on correct, merely "on to something" as I described it, and way off track.

The judgement is in the domain of each individual reader here.

Amazing! Absolutely amazing! I don't know why such a democratic concept eluded me. I stand corrected. All theories being equal, it follows that any given theory's validity should be determined by the perceptions and expectations of the reader. If Schrodinger had fully realized that concept, he could have spared that poor cat some anxious moments.

-Roy

b sharp — 05 Jul 2008, 03:57 · follows Dave Tallman

Back. Was away in NYC a few days.

Dave Tallman asks:

Does he [Dorcas' husband] also [like Inire] have a wry neck (torticollis, a condition in which the head is held stiffly to one side)?

I don't know but all those years of poling could produce an awfully wry neck I think. BTW, some have concluded this character should be called "Charon" and that mythological character was the son of Erebus and Night, a nice connecting tidbit if he is really greek god analog Father Inire.

Roy posts in response to- The judgement (of value of a theory) is in the domain of each individual reader here.

with-

Amazing! Absolutely amazing! I don't know why such a democratic concept eluded me.

Well, since we are not voting I don't see what is democratic about it. Seems to me this list consists of a group of individual autarchs, free to make whatever judgement they wish. Is there a governing body which assesses the correctness of theories, of which I am not aware?

Jeff Wilson asks:

Er, how do you explain Docas' husband being dead *and* immortal? Or the well-connected Inire handicapping his earnest search for Dorcas' body by doing it manually and alone, one body at a time?

Um. well, if I must defend: Within this interpetation, Dorcas' husband/Father Inire isn't really dead. Occasionally playing dead would be a necessary skill for an immortal guy who takes on many mortal human roles, yes? On his bier he is described by Severian as with a "back so straight, his face in death, so youthful, that I hardly knew him. That's a rather odd thing to happen to a dead body (imo) unless the dead body is a shape changer who wants his wife of many years ago to view him more as she remembered him.

-bsharp

place one message at a time.

http://www.imtalkathon.com/?source=EML_WLH_Talkathon_BetterPlace

Jeff Wilson — 05 Jul 2008, 05:06 · in reply to b sharp

Jeff Wilson asks:

Er, how do you explain Docas' husband being dead *and* immortal? Or the well-connected Inire handicapping his earnest search for Dorcas' body by doing it manually and alone, one body at a time?

Um. well, if I must defend: Within this interpretation, Dorcas' husband/Father Inire isn't really dead. Occasionally playing dead would be a necessary skill for an immortal guy who takes on many mortal human roles, yes? On his bier he is described by Severian as with a "back so straight, his face in death, so youthful, that I hardly knew him. That's a rather odd thing to happen to a dead body (imo) unless the dead body is a shape changer who wants his wife of many years ago to view him more as she remembered him.

One of the ways of telling a person is dead is that opposing muscle groups are relaxed, so it would not be unusual for a person often in the grip of strong emotion to look more youthful in death, or a wry necked person to lay straighter now that the abnormal muscle tension is gone.

And why would Inire spend years trolling alone, again?

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

b sharp — 05 Jul 2008, 14:59 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson writes:

One of the ways of telling a person is dead is that opposing muscle groups are relaxed, so it would not be unusual for a person often in the grip of strong emotion to look more youthful in death, or a wry necked person to lay straighter now that the abnormal muscle tension is gone.

And why would Inire spend years trolling alone, again?

Jeff if you are trying to make arguments for why Dorcas' husband might not be Father Inire you are breaking down an open door. I agree, he might not be. But I think he could be. If you are trying to argue he couldn't possibly be, that's a different story and you'll need more definitive proof, I think.

If he was Father Inire then I doubt he was really spending so much time poling around. More likely it is a designed act to draw Severian into resurrecting Dorcas. Yep, he lies. But so does Severian, Apheta, Tzadkiel, even the old autarch who says he doesn't lie.

On the other hand, who knows.... perhaps Father Inire, who has 1000 years to get his work done has a lot of free time on his hands.

You seem to prefer prosaic explanations, in this case the similarities between Dorcas' husband and Father Inire are explained by you as an attempt at character dialog irony by Wolfe. His young appearance in death is a sort of anti-rigor mortis that relaxes the muscles. There are other examples where you reject a fantastic explanation in favor of a humdrum one. Occam's razor as Roy likes to invoke?

For me, Occam is a principle for real world applications. This is a story. Some authors

are the sort that would spend pages finding incredible descriptive beauty in a rock or something. Gene Wolfe seems the opposite to me. He seems like a guy with a lot of fantastical ideas in his head who likes to veil them behind mundane and overly casual descriptions sometimes.

Since he is very careful about revealing anything it is hard to know which portions of his stories are veiled fantasticisms and which are really mundane. The one slip up I know of is where he seems to accidentally spill the beans in an interview that yes, VRT was written by a Shadow Child who has killed and replaced Marsch. With that as my model I am willing to guess that other hints at fantastic scenarios can be believed, if only you guess correctly.

It's a talkathon — but it's not just talk.

http://www.imtalkathon.com/?source=EML_WLH_Talkathon_JustTalk

Dave Tallman — 05 Jul 2008, 15:46 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

If he was Father Inire then I doubt he was really spending so much time poling around. More likely it is a designed act to draw Severian into resurrecting Dorcas.

Yep, he lies. But so does Severian, Apheta, Tzadkiel, even the old autarch who says he doesn't lie.

Yes, if Inire is really playing all these roles he must be lying. Likewise he can't be a full-time painting cleaner as Rudesind. He must also know perfectly well where Dorcas is really located if he expects Sev to stumble into her and resurrect her. The paper with the coordinates he shows Sev must be a lie.

One detail that ought to be explained: Dorcas has a dream in which she is placed (or moved) in the Lake at a location near shore by an old man who doesn't seem to know she is there. If this was Father Inire, he would know. If it was a chant-caught "Charon" he might move her without knowing he did it.

Jeff Wilson — 05 Jul 2008, 17:22 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

Jeff Wilson writes:

One of the ways of telling a person is dead is that opposing muscle groups are relaxed, so it would not be unusual for a person often in the grip of strong emotion to look more youthful in death, or a wry necked person to lay straighter now that the abnormal muscle tension is gone.

And why would Inire spend years trolling alone, again?

Jeff if you are trying to make arguments for why Dorcas' husband might not be Father Inire you are breaking down an open door. I agree, he might not be. But I think he could be. If you are trying to argue he couldn't possibly be, that's a different story and you'll need more definitive proof, I think.

Okay, you have no explanation to back up your earlier supposition then.

You seem to prefer prosaic explanations, in this case the similarities between Dorcas' husband and Father Inire are explained by you as an attempt at character dialog irony by Wolfe. His young appearance in death is a sort of anti-rigor mortis that relaxes the muscles. There are other examples where you reject a fantastic explanation in favor of a humdrum one. Occam's razor as Roy likes to invoke?

Relaxation vs rigor mortis is a question of how long has he been dead. The body relaxes immediately as soon as the nervous system stops delivering signals, and RM doesn't begin to take up until hours later.

For me, Occam is a principle for real world applications. This is a story. Some authors are the sort that would spend pages finding incredible descriptive beauty in a rock or something. Gene Wolfe seems the opposite to me. He seems like a guy with a lot of fantastical ideas in his head who likes to veil them behind mundane and overly casual descriptions sometimes.

He goes the other way as well: the flying cathedral is really just a tent serving as a hot air balloon, and the magical painting is really just an optical illusion.

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

Roy C. Lackey — 05 Jul 2008, 20:01 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote and quote:

And why would Inire spend years trolling alone, again?

Jeff if you are trying to make arguments for why Dorcas' husband might not be Father Inire you are breaking down an open door. I agree, he might not be. But I think he could be. If you are trying to argue he couldn't possibly be, that's a different story and you'll need more definitive proof, I think.

Okay, you have no explanation to back up your earlier supposition then.

That doesn't matter. He cannot be proved wrong. In this school of theorizing, whatever a character (particularly a character who is more than one character) says that seems to support a given theory is to be accepted as true. Whatever that character (or characters) says that is inconvenient to or contradicts that theory can be safely dismissed as a lie. Very simple, very neat.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 05 Jul 2008, 22:24 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:
Jeff Wilson wrote and quote:

And why would Inire spend years trolling alone, again?

Jeff if you are trying to make arguments for why Dorcas' husband might not be Father Inire you are breaking down an open door. I agree, he might not be. But I think he could be. If you are trying to argue he couldn't possibly be, that's a different story and you'll need more definitive proof, I think.

Okay, you have no explanation to back up your earlier supposition then.

That doesn't matter. He cannot be proved wrong. In this school of theorizing, whatever a character (particularly a character who is more than one character) says that seems to support a given theory is to be accepted as true. Whatever that character (or characters) says that is inconvenient to or contradicts that theory can be safely dismissed as a lie. Very simple, very neat.

That's okay. To be unconvincingly correct is not usefully different than being wrong, and may actually be counterproductive by helping discredit the right answer.

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