

Undines

The Urth list — 19 messages, 10 voices, 20 Jul 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5668>

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Lee Berman — 20 Jul 2010, 02:58

Jeff Wilson: Or perhaps she survived through her gift of superhuman powers, similar to her brother, Severian?

As Severian's powers of resurrection are an echo of his ability to resurrect the sun? Hm, could be.

Brother Severian, eh? Well, the bizarre sexual attraction between Severian and Jururna might suggest a family relationship between them. Some other connections also. But, as has been mentioned in other threads, we don't have the proper kinship terms for beings related by both sexual and asexual reproduction. Daughter-brides? Half-sisters? Khaibit? I guess these are Wolfe's attempts to translate such terms.

The undines claim to swim between the stars, presumably they could bear some part of their masters with them, the parts small enough and manlike enough to be able to have "lives" recorded...perhaps it's them that are the Hierogrammates counterparts, or even literally their parts, exiled from the larger bodies like the little Tzadkerbell at the Brook Madregot. Anyway, if they arrived as beans, presumably star-swimming undines could carry them away as beans, they might use their mighty powers of mind to command fliers to descend and take their spawn to nearby planets where further ships await...

I like this general train of thought. There is something about the ubiquity of Undines on Urth (and maybe the stuff going on in Blue's waters) which suggests they might have a key role in transportation and genesis of megatherians.

I have always questioned if we should take their swimming between the stars literally, though. Island sized Tzadkiel aside, swimming through the void seems like a physics-defying task for a biological creature (can Inhumani really do it, even for their much shorter distance between planets?)

I think there might be some hints that undines ride on The Ship. We see one of them, Idas, on the ship with Severian. Also, when Severian enters the ship stateroom of B, F and O, he describes:

I am tempted to write that it appeared to be underwater, but it did not. Rather we seemed immersed in some fluid that was not water, but was to some other world what water was to Urth; or perhaps that we were underwater indeed, but water so cold it would have been frozen in any lake of the Commonwealth.

Severian goes on to waffle, saying it was all a trick of the light. He also goes on to suggest that their chambers suggest to B, F and O (not really O though) that the nature of their chambers suggests they were descended from creatures like kelpies.

A kelpie is a somewhat malevolent Celtic water horse creature which can take the form of a woman to lure people to their death. It seems related to nixies, mermaids, sirens etc., thus establishing a possible link between hierodules and undines. Perhaps swimming between the stars really involves splashing around a liquidy stateroom on Tzadkiel's ship?

On the other hand, Severian runs into an undine on Ushas who is pretty impressive in pointing in the direction of superhuman dimensions. Perhaps they do swim between the stars using mastery of time? Or are they on the ship? I dunno which explanation is best.

Jeff Wilson — 20 Jul 2010, 04:25 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 7/19/2010 9:58 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

Jeff Wilson: Or perhaps she survived through her gift of superhuman powers, similar to her brother, Severian?

As Severian's powers of resurrection are an echo of his ability to resurrect the sun?
Hm, could be.

Juturna doesn't seem to have literal resurrection, though she does save the life of Severian after he has ceased to breathe. But maybe she was preventing him from discovering his water breathing gift too soon?

In short: both breathe water, both have access to the higher dimensions, both show up at times with anachronistic knowledge. Both appear to be otherwise human beings who have been gifted with these extraordinary powers. No other people native to Urth in the Old Autarch's time do these things.

They both repeatedly commit acts of mercy against the interests of their masters. And who else but these two, in their time, is associated with fountains?

Brother Severian, eh? Well, the bizarre sexual attraction between Severian and Juturna might suggest a family relationship between them. Some other connections also. But, as has been mentioned in other threads, we don't have the proper kinship terms for beings related by both sexual and asexual reproduction. Daughter-brides? Half-sisters? Khaibit? I guess these are Wolfe's attempts to translate such terms.

I think she's just a plain jane sister, likely a twin sister, who went over/was given over to Abaia. She may watch over her "little" brother like Miriam over Moses, or she may not know of their relation, only that they seem drawn together for some reason; perhaps they both like to watch a certain star's reflection on the waters, and feel some kind of connection with it.

I have always questioned if we should take their swimming between the stars literally, though. Island sized Tzadkiel aside, swimming through the void seems like a physics-defying task for a biological creature (can Inhumans really do it, even for their much shorter distance between planets?)

If they have access to the fourth dimension and the Brook Madregot, that would seem to make it much easier to transcend the bounds of atmosphere and orbital mechanics, the way the Green Man uses them to transcend the huge gulfs of time between Severian's era and his own; at the very least the Green Man's is covering a day per flash in the few minutes Severian spends watching him run, roughly a factor of 1500:1.

I think there might be some hints that undines ride on The Ship. We see one of them, Idas, on the ship with Severian. Also, when Severian enters the ship stateroom of B, F and O, he describes:

Idas is presumed to be an undine due to his/her gills and complexion. Do the other undines feature gills?

I am tempted to write that it appeared to be underwater, but it did not. Rather we seemed immersed in some fluid that was not water, but was to some other world what water was to Urth; or perhaps that we were underwater indeed, but water so cold it would have been frozen in any lake of the Commonwealth.

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A kelpie is a somewhat malevolent Celtic water horse creature which can take the form of a woman to lure people to their death. It seems related to nixies, mermaids, sirens etc., thus establishing a possible link between hierodules and undines. Perhaps swimming between the stars really involves splashing around a liquidy stateroom on Tzadkiel's ship?

The Fish is the most common creature of the mirrors, perhaps they are uplifted from it in some way? Fish-like or seal-like anatomy would seem both impractical and presumptive for Yesodis, who only get to enjoy the islands of the outer shell after much accomplishment working among the internal machinery, according to Alpheta.

On the other hand, Severian runs into an undine on Ushas who is pretty impressive in pointing in the direction of superhuman dimensions.

That's Juturna, herself, drawn back to the drowned Citadel.

Perhaps they do swim between the stars using mastery of time? Or are they on the ship? I dunno which explanation is best.

It's so often the way with Wolfe, isn't it?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

James Wynn — 20 Jul 2010, 15:24 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 7/19/2010 11:25 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:
Juturna doesn't seem to have literal resurrection, though she does save the life of Severian after he has ceased to breathe. But maybe she was preventing him from discovering his water breathing gift too soon?

I thought the implication of the skull Severian finds at the bottom of the Gyll after the flood is that he drowned when she met him at the beginning of Shadow of the Torturer. The boy that left the river was an aquastor.

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Jeff Wilson — 20 Jul 2010, 16:55 · in reply to James Wynn

On 7/20/2010 10:24 AM, James Wynn wrote:
On 7/19/2010 11:25 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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aquastor.

Is he also an aquastor/eidolon at the time he finds the skull, though? Presumably an aquastor can be tuned to not need air, but Aquastor Malrubius says the spacecraft from Yesod have a projection limitation of a few thousand years - after Sev takes his leave of Juturna at the flooded Citadel, he immediately steps onto Apu Punchau's pampas in a time at least 6400 years previous.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

brunians at brunians.org — 20 Jul 2010, 17:22 · in reply to James Wynn

On 7/19/2010 11:25 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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There is more than one way to look at it, as there normally (regularly?) are in fact when these things happen.

.

Lee Berman — 20 Jul 2010, 18:18 · follows brunians at brunians.org

Jeff Wilson: Presumably an aquastor can be tuned to not need air

Wow, that is a very interesting consideration. Severian has various superhuman powers...could each of them have been endowed during his duplication as an eidolon?

If so, perhaps his first divine manifestation, healing and resurrection, occurred during his "rescue" from drowning by the undine. It was fairly soon after that when his first miracle occurred (Triskele).

We are led to believe Severian gains his connection to the New Sun/White Fountain via intercourse with Apheta. I hope she didn't have to kill him for that to happen (though many female bugs do that sort of thing).

Elsewhere, aren't we told that Severian's Yesod tests were all a sham? And that Tzadkiel had already imbued Severian with his White Fountain connection on the ship. Again we have the possibility that eidolon formation allows this.

(on a side note, how did Baldanders gain the ability to breathe under water? Some have pointed to evidence that he met up with an undine at the end of shadow and that was the mysterious incident at the gate.

If not that then perhaps he became a water-breathing eidolon at the end of Sword. He had B, F and O above him and perhaps Juturna and Abaia in the lake below him. Perhaps either were capable of doing it though one seems more likely than the other.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 20 Jul 2010, 18:24 · in reply to Lee Berman

On Tue, Jul 20, 2010 at 11:18 AM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:
(on a side note, how did Baldanders gain the ability to breathe under water?

Self-modification, just like his size and longevity...

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

brunians at brunians.org — 20 Jul 2010, 18:34 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

It's not actually that difficult.

You need a bigger spleen and more efficient lungs.

.

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

brunians at brunians.org — 20 Jul 2010, 18:36 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

I could go that way if I was willing to do the kind of things that Baldanders is willing to do.

It is helpful to him that he is gay.

You could get your boyfriend to help you with something like this.

Of course you'd both have to be sort of fucked up people.

.

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On Tue, Jul 20, 2010 at 11:18 AM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Gerry Quinn — 20 Jul 2010, 18:52 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

(on a side note, how did Baldanders gain the ability to breathe under water? Some have pointed to evidence that he met up with an undine at the end of shadow and that was the mysterious incident at the gate.

He has gills: Severian notices strange scars on his neck when he sleeps with him in the inn.

- Gerry Quinn

Jeff Wilson — 20 Jul 2010, 20:50 · in reply to Lee Berman

We are led to believe Severian gains his connection to the New Sun/White Fountain via intercourse with Apheta. I hope she didn't have to kill him for that to happen (though many female bugs do that sort of thing).

I interpret this as the Yesodis collecting a gene sample so that the White Fountain can be attuned to him; this may also explain some of Juturna's transcending of dimension, since she shares roughly half his chromosomes. Despite the name, I don't think the White Fountain gives him underwater breathing, since the its power is blocked by even the limb of the earth, and the stars don't shine deeply under the water.

Elsewhere, aren't we told that Severian's Yesod tests were all a sham? And that Tzadkiel had already imbued Severian with his White Fountain connection on the ship. Again we have the possibility that eidolon formation allows this.

I got the impression that there's no one time where he is imbued so much as the WF sends out power on a frequency that he receives whenever its light shines upon him, including frequencies that pierce storms and clouds. This doesn't mean that he always has the skill or knowledge to use that power, depending on where along his personal timeline he is.

If not that then perhaps he became a water-breathing eidolon at the end of Sword. He had B, F and O above him and perhaps Juturna and Abaia in the lake below him. Perhaps either were capable of doing it though one seems more likely than the other.

Juturna tries to coax him into the water and apparently other people are taken below the waves. If it isn't all a murder plot or dinner for the hungry undines, it implies that undines can convert humans to breathe water, and perhaps that the converted humans may even breed water-breathing children who later return to the land, like Idas. A symbiote could be involved, similar to the Green Man's "pond scum".

There remains the question of where the undine in Severian's family tree is. Was Dorcas' husband some kind of spy for Abaia?

Lane Haygood — 20 Jul 2010, 21:02 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Why not Dorcas herself? She has connection to rising from water/watery deaths.

LH

On Tue, Jul 20, 2010 at 3:50 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
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Jeff Wilson — 20 Jul 2010, 21:18 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Why not Dorcas herself? She has connection to rising from water/watery deaths.

- I. Figuratively and posthumously.
- II. She recalls a family business making cloisonne pins or summat.
- III. It would make the closest thing the Book has to an innocent person into a cynical liar at best.

Her husband the boatman, however...

Lee Berman — 20 Jul 2010, 22:54 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson- Idas is presumed to be an undine due to his/her gills and complexion. Do the other undines feature gills?

I'm not seeing that Idas has gills though she does have concealed web feet.

James Wynn- I thought the implication of the skull Severian finds at the bottom of the Gyoll after the flood is that he drowned when she met him at the beginning of Shadow of the Torturer. The boy that left the river was an aquastor.

I think that is a damn good guess. Especially since Severian lays that skull at the threshold of his mausoleum. Fits so nicely with Jeff's idea that Severian's powers come to him during the process of resurrection.

Jeff Wilson- Is he also an aquastor/eidolon at the time he finds the skull?

Surely but I think Severian dies and is resurrected as an eidolon several times (probably five). Maybe he gets a new superpower each time. He probably died in the Flood. He says he was underwater a long time before he found the raft. Later, Eata thinks he is an eidolon. And when Severian meets Jurturna he says, "You lived". She replies, "You did not".

brunians- There is more than one way to look at it, as there normally (regularly?) are in fact when these things happen.

Yes, Severian contemplating the skull is probably a reference to another suicidal guy, Hamlet. But I like James Wynn's interpretation as the proximate plot explanation.

brunians- I could go that way if I was willing to do the kind of things that Baldanders is willing to do. It is helpful to him that he is gay. You could get your boyfriend to help you with something like this.

Usually, being gay is not considered the same sexual orientation as being a pedophile. Interestingly, Severian compares Idas to Baldanders' catamite baby. Those pagan gods- they were all such perverts. Unfortunately, Severian has his own pedophilic moment....

Gerry Quinn- He has gills: Severian notices strange scars on his neck when he sleeps with him in the inn.

He does notice strange scars around Baldanders' neck and ears. I always took this to be another Frankenstein allusion. But you could be right that Severian misidentifies gills. Interesting connection to a recent thread, the original title to Mary Shelley's book was *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*

Jeff Wilson- There remains the question of where the undine in Severian's family tree is. Was Dorcas' husband some kind of spy for Abaia?

Well, he does mention undines, well, "manatees" as does Maxellindis' uncle. I still can't shake the boatman's resemblance to Father Inire. Could be him. Though recent mythological readings remind me that the pagan gods who wanted to sleep with human women often did it by shapeshifting into their husbands' form. Dorcas pulls severian up but perhaps it is another hand in the lake which was pulling him down, earlier.

Lane Haygood- Why not Dorcas herself? She has connection to rising from water/watery deaths.

Argh, how could you sully Dorcas like that? But she does consider herself an "unclean spirit" with vampiress leanings. She seems too sincere to be a spy, (she voluntarily leaves Severian) but I think her past has been marked by mating with demons/pagan gods/fallen angels. In the play as Meschiane she mentions talking to a beam of light which was not a beam of light. This alludes to Zeus' mating with Danae as a shower of gold, I think.

David Stockhoff — 21 Jul 2010, 04:58 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Speaking of monsters ... what was the giant thing deep beneath the mines, that scared the man-apes?

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

On Tue, Jul 20, 2010 at 11:18 AM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

(on a side note, how did Baldanders gain the ability to breathe under water?

Self-modification, just like his size and longevity...

Adam Thornton — 21 Jul 2010, 05:08 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 07/20/2010 11:58 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

Speaking of monsters ... what was the giant thing deep beneath the mines, that scared the man-apes?

I'm going with "Balrog."

Adam

Tony Ellis — 21 Jul 2010, 09:58 · follows Adam Thornton

James Wynn wrote:

I thought the implication of the skull Severian finds at the bottom of the Gyll after the flood is that he drowned when she met him at the beginning of Shadow of the Torturer. The boy that left the river was an aquastor.

and Lee Berman:

I think Severian dies and is resurrected as an eidolon several times (probably five).

I don't think so. At the end of UotNS, Famulimus tells Severian that the Sev who died on Tzadkiel's ship 'was the son your mother bore', or words to that effect.

If Severian dies, he just self-resurrects in the same body. He doesn't need aquastors unless he's cut off from the white fountain.

I think the significance of the skull is what it symbolises.

Lee Berman — 21 Jul 2010, 11:41 · follows Tony Ellis

sorry, another copy of this was filed under subject #. Typo.

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I think the significance of the skull is what it symbolises.

Oh, yes, I'd forgotten that line. Thanks Tony. It does seem rather explicit.

A shame it can obliterate a nice theory. With Severian's death underwater or on the battlefield we can imagine a dead body surreptitiously replaced by an eidolon as a possibility. But not on the Sanguinary Fields. Somehow a dead copy of Severian's body would have to be mentioned by Dorcas or Hildegrin later. That was surely self-resurrection.

So perhaps all of Severian's power, resurrection, healing, water breathing were bestowed when he became an eidolon/aquastor on the Ship. And his powers are at least nascent as long as the White Fountain is within range.

Makes me wonder why Severian never had any expression of his power before Triskele. As a torturer there would be no shortage of injuries and dead bodies around. I expect it would be noticed if they started healing and coming back to life. Perhaps it was seeing the image of his dead mother in the grave which triggered his abilities into action.

David Stockhoff — 21 Jul 2010, 11:43 · in reply to Adam Thornton

It does almost repeat the Moria scene, doesn't it?

Adam Thornton wrote:

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