

The Pelerine (COTA 8)

The Urth list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 11 Sep 2010

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Andrew Mason — 11 Sep 2010, 17:00

(Dunno why I wrote 12 before: it is chapter 8.)

Lee Berman wrote:

Welcome Andrew!

Thanks Lee!

I often think that chapter names provide more clues to what is going

on than what is frequently acknowledged here.

Yes indeed. One of Cyriaca's chapters is actually a good example - 'The Library of the Citadel', making it clear, in a way it wouldn't be otherwise, what her story is about. There's also the chapter 'Dorcas', in which, if I remember rightly, the name 'Dorcas' never occurs.

When Severian is talking to Cyriaca, she first tells him that she has had no contact with any of the Pelerines since leaving. Later, under fear of torture, Cyriaca tells Severian that she got a letter a week ago from her friend, Einhildis, saying the Pelerines were stationed at the Autarch's battle camp at Orithiya.

Being at Orithiya, and unnamed, I must guess this older Pelerine is Einhildis. I don't see anything mysterious about Einhildis herself.

That it's Einhildis makes a lot of sense; though, as you say, it's not entirely clear why that should lead to concealing her name. Perhaps because Severian would start asking her questions about Cyriaca if he knew who she was? (One question that can arise is who is concealing the name. Sometimes it's clearly Severian; he must, for instance, know the name of his predecessor as Autarch. Or there's Jader's sister; Jader actually calls out his sister's name in his sleep, but Sev doesn't tell us what it was. But at other times there's no reason why Severian should know the name, so it may be Wolfe who is concealing it.)

My conjectures about Cyriaca are:

1. She is a family member of Severian's, probably aunt. They have sex, so no great surprise there. Perhaps she is mother to Agia and Agilus as she plans to go to escape back to Nessus to sew and cook.

I'm not convinced by the idea that everyone who Severian has sex with is related to him. Is there any special evidence in this case?

2. Her mysterious (and likely lecherous) uncle who told her so many stories and seems to know more about the cosmic history of humanity than anyone else on Urth might be Father Inire.

Cyriaca knows a lot, but her knowledge is strangely bitty. She thinks the Citadel is deserted and only the Autarch knows about it. The 'lost archives' are not nearly as lost as she imagines. She also seems to think that Nessus was newly built in the time of Typhon.

I'm inclined to think that the knowledge she has is not secret, just not widely shared, because people generally don't inquire, and find it difficult when they do. Even in the actual world there is an immense amount of knowledge that is not secret but not widely shared; it would be much more so in the Commonwealth, with fewer schools and libraries, and no internet. Consider how many people think the torturers no longer exist, though they are a recognised branch of government, based in a highly visible place.

. (I think the Citadel is mentioned to have a Red Tower and a Tower of Healing).

Yes, I've wondered about the Red Tower (which seems, with the Witches' Tower and the Bear, to be one of those nearest the Matachin, but whose function is never stated). But if it were connected with the Pelerines, wouldn't Severian know more about them?

We know that the Pelerines are primarily an exultant order. But we have

evidence (secret beautification, khaibits, experiments with hairless creatures) that exultant Chatelaines also have some connection to witches. Secret connections all over the place.

I know about khaibits. Where do we hear about secret beautification and hairless creatures (in connection with Exultants - I remember the witches' hairless creatures)?

4. Cyriaca discusses the landing of cacogens in the north and they they'd want to "avoid the mirrors at the House Absolute so they could escape the eyes of the Autarch." She discusses political tension between exultants and the Autarch, between the Autarch and the cacogens (hierodules). Stuff even Thecla knows only as rumor. Again, it seems Cyriaca's uncle has been filling her in on very secret stuff known only by the guys at the very top.

Well, she gets the landing of cacogens from Einhildis: I presume she means the ones at Baldanders' castle, who don't seem to be making an effort to conceal themselves, and whose arrival would have caused quite a stir locally. The general political situation, regarding the Autarch and cacogens, she says is common knowledge among the upper classes. May it be that she knows more than Thecla just because she is more alert?

Of course the cacogens do show up at the House Absolute for Dr. Talos' play, so Cyriaca isn't a perfectly reliable source of information. Still, I think the whole thing (along with Palaemon and Rudesind forgetting their lines) smacks of a big set-up for Severian. A play designed to set him on a particular course. Severian has been steered to Orithya.

That the Autarch and Inire are up to something is clear. I remember Rudesind, who works for Inire, forgetting his lines. Where does Palaemon do so? There's the bit about Thrax being in the south, but that's a forgetting of facts, not just of lines; Thrax is in the north. I'm convinced by the theory that Palaemon is confused because his exile was in the south.

Well, okay probably too much. As the old Autarch tells Severian, "you asked me for a light for your candle, and I tried to give you the sun...". But hopefully at least a little helpful.

No problem. You've given me a lot to think about.

Lee Berman — 12 Sep 2010, 02:28 · follows Andrew Mason

Andrew Mason: There's also the chapter 'Dorcas', in which, if I remember rightly, the name 'Dorcas' never occurs.

Yep, though we do hear the nickname, "Cas" repeated a few times, as Ryan Dunn and I discussed recently. I suspect few first time readers connect the boatman's lost wife, Cas, with young Dorcas.

That it's Einhildis makes a lot of sense; though, as you say, it's not entirely clear why that should lead to concealing her name.

Aside from Cyriaca, the most interesting thing to me about Severian's conversation with The Pelerine is the suggestion that he may have some pedophilic thoughts at times. Also interesting is that one of the other times there is a suggestion of Severian's pedophilia is during a conversation with another notable but unnamed character, the Old Leech (his boy Mamas gets a name but not the Leech).

I admit that I may be the only person in the lupine universe to see this pedophilic tendency, so perhaps it is just me being weird. (I myself am very normal, I swear!) But, given that I see much allegory to ancient Greek myth I don't think it is as weird as it might appear. Zeus and Heracles and a number of others had such pedophilic tendencies and it would seem they were more tolerated back then.

I'm not convinced by the idea that everyone who Severian has sex with is related to him. Is there any special evidence in this (Cyriaca's) case?

Many think that the maid playing Holy Katharine is Catherine, Severian's mother. Cyriaca would seem to be roughly Catherine's age. Also they both have dark hair, an oval face and may both be failed Pelerines. There is some other circumstantial evidence that connects them. Not enough evidence to fully prove Cyriaca is Severian's relative but enough for me to consider it possible, since I am actively looking for his family members in the story.

Cyriaca knows a lot, but her knowledge is strangely bitty. I'm inclined to think that the knowledge she has is not secret, just not widely shared.

If all she knew about was the formation of the Library, I might agree. But she seems to have intimate knowledge of the Hiero race and how the Hierogrammates were formed and how they use aquastors. It is the same story we hear from Malrubius and from Apheta and Tzadkiel in Yesod, but from a different point of view (a darker, more twisted view).

In recent discussions we've sorta determined that the Hierogrammates were probably created by humans from Ushas. If not, by humans from another universe or something. Either way, this stuff seems way, way too cosmic for someone like provincial Cyriaca to have come by casually on Urth. Her uncle is a rare book collector, making him like a curator sort of person. And we know Father Inire has a penchant for trying to unfairly awe little girls with stuff which is far too cosmic for them to really grasp. I see a likely connection.

Yes, I've wondered about the Red Tower (which seems, with the Witches' Tower and the Bear, to be one of those nearest the Matachin, but whose function is never stated). But if it were connected with the Pelerines, wouldn't Severian know more about them?...I know about khaibits. Where do we hear about secret beautification and hairless creatures (in connection with Exultants - I remember the witches' hairless creatures)?

Well the torturers (even Master Gurloes) all seem rather scared of the Witches. There is something about the torturers never going to the tower of Healing as ancient scores might be settled...I was just thumbing through Borski's Solar Labyrinth and he devotes a chapter to the witches with a bunch of evidence about how they could be connected to the Pelerines and perhaps that the Cumaeen serves as the leader of both.

There is a mention of Chatelaine Lelia's hairless rats which seem similar to the Cumaeen's hairless creatures. Might be a connection. I'll say this. There is much mystery associated with those in the Commonwealth who dabble in the biological sciences. We get a pretty detailed view of Father Inire's mirrors and a blaster pistol and flyers, but the machinery in the Witches

Tower, Typhon's building, Baldanders castle is all very mysteriously described.

It is my theory that there is much cloning going on here but it is highly disguised and usually unmentioned. My guess is that the hairless creatures are cloned fetuses; the Mandragora being an example.

Regarding secret beautification, there are the khaibits which is sort of secret, their purpose only revealed at the end of CotA. There is Dr. Talos' beautification of Jolenta, the secrets of which are revealed at the end of CotC. The Cumaeen is supposed to be able to beautify even more than Dr. Talos. And Merry'n, who looks the same after 15 years, has the skin stretched tightly across her face like parchment.

Another quickie is from Severian's mushroom-induced hallucination in which we learn that exultant women have "their eyes made large, as Thecla's had been by the application of minute amounts of certain poisons in childhood". Maybe the most cryptic is a dream sequence in which Thecla is in a room with a bunch of tall women and one has a "heart-shaped patch" with "web-fingered wings" on her face. There seems to be something going on with blood bats that we are not fully told about.

For so many years I was rather stumped on why all this mysterious beautification was going on in the seams and cracks of BotNS. Recently I stumbled upon the Judeo-Christian story of a certain fallen angel who specialized in bringing war to men and artificial beautification to women and mating with them. I think this may be related to this story.

Jeff Wilson — 12 Sep 2010, 05:23 · in reply to Lee Berman

In recent discussions we've sorta determined that the Hierogrammates were probably created by humans from Ushas.

Andrew: Please note that the "we" of this determination consists entirely of Lee and the mouse in their pocket. The majority view (of those expressing opinions) seems to be that the Hierogrammates and were the products of humans of a previous Big Bang/Big Crunch cycle. Meanwhile, the humans of Ushas are the conventional descendants of the humans of Urth, and their only visible offspring race is that of the Green Man.

Lee Berman — 12 Sep 2010, 11:05 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson: Andrew: Please note that the "we" of this determination consists entirely of Lee and the mouse in their pocket. The majority view (of those expressing opinions) seems to be that the Hierogrammates and were the products of humans of a previous Big Bang/Big Crunch cycle.

Apologies. Didn't mean to speak for others. "mouse in their pocket"? I did mention humans from other universe as part of the opinion of the majority but Jeff snipped it. Perhaps neither Jeff nor I should speak of majorities without doing a poll.

In the discussion I was speaking of, four characters weigh in on the idea that it is the humanity

of Urth/Ushas that gives rise to Hieros. Malrubius doesn't know. Severian says "perhaps". Aphetta, at the end, says "I believe it to be so". Tzadkiel implies he was an acolyte of a Conciliator/New Sun "in a creation now vanished" which could mean Briahe or could mean some other universe.

I think the question becomes- why did the Hierogrammites give Severian the power to change Urth to Ushas? Are they divine judges above the fray? Or are they taking a hand in their own creation? I see evidence for both.

Jeff Wilson — 13 Sep 2010, 15:47 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 9/12/2010 6:05 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

In the discussion I was speaking of, four characters weigh in on the idea that it is the humanity of Urth/Ushas that gives rise to Hieros. Malrubius doesn't know. Severian says "perhaps". Aphetta, at the end, says "I believe it to be so". Tzadkiel implies he was an acolyte of a Conciliator/New Sun "in a creation now vanished" which could mean Briahe or could mean some other universe.

The constraint "in a creation now vanished" would limit it to some previous incarnation of Briahe, since only Briahe is spoken of to have by-gone, inaccessible existences.

The only real issue I see is to what extent the human race of the previous incarnation of Briahe is the same race as that of Severian's Briahe, for the purposes of determining what kind of intervention they need or deserve. It's the old "kill baby Hitler" question writ large: if the Urthlings of Severian's time have the same numerical identity as the Urthlings that cruelly wrought Tzadkiel's race, then severe intervention in their course of history is easily justified. If they are not, then they arguably deserve a chance to make their own mistakes.

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