

Vodalus and Severian

The Urth list — 8 messages, 5 voices, 27 Sep 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5758>

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Lee Berman — 27 Sep 2010, 12:12

Jane Delawney: By ingesting the memories of what is probably quite a random selection of individuals ('Not another tribade ...!'),

I tend to view things a different way. I see the "tribade" comment as a significance pointer; a way of saying to us that the last victim of a Vodalus dinner was an important person whose personal details matter.

We are only introduced to two such victims, Thecla and the female corpse in the first chapter of Shadow. I don't see much in the text to warrant speculation on others. Moreover, Thecla's body seems to have been kept on ice for quite some time, waiting for a special moment. Access to Severian would seem to be the obvious reason this moment is special. We are told the purpose of the feast is to bind Vodalus' followers more tightly to him. But perhaps the reasons go deeper.

There is a chain of physical appearance clues (dark hair, oval face, olive skin, pale gown) that might associate the female corpse to Severian's mother, Catherine. Perhaps the real reason for choice of victims is not only to create loyalty bonds. Perhaps there is the hidden purpose of collecting the lives and memories of people who are important to Severian.

In the beginning, Severian says he might have a presentiment of his future. Juturna shares this. I suspect others do too (including her dad/husband). Vodalus may not be the one making the choices of victims. Given that he works for the Ascians, there is the suggestion that he serves a greater, unseen master (or masters). Vodalus first brings up the chess analogy but he seems to be a pawn, himself.

Father Inire's letter suggests he is quite happy to replace Vodalus with Agia. Presumably, she makes a better antagonist to Severian than Vodalus. I suspect Inire was actually rather actively involved in his death by worm, and his replacement. (mirrors, mirrors)

Master Ash suggests that the Ascians are making their massive offensive, despite being ill-equipped and manned because of some sudden new unidentified development. I think it is the imminent presence of Severian on the battlefield.

Tzadkiel says the whole purpose of the life of the old Autarch was so he could be tested and fail and be castrated, just so that Severian could have those memories during his testing. Appian (?) is not so pleased to learn this.

My point is that I don't think there is much of random anything happening in this story. It is all a play. A set piece designed to manipulate a certain player. It is all about Severian, all the time.

Jane Delawney — 28 Sep 2010, 00:10 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 27/09/10 13:12, Lee Berman wrote:

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'k, granted. However V's followers don't seem to find anything too abnormal in being invited to such a dinner (and there was obviously a tribade in there somewhere!)

Moreover, Thecla's body seems to have been kept on ice for quite some time, waiting for a special moment. Access to Severian would seem to be the obvious reason this moment is special. We are told the purpose of the feast is to bind Vodalus' followers more tightly to him.

I suspect so.

But perhaps the reasons go deeper.

There is a chain of physical appearance clues (dark hair, oval face, olive skin, pale gown) that might associate the female corpse to Severian's mother, Catherine.

This is the description from ch. 1 of 'Shadow': 'They had the corpse of a woman. Her hair, which had been dark, was in some disorder now about her livid face; she wore a long gown of some pale fabric.'

That's it. No oval face or olive skin. But hey, two out of four is .. average.

BTW 'Livid' - means that her face appears engorged with blood - as in postmortem lividity. Given the level of speculation around here, I'm not that reluctant to suggest that this implies she may have been buried /face down/.

Witches are supposed to have been interred in this way in some cultures; also suspected vampires.

Perhaps the real reason for choice of victims is not only to create loyalty bonds. Perhaps there is the hidden purpose of collecting the lives and memories of people who are important to Severian.

Yup, agreed, it would be quite unlike our GW not to have an alternate agenda - not so much hidden, as left for the reader to work out - here.

Master Ash suggests that the Ascians are making their massive offensive, despite being ill-equipped and manned because of some sudden new unidentified development. I think it is the imminent presence of Severian on the battlefield.

Rather (and if I'd time, I'd take this to a new thread, since it clearly is one) I suspect the implication is that this is the last chance the Ascians can have for victory, since if they don't conquer now, Severian will inevitably become Autarch and since he is the New Sun, the New Sun's enemies will therefore be doomed to fail.

The Hierodules and their masters live 'backwards'; they remember our future. Therefore, they KNOW that Sev is the New Sun; they don't simply suspect, they know, because they've lived his future before they first meet him. Erebus, Abaia, Scylla et al, and their human allies, have presumably gotten wind of this, and know that they have to stop Severian before he takes on his destiny, or not stop him at all.

jd

Jane Delawney: 'They had the corpse of a woman. Her hair, which had been dark, was in some disorder now about her livid face; she wore a long gown of some pale fabric.' That's it. No oval face or olive skin. But hey, two out of four is .. average.

It is the maid playing Holy Katharine who has the oval face and darker complexion. There are some missing connectors. In Dr. Talos' play there is a character named Contessa Carina (form of Catherine) who has three maids with beheaded saint names.

Eventually, I think even Gene Wolfe had to admit to himself that this wasn't enough of a clue. So he gave us a detailed peek at one final connector in UotNS, the woman on the Path Of Air who matches the Contessa Carina. This woman has all the characteristics combined, dark hair, oval face, olive complexion and pale gown. I find the attention Wolfe gives to her in this scene, without any other explanation, to be compelling and insistent that we connect her to other parts of the story. why would this woman's face tear at Severian's heart?

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As Catherine may have been a Pelerine, I would not discount anything that might imply she had witchy connections. I think there is something connecting these two groups of women.

My own theory is that the lividity come from her manner of death- Allowin's Necklace, a device which gets an otherwise rather inexplicably detailed description. Ancillary to this is the sentence given to that other dark haired, oval faced ex-Pelerine Cyriaca- strangulation. Her crime was adultery and given the Ouen episode, I consider that may have been the crime of Severian's mother also.

But I am happy to incorporate witchiness also, especially given the missing Severa. Thanks for that Jane!

There is some vampiric imagery associated with a character or two in BotNS but we'll save that for some other thread.

Andrew Mason — 28 Sep 2010, 14:03 · follows Lee Berman

Jane Delawney wrote:

On 27/09/10 13:12, Lee Berman wrote:

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I'd always assumed that Hildegrin was visiting the Garden of Endless Sleep, while Severian and Agia were there, to look for another such victim, suggesting it was quite a regular thing.

Ryan Dunn — 28 Sep 2010, 14:14 · in reply to Andrew Mason

I'd assumed the same thing. It is when we learn Hildegrin is the badger after all, right?

Was he there to get Dorcas?

Also, the old boatman seems to imply Hildegrin may be a regular there.

...ryan

On Sep 28, 2010, at 10:03 AM, Andrew Mason <andrew.mason53 at gmail.com> wrote:
I'd always assumed that Hildegrin was visiting the Garden of Endless Sleep, while Severian and Agia were there, to look for another such victim, suggesting it was quite a regular thing.

Lee Berman — 28 Sep 2010, 14:28 · follows Ryan Dunn

Andrew Mason- I'd always assumed that Hildegrin was visiting the Garden of Endless Sleep, while Severian and Agia were there, to look for another such victim, suggesting it was quite a regular thing.

It might. I think my thoughts have drifted in that direction. However it might also support my current hypothesis that Vodalus and his followers are being directed to ingest dead people who are important to Severian. Obviously the lake contains such a one.

Hildegrin and the old boatman know each other. It may be that their purpose is more intertwined than is apparent from their casual mention of each other. I say this considering that the boatman bears a resemblance to Father Inire, Hildegrin is associated with the Cumaeen and she and Inire are associated, similar beings.

The lake scene with the boatman might also connect to the Stone Town scene. There we find the Cumaeen, Merryn and again Hildegrin fishing for and hoping to restore life to someone important to Severian.

Jeff Wilson — 28 Sep 2010, 15:45 · in reply to Andrew Mason

On 9/28/2010 9:03 AM, Andrew Mason wrote:
Jane Delawney wrote:

On 27/09/10 13:12, Lee Berman wrote:

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Not to look for a victim/donor, thought it might be a place to stash a recently deceased known sympathizer, in a pickle-barrel sort of way.

I'm a bit skeptical that the bog would keep the memories intact for very long, but if they survive being roasted they ought to survive the bog. Though there is the possibility that in Thecla's case, the cooked meat is really pork spiked with her uncooked "retentive tissues" to maximize viability and minimize the gaminess that could gather even in a snow cave after so long.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

Andrew Mason — 29 Sep 2010, 13:07 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Not to look for a victim/donor, thought it might be a place to stash a recently deceased known sympathizer, in a pickle-barrel sort of way.

That's another possibility, certainly. It still supports the thought it's a quite a regular thing. anyway.

I'm a bit skeptical that the bog would keep the memories intact for very long, but if they survive being roasted they ought to survive the bog.

I'd assume they would be taken out fairly quickly, just as those retrieved from the necropolis are, I think, 'resurrected' soon after their burial. This, by the way, would rather suggest he's not looking for Dorcas.