

Severa

The Urth list — 33 messages, 7 voices, 03 Dec 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6132>

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Larry Miller — 03 Dec 2011, 18:13

Why do you think Merryn is Severa? Just because she is a witch? I think this is the biggest red herring in the book.

On 12/2/11, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

From: Lee Berman

larry miller: Id say that Jolenta is a better candidate for Severa than any other female character in the book. Yes the fact that we never know her real name is a clue that Wolfe is hiding something.

Agreed. If there was a witch character of the right age named Severa, we wouldn't be having this discussion. Even if we ignore the theme of incest (which we should not do, imho), are there any other characters who are Severian's age and who might be named Severa and who might have been raised with witches? I think only (stage name) Jolenta fits that bill.

Merryn might be Severian's age for all we know. We know there is something odd about her age; she looks both old and young, and one or other appearance must be false. It might be the old appearance as easily as the young. If Severian has a sister who is a character, I am pretty sure it is Merryn.

Jolenta is a waitress not a witch, and there's no indication that she was ever otherwise. Come to think of it, if she had been a witch she would surely have been much more wary of Talos's blandishments. And I can think of no thematic reason why someone like Jolenta should be Severian's sister.

Severian's travels resemble those of a clueless Greek hero like Oedipus, stumbling into situations of which he doesn't understand the significance. Oedipus had sex with his mother, an act that defined him. If he had sex with other women too, that does not make him any less of a motherf..well, you know. A pattern of incest among Severian's mates does not require that all his mates were family members.

It requires that more than one of them was. If you can demonstrate that someone other than Jolenta or Dorcas is closely related to Severian, then you can argue that a pattern exists and Jolenta might follow it. But if you just have Jolenta and Dorcas, you are assuming what you want to prove.

If we just have Dorcas (the subject of a weird age distortion amounting to time travel and therefore not really within the bounds of "normal" incestuous relationships anyway) there's no pattern involved.

And as we've seen, it's very obvious that most of Severian's lovers cannot be close relations. And also that sex with Dorcas isn't in any way a defining characteristic of Severian's story, as was the case with that of Oedipus .

- Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn — 03 Dec 2011, 18:48 · in reply to Larry Miller

From: Larry Miller

Why do you think Merryn is Severa? Just because she is a witch? I think this is the biggest red herring in the book.

I don't have any strong feelings about the matter — I just think that IF Severian has a twin sister and IF she is a character, Merryn seems most likely. Because she's a witch, yes. Then again, there's no obvious reason for a name change (possible absence of a given name is IMO the only plausible argument for Jolenta).

- Gerry Quinn

antonio at gmail.com — 03 Dec 2011, 19:19 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

No dia 2011/12/03, ?s 18:48, "Gerry Quinn" <gerry at bindweed.com> escreveu:

From: Larry Miller

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How do we know Severian's real name?

Larry Miller — 03 Dec 2011, 20:43 · in reply to antonio at gmail.com

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David Stockhoff — 03 Dec 2011, 21:00 · in reply to antonio at gmail.com

On 12/3/2011 2:19 PM, antonio at gmail.com wrote:
No dia 2011/12/03, ?s 18:48, "Gerry Quinn" <gerry at bindweed.com> <mailto:gerry at bindweed.com>> escreveu:

From: Larry Miller <mailto:decanus1284 at gmail.com>

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How do we know Severian's real name?

That's easy---it's on the book jacket. G-E-N-E

Lee Berman — 03 Dec 2011, 22:18 · follows David Stockhoff

Then there is Agia. There are a couple converging lines of evidence that she is Severian's cousin.

Gerry Quinn: What evidence?

It wouldn't be evidence for you, Gerry. You have spent 2 or 3 years here demonstrating that your definition of that word is "supports my own beliefs". Your demonstration of this skewed definition also includes taking what all other posters call evidence and relabeling it as "rubbish" or "nonsense" or "ridiculous, mindless, unthoughtout, bizzare...etc. etc.". There is no point in responding to such a request from you. Your rejoinder regarding the ideas of others is completely predictable. The only variation in your posts is which derogatory term for others you will use this time.

The waitress wasn't an actress.

Correct. Nobody said she was. What was said was, "Jolenta was an actress", suggesting that is likely a stage name. You knew that. You were just playing dumb again. I

warned you that trick doesn't work already, so why try it?

However, I think you have inadvertently hit on something that indicates she was never a witch.

Heh! You made me laugh with that one, Gerry! Nothing inadvertent there. Sorry if that takes some of the pats off your own back. I was aware of Palaemon's explanation of the guild when I put the quote from the waitress in and the ambiguous nature of that clue in regard to her origin. As others here recognize, that statement might lend support and might also undercut the idea that she had been a witch.

Gerry, I know this idea is completely alien to you, but I am not here to promote and defend my own view of Wolfe's work. I am here to discuss them. So, unlike you I am completely willing to present all the evidence I find on a topic of discussion. I do not deliberately exclude evidence which doesn't support my idea. See my discussion with Jeff over Rudesind's height for an example.

larry miller- Why do you think Merryn is Severa? Just because she is a witch? I think this is the biggest red herring in the book.

I agree, though the secret of the Inhumis is pretty close. There are a some really deep and

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sham. The Stone Town moves to place itself in certain travellers' paths. They know who Severian is and wanted him there all along.

Further ambiguous evidence: in the appendix on social classes, Jolenta is listed as part of the "commonality" while Severian and other Citadel residents are listed as "servants of the throne". But it also says servants of the throne are drawn from the commonality. Thus, the waitress is part of the commonality due to her occupation, but there is a loophole which could allow her to have formerly been a servant of the throne.

Any idea what her coloring was before Talos transformed her?

She is a thin woman with straggling hair. The lack of information regarding her hair color is interesting, as Wolfe seems later to reveal it through the odd revelation of her pubic hair resembling a downy chick (i.e. golden).

Larry Miller — 03 Dec 2011, 22:32 · in reply to Lee Berman

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Gerry Quinn — 03 Dec 2011, 23:28 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: Lee Berman

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Curious that you did not mention those implications. But <shrug> they have been stated now anyway.

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If she doesn't (it's not altogether clear — "this man in fuligin" can be taken in a number of ways) it's an argument against Merryn being Severa (same applies to Jolenta) While not all witches might have torturers uppermost on their mind, surely a witch named Severa — if that is truly an indication of being born a twin — would take an interest in their affairs. Again, of course that presupposes that Merryn was originally called Severa, taking another name later as

members of religious orders often do. The books lack any Severa other than the young girl in the mountains.

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That wouldn't be a problem anyway, as presumably any non-exultant kicked out penniless into Nessus would become part of the commonality. A worse problem, perhaps, is Wolfe's selection of her as an exemplar of the commonality.

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Jerry Friedman — 04 Dec 2011, 00:00 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com>

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Chicks can be brown or black, as an image search will show you. I suspect that we are supposed to think of the golden color, though, as you say. Also that Dr. Talos made the cuffs match the collars, as Gerry quoted, for artistic completeness and because Jolenta was going to appear nude as Jahi (or were she, Severian, and Dorcas wearing some kind of body stocking or g-string?)

Jerry Friedman

Larry Miller — 04 Dec 2011, 00:28 · in reply to Lee Berman

One thing that may support Agia/Agilus relationship to Severian is that Agia also injures her leg in the fiacre crash. Again this echoes what I said about Jolentas injury. Is there an incident where Dorcas is unable to walk or has her leg or foot wounded? Seems to me that all these leg injuries are a bit too coincidental.

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Lee Berman — 04 Dec 2011, 00:57 · follows Larry Miller

Larry Miller: I may be wrong but I remember Jolentas hair being described as Red-Gold. Red as we know is the color of the Pelerines who can be called witches.

And that may also provide a connection with Catherine.

You are right. The Cumaeen even calls her "big red-gold". She says Jolenta's hair was dyed and thickened with colored silk threads. Gold may be a connection to Dorcas and Severian's family (though Catherine is dark-haired). Red seems to me most likely to indicate the self-important Dr. Talos, his own red hair and the injection of his own version of beauty into her.

One thing to consider- if Jolenta is really Severa the ex-witch, then Merryn and the Cumaeen are being deceptive in pretending they don't know her. There is evidence they are being deceptive. Firstly, they pretend Hildegryn is not there. Also, they might be pretending they don't recognize Severian as a torturer and that they have arranged this meeting with him on purpose (a coincidence that two witches from the Citadel and Severian's childhood happen to appear in the middle of nowhere to intercept his journey? I don't buy it).

Even after Severian introduces Jolenta by name, the witches do not call her that name. She is just "the sick woman". In my view, this episode could be one of a string of pre-arranged situations, complete with rehearsed lines, designed to test and/or poach Severian's nascent New Sun powers of healing and resurrection by those who only have a dark, perverted version of that power. (the Lake of Birds, the avern battle, Typhon, etc. are further examples)

Jerry Friedman: (re: colored pubic hair) and because Jolenta was going to appear nude

as Jahi (or were she, Severian, and Dorcas wearing some kind of body stocking or g-string?)

I think they were nude and I agree the pubic hair color may well be as artificial as the hair on her head. Still the indirect reveal of the color seems too elaborate to have no meaning. I am old enough to remember that in the 60's, 70's it was a cultural trope that men wanting to know if a woman was a "true blonde" or not would check the pubic hair as an indicator (see the movie M*A*S*H, which made a memorable tent-raising scene from that principle).

Gerry Quinn: Why the fear of posting it, if all posters but I would consider it evidence?

Heh, heh. Fear? Nice try. Actually I do respond to all polite requests when I can. I think you

have been making an effort lately Gerry, but I still don't really trust your sincerity yet. I

hope you can understand that.

A worse problem, perhaps (for Jolenta as witch-Severa, is Wolfe's selection of her as an exemplar of the commonality.

And choosing Severian, (her twin?) as an example of servant of the throne. On the other hand,

by doing this he does bring both characters to mind and asks us to compare them and their social class. Social class is related, in part to height, and Jolenta is tall, like Severian.

Keep in mind, Gerry, that Jolenta as Severa is only a suggestion. There may have been no intention by Wolfe to include a Severa. It seems quite clear that Jolenta-as-Severa can't be proven or disproven with the evidence we are given. I'm comfortable leaving it at that.

Gerry Quinn — 04 Dec 2011, 01:37 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: Lee Berman

One thing to consider- if Jolenta is really Severa the ex-witch, then Merryn and the Cumaeans are being deceptive in pretending they don't know her.

A good point. You would expect them to know her. Definitely a strong point against her having been a witch.

There is evidence they are being deceptive. Firstly, they pretend Hildegryn is not there. Also, they might be pretending they don't recognize Severian as a torturer and that they have arranged this meeting with him on purpose (a coincidence that two witches from the Citadel and Severian's childhood happen to appear in the middle of nowhere to intercept his journey? I don't buy it).

It seems not unlikely that devotees of Vodalus and those who deal with them tend towards discretion when they meet strangers. As for the rest: it's a story; building conspiracy theories on the coincidences inherent to stories achieves nothing.

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Such a theory has the advantage that everything naturally deducible from the text can be waved away and ignored.

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You're repeating your lines. But I wasn't making a polite request above. I was pointing out that if you had anything, you'd have posted it. If your "evidence" is worth anything, my words cannot negate it.

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Tall is sexy in the Commonwealth, for precisely that reason; thus Jolenta is tall. We are not told, however, that the waitress is.

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Indeed, even Merryn has considerable defects as a candidate, and it may very well be that no sister-character exists at all. That said, the question of whether something can be proven or disproven rests substantially on one's standards of proof.

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David Stockhoff — 04 Dec 2011, 01:42 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 12/3/2011 6:28 PM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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

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Let's step back a bit. "Severa" is merely the placeholder name of Severian's hypothetical twin sister taken by the witches. She need never have been named Severa; she need never have been named at all before the witches did. Catherine may not have named her children before they were taken from her. She need not know who she is. So none of this is truly valid.

Consider that most infants through most of history were named only after they lived several years; aristocratic infants might be named weeks after birth at a ceremony. Protestants tend to name all children, even those stillborn. What chance did a disgraced, imprisoned, condemned, noblewoman have of naming her bastard children together?

Antonio's question raises another point from that intended---who named Severian? If the Seekers, then the Witches named Severa by her real name. Thus, Severa was never Severa at all and had no name to change.

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It seems cuffs and collar do not entirely match. But some of that could be down to Dr. Talos's silken threads.

Right. Jolenta's coloring is not necessarily the waitress's coloring.

David Stockhoff — 04 Dec 2011, 02:29 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 12/3/2011 7:57 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

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was dyed and thickened with colored silk threads. Gold may be a connection to Dorcas

and Severian's family (though Catherine is dark-haired). Red seems to me most likely

to indicate the self-important Dr. Talos, his own red hair and the injection of his

own version of beauty into her.

One thing to consider- if Jolenta is really Severa the ex-witch, then Merryn and the

Cumaean are being deceptive in pretending they don't know her. There is evidence they

are being deceptive. Firstly, they pretend Hildegryn is not there. Also, they might be

pretending they don't recognize Severian as a torturer and that they have arranged this

meeting with him on purpose (a coincidence that two witches from the Citadel and

Severian's childhood happen to appear in the middle of nowhere to intercept his journey?

I don't buy it).

Even after Severian introduces Jolenta by name, the witches do not call her that name.

She is just "the sick woman".

Good points.

António Pedro Marques — 04 Dec 2011, 04:05 · in reply to David Stockhoff

No dia 04/12/2011, às 01:42, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

Antonio's question raises another point from that intended---who named Severian?

Ahem. Though not explicit, that was the point intended (the other point would hardly have been worth raising).

Lee Berman — 04 Dec 2011, 04:32 · follows António Pedro Marques

Gerry Quinn: building conspiracy theories on the coincidences inherent to stories

achieves nothing.

It does! Our discussions provide opportunities for us to better understand the possible ways

of interpreting Gene Wolfe and provide Gerry Quinn with something to whine about. A win-win

situation.

But I wasn't making a polite request above.

Okay, so it was a rude demand. Thanks for the clarification. I appreciate your admission that you have not turned over a new leaf after all.

and it may very well be that no sister-character exists at all.

We all agree on that. But only one here thinks that possibility excludes all value in discussing the possibility that a sister-character does exist. That same person would, ostensibly, like to end all discussion here. But as I've said before, Gerry, you serve a useful purpose, mostly theatrical, sometimes comedic. I encourage you to carry on.

David Stockhoff — 04 Dec 2011, 14:01 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 12/3/2011 11:05 PM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

No dia 04/12/2011, ?s 01:42, David Stockhoff<dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

Antonio's question raises another point from that intended---who named Severian?

Ahem. Though not explicit, that was the point intended (the other point would hardly have been worth raising).

Ah, I see!

Gerry Quinn — 04 Dec 2011, 14:10 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

From: Ant?nio Pedro Marques

No dia 04/12/2011, ?s 01:42, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

Antonio's question raises another point from that intended---who named Severian?

Ahem. Though not explicit, that was the point intended (the other point would hardly have been worth raising).

I'm not sure it matters — surely the main question is whether the name does imply a twin? Certainly the book seems to be suggesting that a twin sister exists somewhere. With regard to this question, it doesn't really matter if the torturers pick names, or defer to the client's wishes. There is a possibility that occurs to me — the torturers name the boy and the witches name the girl. Might the torturers have given a twin's name to the boy, then handed over the girl to the witches, who gave her a standard name? It would explain Merryn's name, but it seems a slightly convoluted explanation.

- Gerry Quinn

David Stockhoff — 04 Dec 2011, 14:59 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 12/4/2011 9:10 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: Ant?nio Pedro Marques <mailto:antonio at gmail.com>

No dia 04/12/2011, ?s 01:42, David Stockhoff
<dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

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That's what I said, except that Severian is not "a twin's name." It's just a name. Any Latinate male named can be twinned with a female form.

What's convoluted about it?

Gerry Quinn — 04 Dec 2011, 15:24 · in reply to David Stockhoff

From: David Stockhoff

On 12/4/2011 9:10 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

Certainly the book seems to be suggesting that a twin sister exists somewhere.

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That's what I said, except that Severian is not "a twin's name." It's just a name. Any Latinate male named can be twinned with a female form.

But we do get a hint that it's typical of a twin:

"She was your sister, wasn't she?"

He nodded. "We were twins. Big Severian, did you ever have a sister?"

"I don't know. My family is all dead. They've been dead since I was a baby.

And probably not all Latinate names can be associated with saints of both genders.

What's convoluted about it?

The explanation? Just that the torturers take the trouble to select a twin's name for the boy, but then say nothing to the witches. [Assuming it's a name indicative of a twin, obviously. Perhaps there's nothing there.]

- Gerry Quinn

Lee Berman — 04 Dec 2011, 17:57 · follows Gerry Quinn

What's convoluted about it?

Gerry Quinn: The explanation? Just that the torturers take the trouble to select

a twin's name for the boy, but then say nothing to the witches.

You are not thinking correctly. The "torturers" did not take the slightest bit of trouble to select a name for Severian. Gene Wolfe did. The torturers did not put Severian in a cabin in the wilds and learn that Severian and Severa are twin names. Gene Wolfe did. You have to ask why the author did these things, not the characters. Did Gene Wolfe create the cabin scene to make us think Severian didn't have a sister at birth?

Obviously not. Wolfe created the scene to imply the possibility or even likelihood that he did. While I'm sure Wolfe meant for us to have some doubts on the issue I have trouble believing he meant us to arrive at a point where we say, "well, maybe there is a sister but the witches didn't name her Severa, so, well, okay they named her Merryn. So that's it. Severian meets his witch sister. End of story. No incest. No mythological connection to Oedipus. No connection to other family characters such as Dorcas or Catherine. Just a rippingly good yarn with no depth, allusion or mystery, as Gerry would have it.

David Stockhoff — 04 Dec 2011, 20:20 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 12/4/2011 10:24 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: David Stockhoff <mailto:dstockhoff at verizon.net>

On 12/4/2011 9:10 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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With regard to this question, it doesn't really matter if the torturers pick names, or defer to the client's wishes.

There is a possibility that occurs to me — the torturers name the boy and the witches name the girl. Might the torturers have given a twin's

name to the boy, then handed over the girl to the witches, who gave her a standard name? It would explain Merryn's name, but it seems a slightly convoluted explanation.

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"I don't know. My family is all dead. They've been dead since I was a baby.

And probably not all Latinate names can be associated with saints of both genders.

Absolutely not---it's one reason why I think there is something there.

What's convoluted about it?

The explanation? Just that the torturers take the trouble to select a twin's name for the boy, but then say nothing to the witches.

[Assuming it's a name indicative of a twin, obviously. Perhaps there's nothing there.]

IT'S NOT A "TWIN'S NAME." And why would they talk to the witches at all, ever?

António Marques — 04 Dec 2011, 20:20 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote:

On 12/3/2011 11:05 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

No dia 04/12/2011, às 01:42, David Stockhoff<dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

antonio at gmail.com wrote:

How do we know Severian's real name?

Antonio's question raises another point from that intended---who named Severian?

Ahem. Though not explicit, that was the point intended (the other point would hardly have been worth raising).

Ah, I see!

Well... rereading it, one can barely see that that was what was on my mind. Maybe I really should improve my discourse.

António Marques — 04 Dec 2011, 20:21 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote:

On 12/3/2011 11:05 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

No dia 04/12/2011, às 01:42, David Stockhoff<dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

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Ahem. Though not explicit, that was the point intended (the other point would hardly have been worth raising).

Ah, I see!

Well... rereading it, one can barely see that that was what was on my mind. Maybe I really should improve my discourse instead of waiting for others to read my thoughts.

David Stockhoff — 04 Dec 2011, 20:23 · in reply to António Marques

On 12/4/2011 3:20 PM, António Marques wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote:

On 12/3/2011 11:05 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

No dia 04/12/2011, às 01:42, David Stockhoff<dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

antonio at gmail.com wrote:

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Antonio's question raises another point from that intended---who named Severian?

Ahem. Though not explicit, that was the point intended (the other point would hardly have been worth raising).

Ah, I see!

Well... rereading it, one can barely see that that was what was on my mind. Maybe I really should improve my discourse.

Well, it did seem like a rhetorical question---how do we know anything?

Gerry Quinn — 04 Dec 2011, 20:38 · in reply to David Stockhoff

From: David Stockhoff

On 12/4/2011 10:24 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

And probably not all Latinate names can be associated with saints of both genders.

Absolutely not---it's one reason why I think there _is_ something there.

What's convoluted about it?

The explanation? Just that the torturers take the trouble to select a twin's name for the boy, but then say nothing to the witches.

[Assuming it's a name indicative of a twin, obviously. Perhaps there's nothing there.]

IT'S NOT A "TWIN'S NAME."

Surely the fact of it being one of the Latinate names that can be associated with saints of either gender makes it a twins' name in BotNS? Of course it doesn't have to be restricted to twins, but it's a natural possibility.

And why would they talk to the witches at all, ever?

To say they have a baby girl for them. And for whatever reason Severian was sent to the Witches Tower. Damp-proofing in the cellars of nearby towers, who knows...

- Gerry Quinn

David Stockhoff — 04 Dec 2011, 20:55 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 12/4/2011 3:38 PM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: David Stockhoff <mailto:dstockhoff at verizon.net>

On 12/4/2011 10:24 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Absolutely not---it's one reason why I think there _is_ something there.

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sigh

And why would they talk to the witches at all, ever?

To say they have a baby girl for them. And for whatever reason Severian was sent to the Witches Tower. Damp-proofing in the cellars of nearby towers, who knows...

They send an apprentice or two. Done.

David Stockhoff — 04 Dec 2011, 22:44 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Regarding the maid who plays Katharine:

"She was tall and slender, though not so tall nor so slender as Thecla, dark of complexion, dark of eye, raven of hair. Hers was such a face as I have never seen elsewhere, like a pool of pure water found in the midst of a wood. " Katharine herself presumably looks like this.

Severian: identical but pale. It's been pointed out that a pool is a mirror.

If Catherine is tall and dark, and Ouen is small and fair (see Dorcas), then their offspring might look like the maid as well as like Severian, or possibly blonde.

Does anything rule out that the maid is Severa? Is this too blindingly obvious? And what prevents the maid from being Merryn?

Andrew Mason — 05 Dec 2011, 00:15 · follows David Stockhoff

Lee Berman wrote:

larry miller- Why do you think Merryn is Severa? "Just because she is a witch" ?I think this is the biggest red herring in the book.

I agree, though the secret of the Inhumis is pretty close.

Bear in mind, though, that Wolfe said he thought everyone would get the secret of the inhumis. He suggested the reason they didn't was that they couldn't grasp the thought of people not preying on one another. But I don't think that was the reason: I think that the real reason is that it was not mysterious enough. There is a lot of stuff in the archives with people saying 'It can't be that: it's too obvious'. But I don't think it was ever meant to be a secret from us; it was a secret from the people of Blue, It couldn't be stated straight out, because the books had an in-story author who had promised to keep the secret; but it was conveyed (in Wolfe's view, at least) as clearly as possible.

There are a some really deep and

intriguing mysteries in Wolfe's books and to think he simply gives the complete answer to

us in an obvious way is an assumption for a different sort of Wolfe reader than you and me.

There are some really deep and intriguing mysteries, written as such, and there are also some things which puzzle us but are meant to be obvious. The problem is telling which are which. It may well be the case that when Severian said 'If I have a sister she is a witch' we were immediately meant to think 'ah, Merryn!' Indeed, it may be that Wolfe thought he was being over-helpful here, and that we should have been able to get it from the statements that girl children brought to the torturers are given to the witches, and that 'Severian' is a brother-sister name. If it was meant to be obvious in that way it may not be particularly deep. I don't know that this is true, but I don't think we can rule it out.

We have some evidence regarding this- Upon their meeting, Merryn comments on "this man in fuligin".

The Cumaeon explains, "he is but a torturer". Is Merryn, a Citadel resident, really so ignorant?

The context of this is important. Jolenta cries out 'Doctor!' The Cumaean says 'She seeks her lover', and Merryn replies 'Who is not this man in fuligin, then?', i.e. 'Oh - so this man in fuligin isn't her lover?'. So I don't think we need suppose that she is, or is purporting to be, unaware of the significance of fuligin. Likewise the Cumaean's response 'He is but a torturer. She seeks a worse'; needn't be seen as simply explaining'; it's a comment on Dr Talos. (This does not rule out the meeting's being arranged, of course.)

andrew.mason53 at gmail.com — 05 Dec 2011, 00:24 · follows Andrew Mason

David Stockhoff wrote:
IT'S NOT A "TWIN'S NAME."

Not a twin's name specifically, but, as we are told by Ava, a brother-sister name. I take that to be the principal reason for thinking that Severian has a sister in the first place. (In this case it presumably does signify twinhood. If the torturers chose it, they would have no reason to choose a brother-sister name unless the sister was right there. If Catherine did, since she had been separated from her lover and was unlikely to meet him again, she wouldn't be planning for more children at that moment)

David Stockhoff — 05 Dec 2011, 01:18 · in reply to Andrew Mason

On 12/4/2011 7:15 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:
Lee Berman wrote:

We have some evidence regarding this- Upon their meeting, Merryn comments on "this man in fuligin".

The Cumaean explains, "he is but a torturer". Is Merryn, a Citadel resident, really so ignorant? The context of this is important. Jolenta cries out 'Doctor!' The Cumaean says 'She seeks her lover', and Merryn replies 'Who is not this man in fuligin, then?', i.e. 'Oh - so this man in fuligin isn't her lover?'. So I don't think we need suppose that she is, or is purporting to be, unaware of the significance of fuligin. Likewise the Cumaean's response 'He is but a torturer. She seeks a worse'; needn't be seen as simply explaining'; it's a comment on Dr Talos. (This does not rule out the meeting's being arranged, of course.)

And there is of course that exquisite conflation of "lover" and "torturer"

David Stockhoff — 05 Dec 2011, 01:20 · in reply to andrew.mason53 at gmail.com

On 12/4/2011 7:24 PM, andrew.mason53 at gmail.com wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote:
IT'S NOT A "TWIN'S NAME."

Not a twin's name specifically, but, as we are told by Ava, a brother-sister name. I take that to be the principal reason for thinking that Severian has a sister in the first place. (In this case it presumably does signify twinhood. If the torturers chose it, they would have no reason to choose a brother-sister name unless the sister was right there. If Catherine did, since she had been separated from her lover and was unlikely to meet him again, she wouldn't be planning for more children at that moment)

Exactly.

Lee Berman — 05 Dec 2011, 03:26 · follows David Stockhoff

Andrew Mason: Bear in mind, though, that Wolfe said he thought everyone would get the secret of the inhum. He suggested the reason they didn't was that they couldn't grasp the thought of people not preying on one another.

Where is this quote from? I think I remember something like that. Anyway, that sentiment is quite misanthropic. It may be that Wolfe thinks that lowly of the human race in general.

But also of his readers?

But I don't think that was the reason: I think that the real reason is that it was not mysterious enough. There is a lot of stuff in the archives with people saying 'It can't be that: it's too obvious'.

I am not among those people. There are many Wolfe mysteries to which the solutions are given quite freely. For me, obviousness alone is not a disqualification. In the case of the inhum secret, the problem I see is that "you are what you eat" simply doesn't seem like much of a secret. Why is it so carefully protected? (I've heard the arguments; they all sound post-hoc and very weak to me).

Now, if you combine that secret with James and Marc's idea: "We inhum are what we eat and we only became the beings you see flying around because our original form is that of a parasitic vine, a form in which we still hide. As long as there are vines on Blue there will be inhum." There I think you might have a secret the inhum would want to protect. I've spoken my piece on the "flying through space" fib of the inhum. If they are hiding as vines, this "unassisted spaceflight by animals" fib is another part of keeping that secret.

But I don't think it was ever meant to be a secret from us; it was a secret from the people of Blue. It couldn't be stated straight out, because the books had an in-story author who had promised to keep the secret; but it was conveyed (in Wolfe's view, at least) as clearly as possible.

I hear you Andrew. It just doesn't work for me, literarily. Sort of like Chekhov's gun. We are told of a deep secret in "chapter 1" but in "chapter 3" after a very long wait and a dramatic build-up we get- "inhum are what they eat"? Such an anti-climax. Something we already know. Why would an author choose to do this? Why would Wolfe break the writer's rules he has said he is bound by? You can't get your audience hungry for steak then give them crackers. Maybe in the middle, but not at the end of such a long story.