

Witches and Things in Jars

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 22 Jun 1998

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Peter Westlake — 22 Jun 1998, 12:12

Adam - thanks for explaining A & M.

The extraterrestrial mind contacted by the Cumaean I took to be just some ancient Fomalhautian of no other particular significance. I did wonder if the Cumaean was from Fomalhaut herself and knew it from back home, but there's no strong evidence for that.

John:

The second is the scene in *_Citadel_* with the homunculus. I have no idea what *_this_* is about, other than possibly a reference to the works of Samuel Beckett. *_The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction_* suggests that this is Severian's sibling, but Merryn seems far more likely from previous discussions here.

I wondered about the homunculus being Severian's sister for a moment (when it called him "brother"), but then I remembered where he had found it, among the effects of former Autarchs. I'll have to check when I get home, but I'm firmly under the impression that all the stuff in that room was very old, that the room hadn't been used for centuries.

Unfortunately, when Severian went on the errand to the Witches' Tower as a lad, he met someone who looked exactly like Merryn. So either that was someone else, or she's a lot older than him too. All the hints about him having a sister suggest a twin sister, which rather weakens the case for me.

Then there are interviews in which Wolfe himself says that he isn't sure whether Merryn is Severian's sister!

"...it represents for me all that monomaniacal fabric of argument, so tightly woven that not even the tiniest objection or spark of light can escape its net, in which human minds become enmeshed whenever the subject is one in which no appeal to fact is possible" - *_Sword_*, Ch. 38

I **do** like this passage. One of the most amazing things about BotNS is that Wolfe manages to keep the whole intricate edifice together and still has time for new insights into the eternal verities. A genius!

Spectacled Bear.