

A Gene Wolfe glossary?

The SF-Lovers list — 7 messages, 7 voices, 15 Apr 1996

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Frederic Bush — 15 Apr 1996, 05:21

Well, I've started the Book of the New Sun once again, this time with the aid of a polyglot friend and an Oxford English Dictionary to catch some of those wacky words. Unfortunately, there are still plenty of words which even ol' Oxford doesn't have, and we can't seem to derive from Greek or Latin.

Has anyone out there in Web-land composed a glossary/compendium of Wolfeiana? I've seen a list of characters, but not one of terms. I would dearly like to figure out what chrisos and asimi are, among others...

Yours in nenuphars,

Fred Bush
Swarthmore, PA

Michael P Collins — 15 Apr 1996, 12:59 · follows Frederic Bush

Find a copy of "Castle Of Days", and there's a collection of essays written by Wolfe about the Book of The New Sun. One of them is the words used in the first book. Beyond that, you might try _Lexicon Urthus_.

Michael Collins

Raymund Eich — 15 Apr 1996, 15:18 · follows Michael P Collins

If you can find a copy of _The Castle of the Otter_, it contains some essays by Wolfe on various aspects of tBotNS, including a very partial glossary.

I'm halfway through _The Claw of the Conciliator_ on my first reading, but the language hasn't troubled me too much. Important stuff gets defined by Severian (e.g. fuligin), is clear enough from context (e.g. optimates is a generic honorific for the high-born, with exultants -> armigers/armigettes in status; denominations of coins go chrisos -> asimi -> aes), or is meant to be slightly vague (destriers might be warhorses, baluchthithers might be elephants??) in keeping with the huge gap in perception between us and Severian.

Raymund F. Eich

Ethan A Merritt — 16 Apr 1996, 06:01 · follows Raymund Eich

destrier = "war-horse" this one's in the OED

baluchitherium is a large mammal from the North American ice age which looks somewhat like a cross between a huge bear and an elephant.

Ethan A Merritt

Steven H Silver — 16 Apr 1996, 13:10 · follows Ethan A Merritt

Lexicon Urthus was written by Michael Andre-Driussi. It's only available in hardcover and costs around \$30 if I recall correctly. It was published sometime around 1992/3 and will probably have to be special ordered.

Emmet O'Brien — 16 Apr 1996, 15:11 · follows Steven H Silver

Destriers are definitely not horses.. they move much faster, and they have fangs. There's an essay in _Castle of Days_, I can't for the life of me remember if it's in _Castle of the Otter_ or the later part of the book, where Wolfe goes into arguments re the utility of such a cavalry force, making them sound like scaled-up cheetahs with a speed of c. 160 km/h.

Many of the creatures, baluchitheres among them, are anglicisations of the names of various fossil mammals: as a kid I was heavily into pop palaentology books with lots of artists' impressions of such animals, and what bits of description Wolfe gives for baluchitheres, diatrymae et al. do fit with the clear images I still have of these things. Baluchitherium was significantly bigger than modern elephants, IIRC it was the largest land mammal known.

Emmet

Charles Dye — 23 Apr 1996, 22:19 · follows Emmet O'Brien

While the "Lexicon" is great for definitions and derivations, in my (highly debatable) opinion it falls a little short in exploring Mr. Wolfe's reasons for using specific words and names. There's a lot of extremely subtle wordplay in the "New Sun" saga, and it takes some real digging to discover much of it.

To pick two points at random: At one point, Father Inire casually drops the word "pleasance" in conversation with an attractive young girl. Mr. Andre-Driussi correctly quotes the dictionary definition, but misses the reference altogether. (Inire's two fascinations are mirrors and little girls.) And for "Valeria", possibly the most brilliant name in the "New Sun" books, he provides a list of saints named Valeria. Accurately, of course, but missing the jokes. (To be fair, he does add in an appendix that "Valeria is also an herb". Unfortunately, he doesn't mention that valeria is a heliotropic, or sun-seeking, herb. So close)

"Lexicon Urthus" is a fine book, full of years of tedious research. I don't mean to put Mr. Andre-Driussi down here at all! However, "Lexicon" should be viewed as a starting point for Severianology, not the be-all and end-all.