

# Severian's Mother and \_Castle of the Otter\_

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Kevin Maroney — 03 Apr 1987, 17:03

In response to an earlier posting of mine:

In \_Castle of the Otter\_, a 1982 volume concerning \_The Book of the New Sun\_, Wolfe does indeed state that Holy Katherine, the patron of the guild of torturers (note that this is not capitalized, as it is not the proper name of the Order), is Saint Catherine of Alexandria. Catherine was tried and put to death for criticizing the treatment of Christians at the hands of Maxentius, a Roman Emperor. (Time frame: fourth century.) She was placed on the wheel, but it broke down, and she was then decapitated. She forgave her executioner.

That chapter of \_Castle\_ goes on to describe the evolution of the story "The Feast of Saint Catherine", which Wolfe originally saw as a novella, into the tetralogy it is today.

I found \_Castle\_ to be a delightful and fascinating book. It contains a great deal of information on the \_BoTNS\_, including a glossary of \_Shadow of the Torturer\_, discussions of futuristic cavalry, advice to beginning writers, a description of Wolfe's (then current, only recently abdicated) position as a senior editor of \_Plant Engineering\_ magazine, and a chapter of jokes told by the characters of the \_Book\_. Most importantly, it contains a chronological bibliography of Wolfe's spec-fic works. It is available as a limited edition (signed and numbered, I believe) published by Zeisling Bros, and also in an edition from the Science Fiction Book Club. I don't know how to order it from the SFBC; I got my copy from an ad in \_Locus\_.

I will share with you my favorite joke from \_Castle\_. It is told by Master Ash, the Last Man.

"Once a man such as I, a man who walks the corridors of time, was approached by a rich woman. "I wish to see the end of the world," she said. "Show it to me, and I will double your fortune."

"Doubled, my fortune would remain but small," said the scholar.

"Tripled, if you like," said the woman.

Then the rich woman told him all her riches should do to him and his children if he did not obey her.

"Very well then," said the scholar. "Would you like to see the time when the sun swells and Urth falls thereto like a cinder in a grate?"

"No," said the rich woman. "That is only a larger fire, and I have seen many fires."

"Then would you see the Grand Gnab, when the universe shall fall into itself?"

"No," said the rich woman. "For that is not the end of anything, but the beginning of a new universe."

"Then tell me what I must show you," said the scholar.

The rich woman took thought with herself, and at last she said, "Show me the end of life. I would see the last agonies of the last creature to live upon Urth."

"Very well," said the scholar; and they stood upon a plain of ice, with the red sun no brighter than the moon.

"Where is the last creature?" said the woman. "That is what I wish to see. Here every thing is already dead." A cold wind scoured the plain, and she drew her furs more tightly around her.

"Why no," the scholar told her. "You live, and so do I." Handing her a mirror, he vanished down the corridors of time.

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Kevin J. Maroney