

Word origins...?

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 24 Feb 1999

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Yann Oehl — 24 Feb 1999, 11:34

I apologize for changing the subject... but does anyone know the original source of the word "Alzabo". Is it a mythological beast, an alchemical allegory, or did Gene just make that one up? Curious. Thanks all. .y

Kevin J. Maroney — 24 Feb 1999, 14:51 · follows Yann Oehl

At 11:34 AM 2/24/99 -0800, Yann wrote:

I apologize for changing the subject... but does anyone know the original source of the word "Alzabo". Is it a mythological beast, an alchemical allegory, or did Gene just make that one up? Curious.

It's a Romanized version of the Arabic word for "hyena", if I'm not mistaken. The Alzabo was introduced as a replacement for the hyena because, like the hyena, it laughs.

(Remember that most/all of the animal species of Urth except humans were driven extinct at some point in the past, and the animals present in the Book are alien replacements which approximate the original species. Destriers aren't horses, they're alien horse-like beings. This is an inversion of the standard sf cliché where an alien world is populated by exotic creatures which are actually just cows and bunnies with different names; here the Earth is populated by alien species which are *like* cows and bunnies.)

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m.driussi — 24 Feb 1999, 20:13 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

Y,

Hello and welcome.

"Alzabo" is a fabulous creature from medieval bestiaries of Europe, based in part (it is thought) upon legends surrounding the hyena (a non-European creature). See: BOOK OF BEASTS translated by White, and/or THE BOOK OF IMAGINARY BEINGS by Borges.

"Alzabo" is not itself an alchemical term, to the best of my knowledge. And no, Gene Wolfe did not make it up--nor did he invent 99% of the odd words used in TBOTNS (you can trust me: I wrote a book on the subject).

=mantis=