

# Greetings!

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 17 Oct 1999

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Daniel Fusch — 17 Oct 1999, 20:43

Hello.

This is my first post to this list. I first came across The Book of the New Sun two years ago, at the recommendation of a literary agent, and I have been hooked ever since. (How could I not be? What an astounding book!) I think my favorite parts of the book are the vast vistas and varied encounters in "The Sword of the Lictor." Especially the cliff near Casdoe's house. And Mount Typhon. And...

But I can go on like that for a long while. Dr. Talos remains an extremely memorable character in my mind (but then, so do most of the characters), and the storytelling contest in the fourth volume is excellent (I'm partial to Hallvard's story myself, but I like the fact that Severian does NOT end up judging the stories--they are all left on an equal footing).

And, of course, Severian's encounter with Rudesind the curator in volume one...where he (Severian) sees the picture of the armored warrior (what subtlety!) and longs to set it against a tree, with its frame resting on the grass.

And the sequence of short scenes when Severian is walking beside the sea near the end of the fourth volume...

and and and....

Well, from a brief glance at the URTH archives, I can see that there is a great deal of discussion on this mailing list. I'm looking forward to it!

First, as a newbie, may I toss out a few questions?

1. I have to admit I am puzzled by the miracle of Apu-Punchau. Wolfe (in his usual fashion) tells us that the attentive reader might well be able to come up with one or two plausible explanations, but I find myself at a loss to come up with anything particularly plausible. Help! (I keep thinking this should be a simple one.) Does anyone have any suggestions?

2. I have heard it said that Severian may be an unreliable narrator. I can think of a few slight inconsistencies in his narrative that might support this. Has anyone discussed this subject in detail? Could anyone provide me with some examples of the (alleged) unreliability of Severian?

For one thing, I notice that Severian often "leaves out" some small detail of the plot, which is mentioned later. This does not make him intentionally deceptive, perhaps--since it may be that Severian does not himself consider these details of importance at the time, or else he might assume that the reader does not need to be told these details explicitly, since he has dropped hints--but it does make him an unreliable narrator in the technical sense. (It also makes him an even more interesting narrator!) I am thinking of A) the fact that Severian does not mention the

healing of the man-ape's hewed hand at that point in the plot, but he alludes to it later, and B) the fact that Severian does not mention his physical intimacy with Thecla at that point in the narrative, although he alludes to it in "Claw" and "Sword."

Thoughts, anyone?

3. I'm curious...has anyone pondered the question of how closely (or in what ways) Wolfe's character of the Cumaeen corresponds to the Cumaeen in Virgil's Aeneid? (I ask because I have not yet read the Aeneid; it is on my list of books to read over Christmas break--a very long list!) As far as I know, the Cumaeen in "The Aeneid" advises Aeneas in the matter of descending to hell and returning ("hoc opus, hic labor est"). The connection of Aeneas' descent to the hell with Severian's encounter with Apu-Punchau seems (to me, at first glance) tenuous at best. Any thoughts?

Also, a comment....

I received my copy of Andre-Driussi's "Lexicon Urthus" only this last week, and I've had fun looking through it! The section on "onomastics" was enlightening, and the section on Terminus Est was especially interesting. Along the lines of Terminus Est as Excalibur, might I volunteer a few thoughts? These associations may be unfounded, but still, I think the topic begs for such connections!

Here are my suggestions:

Agia, in a sense, serves the role of Morgan le Fay. In a sense. She schemes to obtain Terminus Est, as Morgan le Fay schemes to obtain Terminus Est. Agilus is somewhat like Sir Accolon (I believe that was the name), who jousts with Arthur (with the sword Excalibur at stake, though Arthur did not know it).

Of course, these connections break down with any deeper analysis. For one, Terminus Est is not involved in the combat at the Sanguinary Fields; both Severian and Agilus wield averns. On the other hand, one might recall that Sir Accolon (if that was his name) had superior weaponry in the combat with Arthur, since he wielded Excalibur...in secret. Similarly, Agilus holds an unfair advantage at the Sanguinary Fields, since Severian's avern works against him.

Secondly, Agia is not a sorceress, though she nearly "bewitches" Severian.

Still, I think there might be some slight connection there, if only an unconscious one.

Any thoughts?

Anyway, I'm glad I found this forum!

Sincerely,

Daniel Fusch