

Infrequently Asked Questions

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 25 Dec 1999

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Talarican — 25 Dec 1999, 15:44

I was interested to see the notion of a Wolfe FAQ floated a short time back. It would appear just for the Urth cycle alone that in addition to the Big Questions catalogued in _Lexicon Urthus_, and this list, and other lists or newsgroups, an entire encyclopedia could be filled with Little Questions and clues or conjectures about them. Those competent critics among us always have always declared that Wolfe does not write in vain or include interesting details for mere texture or embellishment. With that in mind, B/UNS is a veritable mine (without the risk of man-apes or stompin' towers, happily) of the Wolfean tossed-off reference and significant interrupted dialog that to my knowlege have not been brought up or at least brought to some semisatisfactory consensus or agreement to disagree.

F'rinstance :

(references are to volume, with UNS =V, and chapter number, to avoid edition problems)

II:XXVI Dorcas tells Severian what she could remember being taught about the Conciliator, ending by saying there were other, frightening legends she could not clearly recall. She then asks Sev if the brown book contains any tales of the Conciliator. He states that he looked and "saw that it did" but they could not stop and read at that time. So far as I could tell, there is no further mention of this matter specifically in BNS.

Lexicon Urthus, in its summary of the known or conjectured contents of the brown book, says nothing about any Conciliator stories per se. What did Sev find in the brown book regarding the Conciliator?

II:X when Severian informs Vodalus of the Claw, Vodalus mutters about the trouble it could cause him and his movement, then starts to ask "You must tell me-" only to be interrupted. What was Vodalus about to ask? ("- how'n tarnation didja GET that, anyway?!")

III:XXXIII When Sev first meets Famulimus, Barbatus and Ossipago in Baldander's castle (the first occasion in Sev's own subjective lifetime, for those Urthlings inclined to quibble over how the Hierodules perceive time), Famulimus makes a gesture which Sev describes as "meaningless". In the following chapter Famulimus makes another "meaningless" gesture which this time reminds Sev of the living statues of the House Absolute which seem to have been modeled after Barbatus' and Famulimus' particular race. Maybe the gestures conveyed no meaning to Severian, but are we to suppose Mr. Wolfe went to so much trouble to describe "meaningless gestures"? What did the gestures mean?