

Soldier Series

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 16 Sep 1997

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m.driussi — 16 Sep 1997, 13:49

Reply: Item #7223192 from URTH at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET00#

Xury,

His real name is Lucius; he is a Latin; he was cursed by the Great Mother Goddess for messing up her temple during a battle; "Latro" means both "mercenary" and "pawn" (game piece), and Lucius is definitely both; and, in the interview words of Gene Wolfe, Lucius has a truly magic sword--"It cuts things." <g>

But seriously, anything more specific than that, you just go ahead and axe--er, "ask"! Maybe a few conflicting answers can be found around here, I'll bet.

=mantis=

Michael Straight — 16 Sep 1997, 12:48 · follows m.driussi

Spoilers...

On Tue, 16 Sep 1997 m.driussi at genie.com wrote:

[Posted from URTH, a mailing list about Gene Wolfe's New Sun and other works]

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I don't have all the people straight in my head (it's been a while, and I make all the connections), but Latro is a pawn in the conflict among the Mother Goddess, the goddess of the Spartans/Rope Makers, Mars (who is served by the Amazons), and is there also a god/goddess of the Athenians?

In the end, when Latro rides to freedom rather than victory, allowing the Amazons to win the race, it seems he is thwarting some of the gods and helping others, but I don't have it all sorted out.

Also there's the Athenian whose name starts with 'T' who the Spartans give all those gifts, apparently to make him look like a traitor and lose power among the Athenians.

And another scene I didn't catch until Wolfe explained it in an interview: The whole ceremony

Latro participates in with the Rope Makers is based on a real event. When the Spartans gave their slaves arms to help repel the invading Persians, they had this ceremony where they were ostensibly going to make them all honorary Spartans, but insted they killed them all, fulfilling their policy of never allowing slaves to carry weapons.

It wasn't clear to me in Wolfe's version if they had intended and failed to kill Latro and Seven Lions or if they never intended to kill him and he was sickened and depressed because that meant he was kind of on the same side as the people who played such an evil trick.

In spite of my confusion (part of which is faulty memory), I think the Soldier books are my favorite of all Wolfe's work.

-Rostrum

Derek Bell — 16 Sep 1997, 19:31 · follows Michael Straight

In message <199709161758.KAA19862 at lists1.best.com>, Michael Straight writes:

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Um, yes - Athena. She was the patron goddess of Athens as well as their goddess of war and wisdom. The Roman equivalent, Minerva, was a goddess of the hearth and wisdom. (Romans being male chauvinists and not wanting to give Athens too much importance either.)

Derek

Scott Dalrymple — 16 Sep 1997, 16:09 · follows Derek Bell

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-Rostrum

I have to admit that I had trouble with the Soldier books the first time through. I always knew that Wolfe was smarter than me, but here some things seemed so far over my head that I found it frustrating reading. Then I found an unabridged cassette recording of Soldier of the Mist. Hearing that read to me well **really** increased my appreciation (and understanding) of the book. BTW, I think the company that made the tapes was The Listening Ear, and I also thonk they're defunct now. I found a copy at the Rochester (NY) Public Library.

On another note: I recently saw a CD-ROM game called City of Lost Children. Does anyone know if it has anything to do with the movie that's been mentioned here (and which I have yet to find)?

Scott Dalrymple

m.driussi — 16 Sep 1997, 20:53 · follows Scott Dalrymple

Reply: Item #7613260 from URTN at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET00#

Rostrum,

Re: Soldier series as your favorite, you are not alone--I've met others who feel the same way, but also a number of people who dislike them for not being accurate enough (in a classicist point of view) and get downright irritated at some of the seemingly willful "mistakes." I believe SOLDIER OF THE MIST was the favorite one that made Jeremy Crampton start up his fanzine, "Book of Gold." So the Soldier series might be the most controversial in having love/hate camps.

(This issue of "accuracy" could possibly be leveled against the use of mystical terms in TBOTNS, but I haven't seen anybody go much further than Nutria's "He is just using Yesod for Heaven and Briah for Earth" statement a few messages back. Because it is true--Gene Wolfe isn't a Kabbalahist! [Nor am I, for that matter.] I'm impressed by how well he can use such terms as he does. OTOH, the analogy "Heaven is to Yesod as Earth is to x" would be answered "Malkuth" by the novice student, rather than "Briah," which really is a different category--a set in which "Assiah" makes more sense than Briah, for that matter. So, is this a "mistake"? Who knows, but say "Sure" just to avoid pointless argument or senseless speculation on trying to figure it out.)

(All of which returns to the bush of "Gene Wolfe is writing entertaining fictions not educational tracts.")

FWIW his pagan magic scenes seem to have met with great approval by at least one pagan magic non-fiction author, Godwin, who wrote about it/them in his book LIGHT IN EXTENSION.

Looking at the interview with Nutria (on the subtopic of the Soldier books) one can see that Gene Wolfe planned to move ever further away from the Robert-Graves-under-heroic-self-constraint-of-I, CLAUDIUS (as opposed to wild Bill of KING JESUS and THE WHITE GODDESS) and fully into the realm of Barry Fell's AMERICA B.C., with ancient Phoenicians, Romans, Greeks, et cetera cruising around North America before the advent of Jesus. At which point the classicists would have finally relaxed and said, "Well, that's what happens when you read the National Enquirer!" To which Gene would surely quip, "But I always read News of the World first!" Or something like that, 'cause it's true.

It is definitely a challenging text because of the narrative device!

=mantis=

Jim Jordan — 18 Sep 1997, 08:37 · follows m.driussi

As regards the Soldier series, one thing we have to bear in mind is that it is incomplete. We'd have lots more problems interpreting Severian if we only had the first two books of the New Sun.

The other point to bear in mind, which Mantis touched upon, is that Wolfe is not committed to "establishment" reconstructions of the history and chronology of the ancient world, any more than he's committed to "establishment" views of evolution. (He's Lamarckian.) Speaking as someone who has done some work in this area, I agree with Wolfe: A great many supposed certainties about the ancient world are merely hypotheses that have been repeated too many times. If anyone wants to pursue such matters, Peter James's **Centuries of Darkness** (Rutgers U. Press) and David Rohl's

Pharaohs and Kings (Crown) make a good starting point.

At any rate, there is good reason to think that Troy fell around 800 BC, and that the early Romans were indeed Mycenaean Trojans; and very good reason to think that Tyreans and other Phoenicians travelled to the Americas. Also, one has to bear in mind that Hiram of Tyre was a worshipper of the God of Israel, and was closely allied to David and Solomon, so that there was Yahwistic influence among the Phoenicians -- something often overlooked, but which I would

not be surprised if Wolfe picked up on.

We'll just have to wait and see. Happily, we have been told that Wolfe is now going to complete the series.

Nutricious