

Origins of Ascians

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 05 Feb 2006

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Jordan Dennis — 05 Feb 2006, 01:52

I would like to throw in another perspective on the origins of the Ascians, if I may.

In his interview with James Jordan, Gene Wolfe said that he owed a big debt to Jack Vance. Let me quote that passage of the interview --

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JJ:* Was Jack Vance's style an influence on the style of the Severian novels?

GW: Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure. A lot of that was my deciding to rewrite *The Dying Earth* from my own standpoint.

JJ: Wonderful book.

GW: Yes it is wonderful. And of course when you read wonderful books sometimes you think, "Gee, I would like to do that"; and you go off and do it, trying to make it different enough that you are not really ripping off the author, but rather writing something in the same vein using some of the same ideas. I have never concealed a debt to Jack Vance and a debt to Clark Ashton Smith as far as that goes. I think Vance is very much in the debt to Clark Ashton Smith.

The entirety of the interview can be found at

<http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/wolfebj.html><<http://mysite.verizon.net/%7Evze2tmhh/wolfebj.html>>.

I recently picked up the Orb trade paperback, *Tales of the Dying Earth*, but only started to read it this morning, with the context of this discussion fresh in my mind, and something immediately jumped out at me. On page 32, one of the characters asked a magician to transport her to Ascolais. What if Ascia and the Ascians were a permutation of Ascolais that Gene Wolfe meant as a sort of homage to one of his inspirations? That would be a good reason to explain why he was suprised when people began associating the Ascians with Asians.

Anyway, just a thought.

Jordan D. Dennis

James Wynn — 05 Feb 2006, 02:57 · in reply to Jordan Dennis

What if Ascia and the Ascians were a permutation of Ascolais that Gene Wolfe meant as a sort of homage to one of his inspirations?

eh.....I don't know. It seems a stretch since I can't think of any other connection beyond the name. But I'm no one to talk since I've always suspected Ascolais is connected to the term "akolasia" meaning "licentiousness".

But wait until you get to the story of Cugel. The writing is soo subtly funny. And Severian is surely an homage to the shirtless, sword wielding Cugel.

J