

The Book of the New Sun

The Urth list — 15 messages, 7 voices, 14 Nov 2006

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don doggett — 14 Nov 2006, 05:23

Hi everyone,

Not much Latro going on yet, I see. Not much to this post either except to say that I'm rereading the Book of the New Sun and just enjoying the hell out of it. It's been a couple of years since I picked it up and it's nice to step away from the minutiae and the theorizing and just dig on the narrative power of the work as a whole. It's really a great, great book. But you all knew that, didn't you?

Don

Matthew DeLuca — 14 Nov 2006, 05:26 · in reply to don doggett

Well I'm reading Soldier of Sidon right now. Frankly it may be Wolfe's best work with Latro yet. I'm glad he wrote this like Wizard Knight, he doesn't use a lot of confusing sentences and vocab. Hopefully we can create a good discussion on this work within the near future.

Matt

On Nov 14, 2006, at 12:23 AM, don doggett wrote:
Hi everyone,

Not much Latro going on yet, I see. Not much to this post either except to say that I'm rereading the Book of the New Sun and just enjoying the hell out of it. It's been a couple of years since I picked it up and it's nice to step away from the minutiae and the theorizing and just dig on the narrative power of the work as a whole. It's really a great, great book. But you all knew that, didn't you?

Don

Do you Yahoo!?
Everyone is raving about the all-new Yahoo! Mail beta.
<http://new.mail.yahoo.com>

Dan Rabin — 14 Nov 2006, 06:44 · in reply to Matthew DeLuca

At 12:26 AM -0500 11/14/06, Matthew DeLuca wrote:

Well I'm reading Soldier of Sidon right now. Frankly it may be Wolfe's best work with Latro yet. I'm glad he wrote this like Wizard Knight, he doesn't use a lot of confusing sentences and vocab. Hopefully we can create a good discussion on this work within the near future.

I'm done with my first reading, and I'm ready to join a discussion once enough other people are done so that we can be free with the spoilers.

This is going to be fun. We've got the charisma of ancient Egypt to lap up, somewhat like the appeal of dinosaurs to children (our knowledge of both relies on impressive reconstructions of a hidden past). Then there's the Darkest Africa thing to contend with.

Non-spoiler stuff: all three Latro books have the name-lists at the end, whereas the Long and the Short have them at the front, where some entries are slight spoilers. I've always assumed that Wolfe chose the positioning of this matter, but it's conceivably a choice made by the editor or even the book designer. Does anyone think this is important enough to ask Wolfe about?

Also, the "translator's" notes in the New Sun books, whose narrator never forgets, are at the ends of the volumes, whereas those of the Soldier books, whose narrator cannot remember, are at the beginning. This fits the general pattern of inversions between the two series, but also solves a technical problem: the construction of Latro's situation makes foreshadowing within the body of the novels impossible, so the "translator" can plant a bit in the forewords.

-- Dan Rabin

Jeff Wilson — 14 Nov 2006, 07:50 · in reply to Dan Rabin

Dan Rabin wrote:

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since the actual author isn't amnesiac, I don't see how this is a problem.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 14 Nov 2006, 09:04 · follows Jeff Wilson

Sidon should arrive here in a couple of days, and I've been re- reading Mist & Arete in preparation.

Mainly I'm hoping for a good story well told, but I'm also hoping that there'll be some answers to a few questions the first two books left hanging for me.

1. The Unseen God

From the word's of Apollo and the mediocre verse of his priestess,
right at the beginning in Thebes.

"I send you to the God Unseen!
Whose temple lies in Death's terrene!
Then you shall learn why He's not seen."

and : "Long after, you will find what you seek in the dead city."

I assume that "the God Unseen" is the really truly God or at least something further up the chain of comamnd than the gods encountered so far.

Google says that "terrene" means "belonging to this world, not heavenly" so I guess "Death's terrene" = "the dead city", a real place, maybe in Egypt? (I hope we're not going to get some kind of identification of Akhenaten's Aten with the God of Moses, but I'm nervous ...)

We get a bit more on the Unseen God. Outside Sestos, the Maiden tells Latro that the gods still meddle in the affairs of men: "Not often now, but the Unseen God wanes, and we are no longer lost in his light. We will never be wholly gone." Be good to get some kind of explanation for that.

Which brings me on to ...

2. Why does Latro end up as a favorite (apparently) of the Earth Mother after starting out (apparently) cursed by her?

The scene with her as Cybele in Thrace is interesting. It appeared to Latro "that a second sun rose behind her ... a splendid light enfolding her in a mantle brighter than the purest gold." He harps on this, so maybe it's more than just a god-ish aura; maybe the sign of the God Unseen in whose light Cybele is illuminated but not lost - referring back to the Maiden's comments.

Presumably all are working to further the designs of the Unseen God, whether or not they know it. In the story so far, Latro has been a pawn in what seems like a rather petty squabble between goddesses, but maybe in Sidon there will be more hints of a Larger Design.

3. What did Aphrodite hypnotize Latro to say or do or believe in Kalleos' garden?

4. Who actually won at the end of Arete - Diana, the Mother, both?

Matthew DeLuca — 14 Nov 2006, 15:48 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

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tells Latro that the gods still meddle in the affairs of men: "Not often now, but the Unseen God wanes, and we are no longer lost in his light. We will never be wholly gone." Be good to get some kind of explanation for that.

Well like right in the middle of Sidon, Latro goes to the Undead city and it's probably one of the best scenes (very American Gods-ish) in the book so far. Suffice it to say, this prophecy does take place in Sidon.

Sidon has a lot of elements in it, it's a combination of all the previous Latro novels, The Short Sun series and contains many Gaiman elements (maybe Gaiman has many Wolfian elements, who knows?)

The Gods are still alive and well in Egypt in Sidon.

Matt

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 14 Nov 2006, 17:24 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On Tue, 14 Nov 2006 20:04:00 +1100, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com said:

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Not sure I agree, since the name Hades means "unseen" and he's king of the underworld, where there is no sunlight--plus Dis Pater is never encountered until we're dead.

The very last chapter of _Sidon_ with its boatman and Cerberus-analog (besides reinforcing the Latro-as-Heracles subtheme) seems to indicate Latro is close to the particular realm in question.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - Or how I learned to stop worrying and love email again

Matthew DeLuca — 14 Nov 2006, 19:32 · in reply to Rex Lycanthrosaurus

On Nov 14, 2006, at 12:24 PM, Rex Lycanthrosaurus wrote:

On Tue, 14 Nov 2006 20:04:00 +1100, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com said:

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(besides reinforcing the Latro-as-Heracles subtheme) seems to indicate
Latro is close to the particular realm in question.

I was referring to Latro's judgement when he is dead in the middle of the book. I thought this
might have some connection.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 14 Nov 2006, 20:00 · follows Matthew DeLuca

On Wed, 15 Nov 2006 04:24:45 +1100 Rex Lycanthrosaurus
<lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm> wrote:

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king of
the underworld, where there is no sunlight--plus Dis Pater is
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analog
(besides reinforcing the Latro-as-Heracles subtheme) seems to
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Latro is close to the particular realm in question.

Good point! But I'm going to stick with the my interpretation for now. Pindar says he doesn't
know who is meant by "the god unseen" - why wouldn't he have picked up on a Hades
reference? And it seems to be a well-recognized christian usage - eg Colossians 1 (tks to
Google). Plus the Maiden's reference to the god (assuming it's the same one) as a radiant being,
which doesn't seem to fit Hades very well. Finally, Latro actually meets Hades a couple of times,
which weakens the "unseen" aspect.

Though there could be a double meaning.

Anyway, my half-baked guess at the moment is that there's a connection with Latro's memory
palace, which will turn out to be an image of Akhenaten's destroyed temple to Aten in Karnak.
East of the Nile; huge, open, airy; a radiant supreme/exclusive solar deity; a dead city; Karnak
has an avenue of sphinxes (although all ram-headed, I think, but there were sphinx's in the Aten

temple too).

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 14 Nov 2006, 22:29 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On Wed, 15 Nov 2006 07:00:08 +1100, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com said:

Pindar says he doesn't know who is meant by "the god unseen" -
why wouldn't he have picked up on a Hades reference?

Latro uses the name 'Hades' only once in the first two books, preferring instead 'Receiver of Many,' which he uses at least three times. 'Receiver of Many,' translated back into Greek is Polydectes--indeed, an epithet of Hades. So perhaps Pindar is more familiar with Polydectes or any of Hades' other names.

TheoWiki (<http://www.theowiki.com/index.php/Hades>) also asserts that "[Hades] is best known in Hellas under the name Plouton/ Ploutonas" and that "Hades is the most recent form. An older form of his name is Aides or Aidoneus and an even older form is Ais, which means house and refers to the Underworld as the House of Hades."

Plus the Maiden's reference to the god (assuming it's the same one) as a radiant being, which doesn't seem to fit Hades very well.

Again, according to TheoWiki, "the meaning of the names Ais, Aides or Aidoneus or Hades is 'The Invisible' or 'Invisibility giving', in contrast with Helios 'The Visible', 'the Visible Giving'. It also makes a greater contrast between Zeus and Hades whose name once meant 'the brightness of the day'."

Anyway, my half-baked guess at the moment is that there's a connection with Latro's memory palace, which will turn out to be an image of Akhenaten's destroyed temple to Aten in Karnak. East of the Nile; huge, open, airy; a radiant supreme/exclusive solar deity; a dead city; Karnak has an avenue of sphinxes (although all ram-headed, I think, but there were sphinx's in the Aten temple too).

Latro's memory palace is almost certainly based on a real structure, and it seems probable that something he's done here (along with his 100 fellow mercenaries) is what's earned him the enmity of Gaea/Demeter. But is this "lost temple" Egyptian in origin or Assyrian/Sumerian? In my opinion the sphinxes, griffins, winged bearded bulls, and man-bull make the latter more likely.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

--

<http://www.fastmail.fm> - And now for something completely different

Dan Rabin — 14 Nov 2006, 22:30 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

At 1:50 AM -0600 11/14/06, Jeff Wilson wrote:
Dan Rabin wrote:

This fits the general pattern of inversions between the two series, but also solves a technical problem: the construction of Latro's situation makes foreshadowing within the body of the novels impossible, so the "translator" can plant a bit in the forewords.

since the actual author isn't amnesiac, I don't see how this is a problem.

I meant that Latro, not Wolfe, can't foreshadow the way Severian can. It is true, as I guess you're suggesting, that nothing prevents Wolfe from injecting foreshadowing into the

utterances and actions of others as reported by Latro. Indeed, Wolfe has gods, oracles, and seers do precisely this.

-- Dan Rabin

Jeff Wilson — 15 Nov 2006, 02:46 · in reply to Dan Rabin

Dan Rabin wrote:

At 1:50 AM -0600 11/14/06, Jeff Wilson wrote:

Dan Rabin wrote:

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Now that I think about it, Latro can do this, though not reliably. Certainly in *_Mist_*, he revisits themes and topics hinted at earlier, and this is explained by him re-reading his earlier entries immediately prior to inscribing new ones. In fact, he pretty much has to be assumed to re-read at least "read this every day" for him to know to continue the scroll at all.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Matthew DeLuca — 15 Nov 2006, 06:49 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

There is an interesting homage to Severian and necromancy of a sort in Sidon (I know there was some in *Mist* too) in that his presence reanimates Sabra, the wax woman. Is there some Greek or foreign myth that parallels this reanimation myth that Wolfe would include in Sidon?

Michael Straight — 01 Dec 2006, 08:25 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On 11/14/06, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:

2. Why does Latro end up as a favorite (apparently) of the Earth Mother after starting out (apparently) cursed by her?

I think it's just that she's decided she has a use for him. It's not like she revokes her curse and heals him.

3. What did Aphrodite hypnotize Latro to say or do or believe in Kalleos' garden?

Aphrodite=love. She says Latro will not forget her=will not forget love. One of the few things Latro seems to remember is his love for Pharetra (he gets choked up hearing her name even when he hasn't read about her that day). Maybe this is the gift Aphrodite gave him with her visit?

Rostrum

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 02 Dec 2006, 10:55 · follows Michael Straight

On Fri, 01 Dec 2006 19:25:45 +1100 Michael Straight

<mfstraight at gmail.com> wrote:

On 11/14/06, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com>

wrote:

2. Why does Latro end up as a favorite (apparently) of the Earth Mother after starting out (apparently) cursed by her?

I think it's just that she's decided she has a use for him. It's not like she revokes her curse and heals him.

Could be. But by the time he encounters her in sphinx-form, she's instructing him in a perhaps motherly way; apparently guarding his memory palace; and actually declaring that she's his mother.

And also his mother's mother.

Here's my guess at what that's supposed to mean. As a Roman, Latro is perhaps a descendant of Aeneas. Aeneas was the son of Aphrodite/Venus. This might make Latro a "son of Aphrodite/Venus" in the same way that the Amazons are "daughters of Ares/Mars".

In Homer & elsewhere, Aphrodite is the daughter of Dione, who seems to be a great mother goddess, another aspect of Gaea. So that could make Gaea Latro's "mother's mother".

If Latro is himself supposed to be some kind of aspect of Mars/Ares, that also makes him a "son of Juno/Hera", arguably another aspect of Gaea.

(Latro is at least a "son of Mars", like the Amazons - Mars was the father of Romulus, the other great Roman ancestor, and Romans often referred to themselves in this way. Maybe this explains why he & Amazons get on so well together, as well as injecting some Wolfean quasi-incest into the story.)

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Pharetra (he gets choked up hearing her name even when he hasn't read

about her that day). Maybe this is the gift Aphrodite gave him with

her visit?

It could be. At any rate, there's a little incident in Sidon which hints at Aphrodite gently interfering once again, maybe in the same kind of way ...