

Soldier of Sidon [possible spoiler]

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

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James Crossley — 15 Nov 2006, 22:16

This may qualify as a [SPOILER] for anyone who hasn't finished reading the latest Latro, but I must admit that I was slightly disappointed that SoS doesn't even hint at closure. I know that this is more a function of publishing practices than Wolfe's own desire to cruelly tweak his readers (or is it?) but I'd appreciate knowing when we might expect to see the "completion" of the series. I wouldn't mind reading another installment or two, but I hope he's not planning to make Latro a literary decathlete.

By the way, what outlets have covered the book so far? After a quick web search, I found reviews at scifi.com and on a couple of blogs. Any mainstream mentions yet?

James

Matthew DeLuca — 15 Nov 2006, 22:44 · in reply to James Crossley

On Nov 15, 2006, at 5:16 PM, James Crossley wrote:
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David Duffy — 05 Apr 2007, 07:19 · in reply to James Crossley

This list seems to have been a bit quiet lately on Soldier, so I'll add in some half digested thoughts about the scroll. A few spoilers

The prophecy that Latro is given from the temple of Ap-uat says he (as death's hero) is to receive the shield of Hemuset.

Thotmaktef says that Hemuset is the goddess of fate, a minor goddess who decrees the fate of

the person at birth. She carries a small shield with an arrow on it. The shield is often worn on her head, and reflects a man's entire life.

I read, however, the following in the description of an Egyptian painting:

"At a first glance the supporting goddesses seem to Neith and Selket who frequently appear together in the Egyptian religion as protective deities (e.g. on sarcophagi or canopic chests). The just discernible shield with the crossed arrows on the head can point to Neith as well as to Hemuset (s). Brunner described Hemusets as female geniuses, the counterparts of the male Kas, who are involved in procreation or keeping-up life. According to the accompanying texts the figures represent Hemusets."

Neith carries a shield and crossed arrows, and by Roman times was said to be an *upper Egyptian* creator-goddess who had settled in Sais, where her temple received revenue from the Greek trading settlement at Naukratis. She was also worshipped as a "Great Cow", and thus is confused/overlaps with Hathor (who wears a sun disk on her head).

The most critical details, I think, are that Neith is/was a consort of Set, and the Greeks identified her with Athena. (They identified Set as Typhon BTW).

So does the scroll involve a relationship between Neith and Set? Is he collecting old love letters? Who is the old god guarding the scroll then? The best match I could find was Hapy. He is the god of the inundation, and is a pot-bellied bearded man with pendulous breasts. That doesn't make much sense to me.

David Duffy.

Nigel Price — 29 Jun 2007, 22:08 · follows David Duffy

I'm still reading "Soldier of Sidon" having just reread "Mist" and "Arete". I hope to review it for "Ultan's Library". I'm enjoying it very much but tend to agree that it seems to lack the depth of the other two Soldier novels and of Wolfe's work in general.

One obvious difference between "Sidon" and the other two Soldier novels is the lack of a specific historical narrative. "Mist" and "Arete" are remarkable in that they combine a story of gods and goddesses with a very specific historical context, namely the aftermath of the Persian invasion. These books do for ancient Greek history what the Greeks themselves did for their pre-historical age of myth. I guess that Wolfe's approach is not unprecedented, but it is unusual and makes the two novels a fascinating hybrid of fantasy and historical novel.

While I'm sure that the depiction of life in Egypt and Nubia given in "Soldier of Sidon" is well researched and historically accurate, the novel's narrative does not depend on an understanding of any actual historical events beyond a generalised knowledge of Egypt's gradual decline in power and its domination by the Persian Empire.

This lack of a specific historical narrative is one obvious way in which "Sidon" is simpler than its predecessors.

I need to think more about all this before I write my review...

At the moment, the question that is occupying me is, "What makes Latro/Lucius different from other fantasy heroes?" Or, to put it another way, "Is Latro a Lupine Conan the Barbarian?"

In many ways, Latro is a classic (as well as a Classical!) super hero. He has super powers: he can see the gods, he's a superb warrior, and he's pretty well irresistible to women. He has a crucial vulnerability: he forgets everything. He swashbuckles his way round the ancient world, fighting battles, getting into dangerous scrapes, tangling with the purposes of the gods and bedding exotic women (Amazons, Egyptian dancing girls!) as he goes.

On this last point, Wolfe has devised a wonderful strategem to surmount the problem of how you have a basically good and morally upright hero who still has lots of love affairs. He forgets, so of course he is not culpable even though he serially unfaithful to his wife back in Italy!

I also like the way that Latro manages to be a wish-fulfilment figure for his author in that he is both a super-soldier and, of necessity, a copious writer, writing feverishly nearly every day, just like his creator...

More anon!

Nigel

Transient — 13 Jul 2007, 03:58 · in reply to Nigel Price

On Jun 29, 2007, at 6:08 PM, Nigel Price wrote:

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I find it interesting how Latro seemed quite a bit less piteous in Sidon due to the fact that he was monogamous (well, polygamous, but in the actually matrimonial sense and not just sleeping around like a rake). At least during the part of the book that followed the river, when things were going comparatively smoothly for him.

Henry Eissler — 16 Jul 2007, 15:25 · in reply to Transient

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I also noticed that Latro seemed much happier through most of this journey, but it struck me more as a reflection on how much he had disliked the "strategem loving" Hellenes, but admired the people of Kemet.

Michael Straight — 16 Jul 2007, 20:52 · in reply to Henry Eissler

On 7/16/07, Henry Eissler <henryeissleriii at mindspring.com> wrote:
I also noticed that Latro seemed much happier through most of this journey, but it struck me more as a reflection on how much he had disliked the "strategem loving" Hellenes, but admired the people of Kemet.

It also helps that most of the Egyptians (for most of that trip up the Nile) were treating him with respect and not as a slave.

I was going to make a similar comment myself. I'll have to re-read the book before I have anything substantial to say about it, but one thing that stuck out for me is that I enjoyed seeing Latro so happy on his journey up the Nile. I guess I really like the character.

Rostrum