

Why Wolfe's Protagonists are Supermen

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Michael Straight — 01 Dec 2006, 17:31

Re-reading *Soldier of Arete*, I came across a passage that I think sheds light not only on Latro but also Able and some of Wolfe's other characters.

Polos is shocked to see Latro cry, and is told, "You admire strength because you are not strong, and that's fine. But Latro is strong; for him to admire strength would make him a monster."

In most adventure novels, the hero faces opponents who are stronger than he, and he struggles to become strong enough to defeat them. But Wolfe's heroes often face opponents who are weaker than they are, creating a very different set of conflicts.

I can think of many worthwhile reasons Wolfe might want to explore such characters: How might we live if we were not afraid? Or if we did not admire strength? How might we treat others if we felt no need to struggle to be stronger than they are? How ought a rich country, with the most powerful military in the world, behave if attacked or threatened by a weaker neighbor?

Of course, there's also the fun of writing a hero who, when challenged to a duel and warned that no quarter may be given, replies, "I'm not sure I can kill a man who is begging for his life, but I'll try."

Rostrum