

Antechamber, mask, HALE

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 04 May 1998

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Peter Stephenson — 04 May 1998, 08:40

Whew, I've never seen so many messages... it doesn't seem worth staying silent at the moment, so...

1) Antechamber: it just occurred to me this has more specific Kafkaesque overtones than I'd assumed. There's a famous story in 'The Trial', told to K. by a priest who turns out to be a chaplain of the Court (with which everyone is somehow associated): a man tries to gain admission to the Law, but is held back by a gatekeeper. He spends his whole life waiting in that room. He is told that, were he to get through, he would find a whole sequence of other antechambers (I read it in German, so the word itself certainly didn't occur); even the third gatekeeper is too terrible for the first one to behold. As the man is finally dying, he asks the gatekeeper why no-one else tries to gain admission, and is told 'This door was put there for you alone. Now I will go and close it.' (It's in the chapter called 'Im Dom', 'In the Cathedral', towards the end.) The individual importance isn't there in Wolfe's version, but the notion of spending one's life waiting for access to the Law is very similar.

2) Agilus's Mask: I'm sure Mantis is right about this, but I think there's a relationship with a wider thread here. There are lots of masks in the Book, and they are all related to some sort of deception, benign or otherwise, beyond that implied by the mask itself. Hence Agilus's could be a clue to the reader that some deception is about to take place... and when Agia appears masked (although we don't know it's her), it's a double clue. That's actually extraordinarily generous by Wolfe's standards.

3) HALE: Totally off the topic, did anyone see that article in April's Scientific American (also on the cover) about High Altitude Long Endurance platforms that were going to fly for weeks on end over cities providing communications facilities, and did anyone think of the mysterious bomber towards the end of Free Live Free?

Peter