

This Week in Google Alerts: Soldier of Sidon review

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 10 Oct 2012

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6297>

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Gwern Branwen — 10 Oct 2012, 00:13

<http://www.logicalatomist.com/blog/2012/10/soldier-of-sidon-by-gene-wolfe.html>

The narrators of Gene Wolfe novels are usually tricky, mendacious, or inobservant. Latro is both intelligent and straightforward, but his mental disability enables Wolfe to play narrative games. The reader learns about Latro only from reading the book but Latro himself is in almost the same situation! In fact, we often know more than Latro; he can only skim his journal, while we remember details from earlier in the book.

In these respects *Soldier of Sidon* is no different from its predecessors *Soldier of the Mist* and *Soldier of Arete*, novels presented as Latro's earlier journals. It differs from those books in its setting in Egypt, as Latro joins an expedition sailing towards the source of the Nile. So the gods, wizards, warriors, princes, prostitutes, and spirits he encounters are Egyptian or Sudanese, not Greek and Roman as in the previous novels of the series.

Wolfe is remarkably knowledgeable about the ancient world, and *Soldier of Sidon* is entertaining to read for its historical detail and clever hypotheses. But it is unfocused and dull as a work of fiction. It is hard to build tension when the hero cannot remember what happened yesterday, and when every day must begin and end with reading and writing in a journal. No doubt the novel is full of mysteries and puzzles that a more dedicated reader could decipher. It's just not entertaining enough to inspire me to put in the work. I'll wait for an interpreter who can explicate the Latro series, as Robert Borski explicated the *Book of the New Sun* in *Solar Labyrinth*.

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

David Stockhoff — 10 Oct 2012, 01:27 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On 10/9/2012 8:13 PM, Gwern Branwen wrote:

But it is unfocused and dull as a work of fiction. It is hard to build tension when the hero cannot remember what happened yesterday, and when every day must begin and end with reading and writing in a journal.

I think *Mist* and *Arete* demonstrate the above to be false, but I can understand it for *Sidon*.

Gwern Branwen — 10 Oct 2012, 19:16 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Also of interest: <http://litreactor.com/columns/primer-gene-wolfe-the-subtle-master>

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<http://www.gwern.net>