

(no subject)

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 07 Dec 1996

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Charles Dye — 07 Dec 1996, 14:52

This from Jim Jordan <jbjordan at gnt.net> :

Quetzal - Quetzalcoatl was the mythical "white man" who was expected to arrive among the Aztecs and change things forever. The Mayans called him Culculcan, as I recall. "Quetzalcoatl" means "feathered serpent." Perhaps a dragon/cherubim association. Quetzal knows his Bible (the pre-Bible of the Urth-universe) and corrects someone in "Exodus" who ascribes a Biblical saying to Pas.

Since most people can't see gods, it's traditional to put the gods someplace inaccessible -- in the sky, atop a high mountain, deep in the earth. (In a computer is a new one on me, though.) Many pagan religions used birds to communicate with the sky gods, and snakes to keep in touch with the gods below. Snake/bird combos like dragons and quetzalcoatl are especially holy, for obvious reasons.

We see quite a few birds in the Whorl, as well as flying humans at various levels of technology. Most of the augurs have names suggestive of snakes, worms, eels and so forth. (Incus is one exception.) I think Quetzal is the only "bird" name in the bunch.

I kept expecting Wolfe to bring forth an auspex or two, to go with the augurs. Perhaps Silk himself, in a major reform of the Vironese religion? But it never happened; sigh.

So Quetzal is pretty ambiguous. Perhaps a "converted" vampire who rejects human blood for animal blood?

And perhaps not; remember Teasel? Guiding a whole starshipload of humans to the vampire planet would be a true act of charity ... to the vampires.

And this from Peter Cash <cash at convex.convex.com> :

I always preferred to translate "Terminus Est" as "It is finished". And when that sword gets through with you, it is definitely all over! 8^)

Other connotations, of which Severian may not be aware -- but Wolfe is: "terminator", division between day and night, the edge of dawn; "terminus", in railroad speak, the End Of The Line.

In addition to "mercury", my dictionary (the huge Merriam-Webster) also gives "the universal remedy of Paracelsus" as a meaning for "azoth". If you think about it, the azoth was a pretty drastic remedy, just like Terminus Est! And yes, I want one!

"Azoth" not only links the weapon with the mercury-filled Terminus Est, but with that panacea, the Claw of the Conciliator. When Wolfe makes a word work this hard, I sure hope he pays it double!

And these from me:

Wounds of Graves's King Jesus: lame (dislocated thigh), torn cheek. Nail holes, of course. And finally, the puncture wound in his side -- fatal, but not for long.

Wounds of Graves's Tiberius Claudius: lame (malformed leg), severe abdominal cramps (the "cardiac passion.") Died by poison (more abdominal cramps), deified.

Wounds of Severian: lame (battle scar), torn cheek (Agia's weapon.) Chest wound (from the avern leaf) -- fatal, but not for long.

Wounds of Patera Silk: lame (broken ankle), chest wound (stabbed by Musk) which should have been fatal -- but Silk wasn't really stabbed. Silk also has a habit of rubbing his cheek; I have to wonder whether it has something to do with that gawdawful straight razor of his father's.

Severian is frequently associated with Graves's Claudius. Graves makes his fictional version of the Roman tyrant a philosopher and philanthropist, a would-be democratic reformer. Silk, by contrast, gets associated with Marcus Aurelius, who really was a philosopher, and a reasonably benevolent Emperor. (Many of Silk's quotations from the Chrasmmological Writings are in fact from the Meditations.)

Anybody care to venture a guess as to which Caesar will show up in Wolfe's next series? Constantine, or Diocletian?

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Questions or problems to whorl-owner at lists.best.com