

Void Cross

The Whorl list — 4 messages, 2 voices, 16 Dec 1996

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/12>

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Doug Eigsti — 16 Dec 1996, 13:20

Whorl Wolfe's;

What is the Void Cross that Silk wears? Silk refers to it as a gammadion. Some have said that it is a swastika but this does not quite fit the descriptions: NIGHTSIDE pages (hardback); 43, 112, 170, 217, 239, 291. It clearly must have an "X" shaped cross or plus sign void in the center of the four gammas. A swastika does not fit the bill.

One configuration that does fit follows: Imagine a 5 x 5 square with a cross, or plus sign, occupying the five center squares. Now arrange four "gammas" around the edges consisting of four squares in line and then one square next to the last one but to the right. This is like an elongated Knight's move. Each gamma on Silk's necklace can be separated and used as a screwdriver for checking the electrical connections on the Sacred windows. When connected in this manner the four gammas do form a void cross in the center. It does not have the mystique of a swastika but is more appropriate for the cross symbolism of Wolfe's story.

=Doug Eigsti=

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

Jim Jordan — 18 Dec 1996, 19:39 · follows Doug Eigsti

At 01:20 PM 12/16/96 -0700, Doug E. wrote:

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Not sure. My dictionary gives "swastika" as equivalent of "gammadion." Silk's cross has corners that he can use to carve with.

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If I read you correctly, this is not one of the traditional meanings of "gammadion." The other is "voided Greek cross." The Greek cross has the crossbar in the center of the vertical bar, and of equal length, looking exactly like a plus sign +. A voided Greek cross evidently has two lines in

each directly, closed at the ends. Thus, one line is straight, while the other is a gamma -- in each of the four directions.

Only Gene could answer which is in view, but Meyers is certainly right that a cross emptied of Christ is partly in view -- since Pas has tried to pervert the traditional religion of the people. But since this is Pas's cross (as we are told), it may be a swastika.

And don't put it past Gene to be doing something sophisticated. Remember that before Hitler the swastika was a perfectly good Christian symbol. This story is set in the equivalent of the far future but in a universe preceding ours -- so the Hitler-association would be long gone, if ever it existed.

I suspect Gene intends a variety of associations, corresponding the ambiguity of the religious Silk serves.

Jim Jordan

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

Doug Eigsti — 19 Dec 1996, 06:14 · follows Jim Jordan

[Posted from Whorl, the mailing list for Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun]

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Jim J,

I can see how your Voided Greek Cross, which does indeed look like a plus-sign, can be made out of four gammas and four straight lines but to my knowledge Wolfe never mentions the Voided Cross of Pas as consisting of anything more than four gamma shaped pieces that Silk uses to tighten the connections of the Sacred Windows. Somehow these four gammas must fit together leaving a plus-sign shaped void in the center.

If the Outsider is the God of the Christian Bible and Pas and his cohorts are considered to be mere pretenders to the throne of men's souls then the Void Cross would be a negation symbol indicating Pas' antagonism to everything the Christian Cross stands for: i.e. he is the equivalent of the Devil. Early in the text of NIGHTSIDE Wolfe indicates that the Outsider was worshiped in The Short Sun Whorl before the Nine. The Nine are limited to inside the Whorl. The Outsider is everywhere on the outside, just as the Christian God is omnipresent.

=Doug=

Questions or problems to [whorl-owner at lists.best.com](mailto:whorl-owner@lists.best.com)

Doug Eigsti — 23 Jan 1997, 10:32 · follows Doug Eigsti

Fernando writes,

**** On Tue, 21 Jan 1997 15:17:47 -0700 (MST), douge at nti.com (Doug Eigsti) said:

Doug> I like your diagram it does seem to allow for the void-cross, and
Doug> it is a nice plus-sign shape. I can find two things to take
Doug> exception. One: The disconnected gammas which you mentioned. It
Doug> would be more elegant if the gammas were self connected, not needing
Doug> a framework to keep them together. Two: Gammas do not have arms of
Doug> equal length. They look like an upside down capitol "L".

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Doug> This has the advantage of being connected and built exclusively from
Doug> four gamma shaped objects. One can see how Silk could use a gamma as
Doug> a screwdriver for tightening the power connections on a window.

It has the disadvantage, though, of not being a cross at all! Since Wolfe repeatedly says "voided cross", I'd expect something that was a cross but had some sort of hole in it. (Or was missing something---an allusion I think Wolfe intends but that is immaterial to the shape of the thing.)

Fernando

--

Fernando Q. Gouvea
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=====

Fernando,

My concept of a voided cross is that of a cross shaped void. I found a couple of references in LONG SUN to support this:

NIGHTSIDE p.112.1 - "There was a secret in the empty, X-shaped space,... a mystery far beyond the detachable arms."

CALDE p. 322.1 - "...again traced the sign of addition, which could not - now he came to think of it - ever have been Pas's. A sign of addition was a cross... Pas's sign was not a cross but the voided cross."

Note that it is the empty space that is considered the cross, not the surrounding framework. The OED sheds some light on this also:

GAMMADION - A decorative pattern formed of repetitions or combinations of the shape of the Greek letter gamma. By antiquaries applied otherwise fylfot. Also to a figure composed of four gammas placed back to back in such a way as to form a voided Greek cross.

VOIDED - 2. having a part or portion cut out so as to leave a void or vacant space.

c. Her(aldry) - voided per cross - c1828 Berry. Encycl.

Her. Gloss. voided per cross is a voiding in the form of a cross, such as a cross Moline, and the like, voided, or cut, out in the middle in the shape of a plain cross through which the field is seen.

Dave Lebling referred me to the OED. Thanks.

Dave has stated on these pages that he thinks Silk's cross fits the OED definition.

Dave,

I visited the cross web site you listed and found it very well

done. Someone is really into crosses. The second listing for a gammadion does indeed look like a passable design for Pas's Void Cross. You are correct that the gammas do not need to have arms of unequal length. The gammadion listed there shows each of the four gammas being symmetrical.

I am willing to concede that this gammadion shaped like a Greek

Cross is probably the one intended by Wolfe. It being a more obscure reference than the swastica definition for a gammadion would appeal to Wolfe's flair for mischief while still maintaining his tendency to utilize existing, albeit obsolete, words, weapons and other implements. This design makes a fine heraldic symbol but cannot be directly translated into a physical object. I still prefer the design I had referred to earlier as being more satisfying because all the gammas are physically connected without an additional framework and because the cross appears without orienting the gammas in a cross pattern. The void does not follow the shape of the gammas. When looking at the other gammadion the eye is drawn to the outline determined by the gammas and not to the narrow void in the middle.

One nomenclature oddity strikes me as I researched the references to the void cross: the individual pieces of the gammadion are themselves referred to as gammadions:

NIGHTSIDE - p.217.-5 - "...pointed corner of one of the four gammadions..."

NIGHTSIDE - P.292.1 - "...gammadion by gammadion..."

Is this correct?

=Doug Eigsti=
doug at nti.com

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