

Silk's standing orders?

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CoxRathvon — 22 Jan 1997, 09:28

While we are all pondering Quetzal, Hyacinth, voided crosses, and other mysteries of the Whorl, allow me to mention one other tantalizing matter.

In "Lake" (p. 223), Hammerstone reveals to Silk that the soldiers have standing orders. "You've got them too," Hammerstone tells him; to illustrate, Hammerstone fakes a punch to Silk's face, and when Silk reflexively protects himself Hammerstone explains, "Your standing orders say your hands got to protect your clock, just like ours say we've got to protect Viron." Hammerstone adds that the soldiers' orders ultimately come from the calde. (And this, of course, is why the soldier Sand shoots Potto instead of Silk at the end of the third volume; Sand is reflexively protecting the calde.)

But what about Silk's deeper instincts? In the first book, we are surprised to see him duel expertly with Xiphias without any prior training. How is that possible? As Wolfe tells us in the prefatory lists of "Exodus," Silk is "grown from the frozen embryo purchased by Tussah." We've already seen that the sleeper Mamelta had technical abilities pre-loaded into her brain and that Mucor (also grown from a frozen embryo) came with some very peculiar abilities indeed. Evidently Silk has some "standing orders" of a special kind. On p. 345 of "Calde," Silk looks at the soldier Sand and ponders: "His own [name] and Sand's were similar--each had four letters, each contained a single vowel, and each began with an S. They could not be related, however, because, Sand was a chem and he a bio. Yet they were related by the similarity of their names. Not inconceivably... Sand was a cognate, a version of himself."

So if I've got this right, the frozen embryo purchased by Calde Tussah and raised quietly out of sight of the Ayuntamiento is likely to have been extraordinary. Silk probably has "standing orders" that give him instinctive military capabilities, that enable him to duel and fly airships and plan campaigns. They may even contribute to his extraordinary endurance and capacity to recover from wounds. He is, in other words, a born leader.

Does this sound right to the rest of you?

--Henry Rathvon

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