



Lexicon Urthus: A Dictionary for the Urth Cycle

Michael Andre-Driussi, Gene Wolfe (Foreword)

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Lexicon Urthus is an alphabetical dictionary for the complete Urth Cycle by Gene Wolfe: The Shadow of the Torturer; The Claw of the Conciliator; The Sword of the Lictor; The Citadel of the Autarch; the sequel Urth of the New Sun; the novella Empires of Foliage and Flower; the short stories "The Cat," "The Map," and "The Old Woman Whose Rolling Pin Is the Sun"; and Gene Wolfe's own commentaries in The Castle of the Otter. The first edition was nominated for a World Fantasy Award. This second edition, available for the first time in paperback, includes 300 new entries. When the first edition was published, Science Fiction Age said: "Lexicon Urthus makes a perfect gift for any fan of [Wolfe's] work, and from the way his words sell, it appears that there are many deserving readers out there waiting." Gary K. Wolfe, in Locus, said: "A convenient and well researched glossary of names and terms. . . . It provides enough of a gloss on the novels that it almost evokes Wolfe's distant future all by itself. . . . It can provide both a useful reference and a good deal of fun." Donald Keller said, in the New York Review of Science Fiction: "A fruitful product of obsession, this is a thorough . . . dictionary of the Urth Cycle. . . . Andre-Driussi's research has been exhaustive, and he has discovered many fascinating things . . . [it is] head-spinning to confront a myriad of small and large details, some merely interesting, others jawdropping."

Lexicon Urthus: A Dictionary for the Urth Cycle Details

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From Reader Review Lexicon Urthus: A Dictionary for the Urth Cycle for online ebook

Matt says

A great dictionary for the Book of the New Sun by Gene Wolfe; don't read it if you don't want a lot of the more subtle things in that great series spoiled for you!

Aaron Singleton says

While this book is a reference volume concerned with Gene Wolfe's tetralogy The Book of the New Sun, it's damn near as entertaining as the books it references. Andre-Driussi has done an admirable job compiling and researching the details of Wolfe's masterpiece. It contains detailed definitions for the many archaic and unusual words used in the New Sun books as well as maps, character sketches, character and place name origins, and much more. Just opening this book to a random page recreates the heavy, ruby-tinted moods of Urth. A must have for fans of Wolfe.

Lisandro Nieva says

A large and detailed glossary of terms, characters and concepts of the Urth Cycle. Inspiring, but I wished for more theories and possible explanations. TV Tropes and GoT forums may have been spoiled me.

Steve says

I originally read Wolfe's Book of the New Sun tetralogy in the mid eighties, shortly after they were written. I treated myself to re-reading them in early 2009, and was just as agog at how good they were now as I was over twenty years ago. In re-reading them now, the Lexicon Urthus has been an invaluable companion that only deepens the experience

Bill says

So, a book that serves as a guide to some trilogy or series always seems like a dicey concept. I have to say, though that they've been great reads in a couple cases (Dune Encyclopedia, Lexicon Urthus) -- a couple now that I've gotten a hold of this book. Lexicon Urthus does exactly what you need it to do, reading Wolfe's sprawling trilogy-- explain the concepts, the language, and their references. I don't become obsessive about the setting of every series I like, but if for whatever reason you read Book of the Fading Sun and find it lingering in your mind with its weirdness, or god forbid, you're reading it a second time like I am now, do yourself a favor and pick up Lexicon Urthus.

Adam Morgan says

Must-have for Gene Wolfe fans. Just don't spoil yourself.

Patrick says

Super helpful, but only if you've read / are reading Gene Wolfe's magnum opus *The Book of the New Sun*.

Christopher says

LEXICON URTHUS is a dictionary prepared by Michael Andre-Driussi of the unusual words and names used by Gene Wolfe in his four-volume masterpiece *The Book of the New Sun* (and its coda *THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN*). Originally published in 1994, it swiftly went out of print and used copies went for high prices. The publication of its second edition is to be heralded.

Those who have read Wolfe's work know that he usually allows many of his archaic terms to be defined for the reader through context, but those wishing to know more about these words weird and wonderful can turn to this resource. The book doesn't limit itself merely to terminology, however, but also contains the names of characters and places. Many characters in the *Book of the New Sun* are named after obscure saints of early Christianity or the Middle Ages or mythological figures, and Andre-Driussi shows why they have the names they do. For example, "Nilammon", the man mentioned in passing by the caretaker who shows Severian a picture of the moon ("Now there's trees enough on it to hide Nilammon") is named after a 4th century Egyptian saint who hid in his cell to escape a mob that wanted to proclaim him bishop.

Yet, Andre-Driussi sometimes goes astray. In the entry on Valeria, for example, he mentions several female saints, but doesn't mention who, I would say, is the most likely namesake of the character: Claudius' wife Valeria Messalina. The name of "Kim Lee Soong", the ancestor of the prisoners in the antechamber, is said to be Chinese, but clearly it is Korean. And occasionally Andre-Driussi makes pronouncements that are simply beyond reason, such as that Hethor is the same as Soong. The work is also clearly an amateur production, although Sirius Fiction has typeset and bound it quite nicely.

Educated readers will already recognise many of these etymologies, and LEXICON URTHUS is no substitute for the Oxford English Dictionary and a good saints dictionary. Still, the book is worth reading for any passionate fan of *The Book of the New Sun*.

James Balasalle says

Almost required reading for the Urth Cycle. I used this when re-reading *Shadow & Claw*, and it upped the enjoyment factor by several orders of magnitude. Highly recommended.

Dtyler99 says

For those of you who are about to tackle Gene Wolfe's Book of the New Sun (including the coda, *The Urth of the New Sun*), Michael Andre-Driussi's *Lexicon Urthus* is a highly recommended companion resource.

And why is that? Wolfe, in an effort to be faithful to the series' setting so far in the future of Earth that our history has been long forgotten, employs arcane words to describe people, objects, places and concepts, thus lending them an "otherness" that adds to and supports setting. But beware: he does it relentlessly and while the words and terms are real, they can be so arcane that they are difficult to find, even in an OED.

Fortunately, Michael Andre-Driussi -- who started the *Lexicon Urthus* project as a fan lit thing -- has consolidated the vast majority of terms and their definitions into this glossary/dictionary to make life much easier for the reader. So now instead of sitting down with three dictionaries (and that's just a start; a list of saints through the ages would help too), as well as a perpetually open Google search bar (which I didn't have when I read and re-read *TBotNS* in the 80s), you now have a comprehensive reference volume at your fingertips.

For example, Wolfe uses "arctother" to mean "giant bear;" an arctother was a prehistoric bear native to North and South America. "Scopolagna" means "a woman whose appearance others find stimulating in the extreme." Similarly he uses the word "epopt" to describe someone who is "instructed in the mysteries of a secret system," and the word actually means an initiate in the Eleusinian Mysteries, the ancient cult of Demeter and Persephone. Character names are almost invariably derived from the names of saints from the 3rd century on.

Wolfe uses words like these ALL THE TIME and while many times they are meant to be allusive rather than denotative, other times you JUST HAVE TO KNOW WHAT THAT WORD MEANS. The beauty of *Lexicon Urthus* is that it's a one-stop shop but beware, as good as it is, it's not exhaustive.

Ensure you get the 2nd edition, published in 2008. It's available on Amazon and although it's available on kindle for a lot less than the PB version, I can't see easily navigating a dictionary-like structure on an e-reader.

Highly recommended.

Michael says

This book is a collector's item, meaningful only to fanatical readers of Gene Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun*. For those readers, it's an amazing resource.

Andreas says

This is the second edition of the *Lexicon Urthus* and contains new entries as well as all corrections. The first edition from 1994 sold out quickly.

This is an amazing book and the result of careful study of the *Book of the New Sun* (available for instance in

the two omnibus editions Shadow and Claw and Sword and Citadel). I guess it's possible to figure out many of these things on his own, but if you do not have the time or the resources to check the various references, this book is for you. After browsing through the lexicon I immediately wanted to re-read the books - and I probably will this winter.

Matthew says

Gene Wolfe elevates the sensations of wonder, mystery, and discovery that we associate with science fiction into the realms of aesthetic and religious awe. He reaches back in time to take hold of the the thread of myth, traces this thread through the weave of history and literature, draws it forward into the unimaginable future, and then he ties the two ends together in an infinite loop.

I am profoundly grateful for Lexicon Urthus, a book that is clearly a product of extraordinary time and effort on the part of its author. Lexicon Urthus is a key to the labyrinth that is The Book of the New Sun. It is full of maps, diagrams, and timelines, as well as definitions of the words you won't find in your dictionary, and information about the linguistic, mythical, historical, and/or literary origins and meanings of the names of people and places in the book.

The trouble with much that has been written about Wolfe's works, especially about the New Sun novels, is that it is full of speculation, specious reasoning, and over-interpretation. In contrast, all of the information in Lexicon Urthus is based upon Wolfe's text and upon extrapolation and research; nothing is made up. Lexicon Urthus is an invaluable resource for delving deeper into Wolfe's masterpiece.

Robert Defrank says

I admit, I couldn't get through Gene Wolfe's New Sun books the first time I tried. Now on my second attempt, I'm keeping this volume close at hand (figuratively speaking, since it's in digital format).

On the positive side, it's got a lot of invaluable background stuff such as definitions of obscure words, historical context and connotations of names, and explanations of the themes of the book. On the negative side, the digital version was the cheapest I could find and I would have preferred a physical copy to more easily find entries. The table of contents does not provide quick access links to sections by their alphabet header, and the illustrations are not linked so to be more easily located.

Another admission about my attempt to tackle Wolfe's opus: I cheated. A search through related terms quickly told me the gist of the story, what it's about and what happens. I know Wolfe intended his readers to only realize this stuff after multiple re-readings, but dang it I've got a day job!

Paul says

In a sense it's hard to believe that a reference work could be 5/5 stars, but the *Lexicon* functions almost as a

companion novel to the *Urth* cycle and uncovers so much depth that it needs to be treated as a sixth entry in the series. Not only did Andre-Driussi track down every OED entry used by Wolfe, he pieces together many of the maddening and confusing bits of Wolfe's plotting/concepts into a coherent whole, retroactively improving the *Urth* novels themselves, in a curious way.

Ultimately Wolfe trusted the reader a bit too much, he added too much opacity ... for a first read-through, it's fine to not completely understand all of the events taking place, but the *Lexicon* is virtually required for any deeper reading that fully appreciates Wolfe's achievement. Any single reader COULD have pulled all of this data together through a thousand hours of patient study, but thankfully now they don't need to.
