

Call 4 a FAQulty

The Urth list — 8 messages, 6 voices, 25 Jan 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1342>

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m.driussi — 25 Jan 1999, 18:09

Here's a thought--maybe a committee (a "FAQulty," if you will) could begin the process of whipping up a FAQ ("Frequently Asked Questions" and the Answers to Them) for a book by Gene Wolfe. From time to time there is a call for them, or a single voice volunteering for some herculean task (e.g., "Let's do FAQs for =all= Wolfe books at once!"). Yet nothing is ever actually done.

The opening steps (in no particular order):

A committee must be formed by volunteers and/or draftees, preferably a mix of both.

The target text must be selected. Avoid the series books for the time being; give the committee a break as well as the slim hope of getting a FAQ completed (in any sense of the word). Obviously the text must be one that the committee members are enthused enough to work on (which is why this step might best work if it comes before the committee formation--have potential committee members all cast ranking votes on a short list to determine which text would be best to start with).

=SCORE--MEANING=

"5" I am very interested in working on this text, in fact,
I've already started!

"3" I am interested in working on this text.

"0" I refuse to work on this text.

=A SAMPLE SHORT LIST=

PEACE

THERE ARE DOORS

PANDORA BY HOLLY HOLLANDER

CASTLEVIEW

OPERATION ARES

THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS

FREE LIVE FREE

Finally, the glory and the gruntwork: the crafting of the FAQ!

Then, after it is done, a brief rest and then (perhaps) move on to the text ranked number two by the committee preference vote.

The FAQulty could even put a deadline of one month per FAQ, so that the project doesn't draw out indefinitely. Each FAQ can/will be revised/added to later--the point is to get something up and running. If each one was completed in one month, and there was a one month vacation in between each one, nearly the entire short list above could be covered in one year (though since I doubt people will want to do work on THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS or OPERATION ARES or

PANDORA BY HOLLY HOLLANDER, the official short list will probably be much shorter and therefore the FAQs completed more quickly).

=mantis=

Michael Straight — 25 Jan 1999, 16:31 · follows m.driussi

I've got another idea that might be less work and more useful. How about someone volunteer to help Ranjit convert the Urth/Whorl archives into an easily searchable format?

Do most frequently asked questions about Wolfe's books have a single, brief answer?

-Rostrum

CRCulver — 26 Jan 1999, 03:24 · follows Michael Straight

Mantis suggested:

<<Here's a thought--maybe a committee (a "FAQulty," if you will) could begin the process of whipping up a FAQ ("Frequently Asked Questions" and the Answers to Them) for a book by Gene Wolfe. From time to time there is a call for them, or a single voice volunteering for some herculean task (e.g., "Let's do FAQs for =all= Wolfe books at once!"). Yet nothing is ever actually done.>>

A FAQ sounds like a great idea, and we could easily find the frequently-asked questions with a trip through the ol' archives. However, instead of doing a FAQ on a single book, I'd rather do a FAQ on the Book of the New Sun itself. After all, this is the one single book we're here for, anyway, with _Peace_, etc. being a sort of frill. Besides, I don't think there are any *frequently asked* questions on any of the minor Wolfe novels, whereas we've treaded over certain points of the BotNS repeatedly.

I for one would be happy to serve on the committee for the "Book of the New Sun FAQ beta version." It would not have to be a big deal, just a few questions in the beginning, more after the list has seen it and wishes to make suggestions.

We have some bigwigs in the exegesis department here (Mantis, Alga, James B. Jordan, etc., though sadly John Clute has yet to join us), and this is just the sort of thing they are trained for. It would be wonderful for the literary skilled (and myself) to work on this monument to eternity for BotNS readers, so to speak.

Incidentally, as for your survey, the BotNS gets a five, the rest get 0's. <g>

Let the FAQ happen,

Christopher R. Culver <crculver at aol.com>

President Pro-Tempore of USEJ

Prezidanto Dumtempa de USEJ

<http://ttt.esperanto.org/usej/>

Kevin J. Maroney — 26 Jan 1999, 11:19 · follows CRCulver

At 10:24 PM 1/25/99 EST, Christopher wrote:

After all, this is the one single book we're here for, anyway, with _Peace_, etc. being a sort of frill. Besides, I don't think there are any *frequently

asked* questions on any of the minor Wolfe novels, whereas we've treaded over certain points of the BotNS repeatedly.

Here are a few Wolfe FAQs which have nothing to do with BotNS and one which does but isn't *about* BotNS:

"What's up with Dennis Weer?"

"Which egg contained the hallucinogen?"

"What became of John V. Marsh? And what does VRT stand for?"

"How is the _Long Sun_ related to the _New Sun_?"

"What is a memory palace?"

"Where should I start reading Wolfe?"

"What Wolfe short story collections are there?"

"What is Cheap Street? What other small-press Wolfe am I missing?" "Did Gene Wolfe really invent Pringles?"

I agree that the most Frequently Asked Questions are about _BotNS_, because it's the largest, densest(*), and most-read of Wolfe' works. But it's hardly the only work about which the same questions come up again and again.

(*)Actually, I think that _Peace_ might be denser.

Wombat, a.k.a. Kevin Maroney kmaroney at crossover.com Kitchen Staff Supervisor, New York Review of Science Fiction <http://ebbs.english.vt.edu/olp/nyrsf/nyrsf.html>

CRCulver — 26 Jan 1999, 17:21 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

Wombat said:

<<Here are a few Wolfe FAQs which have nothing to do with BotNS and one which does but isn't *about* BotNS:

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"Which egg contained the hallucinogen?"

"What became of John V. Marsh? And what does VRT stand for?"

"How is the _Long Sun_ related to the _New Sun_?"

"What is a memory palace?"

"Where should I start reading Wolfe?"

"What Wolfe short story collections are there?"

"What is Cheap Street? What other small-press Wolfe am I missing?" "Did Gene Wolfe really invent Pringles?">>

Ha, that is a different thing entirely. What you are talking about is a general Urth-list FAQ, whereas Mantis and I were talking about single-book FAQs. Nonetheless, your questions above are good, and really could help the person new to the list. I should note that we should try to reduce the possibility of spoilers for those who have not read certain books. For example, I've yet to read _The Fifth Head of Cerberus_

<<I agree that the most Frequently Asked Questions are about _BotNS_, because it's the largest, densest(*), and most-read of Wolfe' works.>>

Yes, and the BotNS needs exegesis to be fully appreciated. The first time I read it, I treated it just as a sword-and-sorcery epic. But, after reading about the many Christian allusions and references to Borges, I enjoyed it a lot more.

<<(*)Actually, I think that _Peace_ might be denser.>>

That is a good possibility, because _Peace_ never has what could be called a straightforward narrative, there are always myriad meanings behind each action. Whereas in the BotNS one could say "The uhlan was on horseback," and be very clear about what you are trying to describe, _Peace_ is a different story, literally. A FAQ on _Peace_ wouldn't be a frequently asked questions list, it would be more of a running commentary.

Christopher R. Culver <crculver at aol.com>

President Pro-Tempore of USEJ

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<http://ttt.esperanto.org/usej/>

William H. Ansley — 27 Jan 1999, 00:05 · follows CRCulver

Here's a thought--maybe a committee (a "FAQuilty," if you will) could begin the process of whipping up a FAQ ("Frequently Asked Questions" and the Answers to Them) for a book by Gene Wolfe. From time to time there is a call for them, or a single voice volunteering for some herculean task (e.g., "Let's do FAQs for =all= Wolfe books at once!"). Yet nothing is ever actually done.

I have been reading this list quite a while and have read all the archives at one time or another and I think I know why "nothing is ever actually done" and why nothing is likely to be done this time. It is very easy to make a list of Questions (perhaps not all of them Frequently Asked) about virtually *any* Wolfe work, even very short stories, (remember the lengthy discussions about "A Solar Labyrinth" and "Cues"?) but it is very hard to come up with any definite answers that everyone (or even a majority) will agree on (remember the lengthy discussions about "A Solar Labyrinth" and "Cues"?).

I assume that this lack of agreement is at least part of the reason that mantis (m.driussi at genie.com) said "I doubt people will want to do work on THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS": in a very lengthy discussion of that work on this list there was very little agreement about the answers to the questions it raised or even about whether those questions had answers.

Actually, if a committee decides to write a FAQ containing the answers to questions they can all agree on the answers to, then the FAQ should be quite short and easily completed.

In other words I think this is the answer to Rostrum's (Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu>) question:

Do most frequently asked questions about Wolfe's books have a single, brief answer?

is "No."

I like Rostrum's idea:

I've got another idea that might be less work and more useful. How about someone volunteer to help Ranjit convert the Urth/Whorl archives into an easily searchable format?

I am not sure about the "less work" part; the archives are easily searchable as plain text (I have downloaded all of them except the most recent to my computer in this form) but because of

inconsistencies in references (different abbreviations, referring to a character by a nickname or by a humorously altered form of the name, simple typos, etc.) as well as the sheer bulk of the material over several different files, it is difficult to find specific information.

I suppose some sort of electronic index could be created, but I don't know how to go about this. Editing the archives for consistency (perhaps adding tags for content) for plain text searching also seems a daunting prospect.

Does anyone else have any ideas about this?

William Ansley

Michael Straight — 28 Jan 1999, 11:33 · follows William H. Ansley

On Wed, 27 Jan 1999, William H. Ansley wrote:

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Still, I think it would be a big improvement if either:

1. Someone with programming knowledge would help attach a search engine to the archives (I have no idea how big a job that would be), or
2. Each archive were available as a single large text file one could search online with one's browser.

When I mentioned option #2 to Ranjit, it sounded like limited server space at his site was the main obstacle.

As it is, I am regularly unable to find conversations in the archives when I go back to try to find something someone wrote, largely because it takes so long to search each of the archive volumes individually.

-Rostrum

Jason Voegele — 28 Jan 1999, 12:29 · follows Michael Straight

I'm a programmer, but I don't think it takes any programming skill whatsoever if you use some of the search forms provided by standard search engines. HotBot, for example, provides a search form that you can embed within your Web page, and all you have to do is provide the domain through which it is supposed to search. This would require a domain name specifically for the faq (such as www.wolfe-faq.com), so it may not be flexible enough. It's worth looking into, though, and if it's not enough feel free to contact me and I'll see what I can put together for searching only those pages relating directly to the Wolfe FAQ.

Jason Voegele

-----Original Message-----

From: Michael Straight [SMTP:straight at email.unc.edu] Sent: Thursday, January 28, 1999 11:33 AM To: urth at lists.best.com Subject: Re: (urth) Call 4 a FAQulty

On Wed, 27 Jan 1999, William H. Ansley wrote:

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works