

Pulp Fiction

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 11 May 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1626>

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Tony Ellis — 11 May 1999, 09:39

David Lebling joked:

...All the talk we hear about multiple drafts is just publicity; he races through each book like the early-career Silverberg, and lets the errors fall where they may.

Actually, there may be a germ of truth to this. Not about the multiple drafts, obviously, but the "racing through" bit. I can still remember a long ago Gene Wolfe interview in Interzone in which, talking about Severian fishing Dorcas out of the lake, Wolfe said "I had a hell of a time working out who she was and how she got there."

The implication being that he really does make things up as he goes along, and then papers over the cracks, as opposed to working to an elaborate, preconceived plan. Personally speaking, that's always been the impression I've got from his novels in any case: they have that fast-paced, picaresque style symptomatic of a writer who doesn't have a clue what's going to happen next.

Michael Straight — 11 May 1999, 10:27 · follows Tony Ellis

On Tue, 11 May 1999, Tony Ellis wrote:

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I'm not sure how much you can conclude from that one example. I'd think even the most "plan-ahead" type of writers occasionally come up with a cool scene they want to write without really knowing yet where it's going to go. I imagine most writers having some combination of planning and working things out as they go.

Then there's Philip Dick writing "The Man in the High Castle" by periodically consulting the I Ching to decide which way the plot would go.

-Rostrum

Tony Ellis — 11 May 1999, 17:24 · follows Michael Straight

Rostrum wrote:

I'm not sure how much you can conclude from that one example.

Well, it's an example with significant repercussions: the whole thing about Severian's parentage traces back to this one event. Dorcas gives us Owen gives us Catherine gives us Katherine.

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Oh for sure. But which is Wolfe: a "plan ahead" writer, or a "make it up as you go along" one? Fifty-fifty? I wanted to raise the "makes it up as he goes along" argument because it seems to me the natural assumption might be the opposite. As I said, to me the structure and pace of TBOTNS is very much that of a story being made up on the spot (and then polished by a grade-A genius, mind you) -- but what do other people think?