

Maybe it's not a black hole

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 01 Dec 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1994>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Michael Straight — 01 Dec 1999, 13:31

On Wed, 1 Dec 1999, mark millman wrote:

Regrettably, it seems that Wolfe was using science obsolete even at the time of his writing when he came up with the White Fountain idea. (This is the part of UotNS I perhaps like least.) There had been a theory that the energy absorbed by black holes was somehow shunted into other dimensions or universes via what came to be known as wormholes, but the "missing" energy was adequately accounted for when the polar X-ray jets that black holes emit were discovered. We know that the White Fountain was meant to be the output of a black hole from another universe from Severian's experiences in Yesod--I believe (though I'm not sure, and I don't have the book here to check) that Apheta tells him how the White Fountain is to work.

Does Apheta or anyone else use the words "black hole" to describe the other end of the White Fountain or the thing eating away at the sun?

Perhaps there is some other phenomenon, unknown to 20th century astronomers because it doesn't emit jets of x-rays, that is not a black hole but is a rift between universes where energy is sucked out of one universe and emerges as a White Fountain in the other.

-Rostrum

mark millman — 01 Dec 1999, 14:39 · follows Michael Straight

At 01:31 PM 01-12-99 -0500, Rostrum (Michael Straight) wrote:

Does Apheta or anyone else use the words "black hole" to describe the other end of the White Fountain or the thing eating away at the sun?

Perhaps there is some other phenomenon, unknown to 20th century astronomers because it doesn't emit jets of x-rays, that is not a black hole but is a rift between universes where energy is sucked out of one universe and emerges as a White Fountain in the other.

Of course nobody uses the term "black hole"--it would ruin Wolfe's carefully crafted diction. But the "worm gnawing at the heart of the sun" and the description of the White Fountain that Severian gets in Yesod--not to mention the discussion on this list--make it pretty likely that black holes and their associated phenomena are what Wolfe had in mind when he was writing.

Besides, this is science fiction. While you are certainly free to believe what you please about possible future discoveries in cosmology, I'm addicted to the idea that the best writers will use established science in making their extrapolations. Your statement requires Wolfe to have created a new form of astronomical event from whole cloth, while to me, and based on the evidence that I saw, Occam's Razor suggests that Wolfe was working from an obsolete model of

the structure and behavior of black holes.

And at 9:58 AM 01-12-99 Tony Ellis wrote:

But there is. We've been down this road before. Right at the very end of *The Shadow of the Torturer*, Jonas tells the story of the woman who comes back with space with a handful of magic beans, and threatens to throw them into the ocean.

Erebus and friends aren't genetically modified humans like Baldanders, they're alien lifeforms. That grow.

Well, could be. But they could also be people who have returned from the stars, with changes. They could be kind of like Typhon and the ex-ultants, only less human(e) (or not, who knows?) still. After all, beans come from Earth, or Urth, too.

Mark Millman