

New Sun Mysteries FAQ?

The Urth list — 6 messages, 3 voices, 02 Dec 1999

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Ron Hale-Evans — 02 Dec 1999, 12:38

We all know that the New Sun cycle is filled with deliberate little Lupine mysteries for the reader. Some are relatively easy (who were Severian's parents and grandparents?) and some are very hard, so hard that maybe not one of us on the list could accurately answer every question on a substantial list.

I know of two lists of these mysteries. One is in an old Usenet message by Donn Seeley that I have kept and treasured since the early Eighties. Another is in _Lexicon Urthus_ by our own Mantis. Perhaps we could combine these lists (authors willing), add a number of our own, and set about answering them in FAQ form. We could warn the reader that these are major spoilers and that the FAQ is not to be read until the New Sun books have been read at least twice.

If we decide to do this, I would prefer that someone else coordinate the effort, as I have too many irons in the fire already. (Hmm, in light of Our Hero's trade, that doesn't sound good...) If no one steps forth, however, I would be willing to do so.

This could become an important resource for future readers of the New Sun books, and would likely be a lot of fun to put together. Mantis, what say you? Donn Seeley, are you here? (Anyone know how to reach him?)

Ron H-E

Ron Hale-Evans: [rwhe at apocalypse.org](mailto:rwhe@apocalypse.org) ... <<http://www.apocalypse.org/~rwhe/>>
Center for Ludic Synergy: <<http://www.ludism.org/>>
Kennexions GBG artgame: <<http://kennexions.ludism.org/>>
Hexagram-8 I Ching Mailing List: <<http://www.apocalypse.org/~rwhe/hex8.html>>
Positive Revolution FAQ: <<http://www.ludism.org/posrev/>>

Ron Hale-Evans — 03 Dec 1999, 13:31 · follows Ron Hale-Evans

OK, we have mantis's permission to crib from his list of New Sun mysteries.

I've been thinking about copyright law, which protects only the expression of a work, not its ideas. (Only a patent can protect an idea, and no one has patented the idea of a list of New Sun mysteries.) This means that while it would be nice to have Mr. Seeley's blessing on the New Sun Mysteries FAQ, if we cannot locate him in 1999 (fifteen years after his piece was posted to Usenet), we need not wait for his permission to incorporate the _gist_ of his questions into the FAQ. We cannot legally use his actual prose or even a close paraphrase, but we can nevertheless use his piece as a guide for creating a list of questions of our own.

That said, is anyone willing to compare Seeley's list and mantis's, and distill them down into a single list, to be posted here?

If no one volunteers by Sunday, I'll put it together myself.

Ron H-E

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Ron Hale-Evans — 05 Dec 1999, 17:33 · follows Ron Hale-Evans

I got a very nice message from Donn Seeley yesterday; you'll find it below. We have his blessing.

alga has volunteered to help me get the list of questions into shape. I hope we'll soon have the initial mysteries list, and can then work on (1) expanding the list of questions, and (2) adding answers.

Ron

<BEGIN FORWARDED TEXT>

To: Ron Hale-Evans <[rwhe at apocalypse.org](mailto:rwhe@apocalypse.org)>
Subject: Re: (urth) New Sun Mysteries FAQ?
Date: Sat, 04 Dec 1999 07:58:51 -0700
From: Donn Seeley <[donn at BSDI.COM](mailto:donn@BSDI.COM)>

You compiled an excellent list of mysteries in the New Sun books that you posted to Usenet in 1984. ...

Wow, that was certainly a long time ago. Feel free to make any use of that posting that you want.

Donn Seeley

<END FORWARDED TEXT>

Ron Hale-Evans: [rwhe at apocalypse.org](mailto:rwhe@apocalypse.org) ... <http://www.apocalypse.org/~rwhe/>
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JMAzurin — 07 Dec 1999, 02:51 · follows Ron Hale-Evans

Ron Hale-Evans <[rwhe at apocalypse.org](mailto:rwhe@apocalypse.org)> wrote
I hope we'll soon have the initial mysteries list, and can then work on (1) expanding the list of questions, and (2) adding answers.

Hi Ron,

Just a suggestion: perhaps two versions of the FAQ could be maintained? One with answers and one without.

Mikah

- Are you crying?
- No, I'm bleeding.

William H. Ansley — 06 Dec 1999, 22:29 · follows JMAzurin

The story so far.

Ron Hale-Evans <rwhe at apocalypse.org> bravely volunteers to produce a TBotNS FAQ.

JMAzurin <mikah at brewsoft.com> suggests:

Just a suggestion: perhaps two versions of the FAQ could be maintained?
One with answers and one without.

How about a dozen or so versions of the FAQ. All the questions will be the same, but the answers will vary depending on which of us is reading it. We can have the Roy C. Lackey version, the Tony Ellis version, the Robert Borski version, the William Ansley version... Just to name a few folks with differing insights into TBofNS.

William Ansley

P.S. Ron, by all means, carry on! It is a most noble quest. Just don't expect the going to be too smooth.

Ron Hale-Evans — 06 Dec 1999, 19:48 · follows William H. Ansley

At 10:51 AM 12/7/99 +0800, Mikah wrote:

Ron Hale-Evans <rwhe at apocalypse.org> wrote
I hope we'll soon have the initial mysteries list, and can then work on (1)
expanding the list of questions, and (2) adding answers.

Hi Ron,

Just a suggestion: perhaps two versions of the FAQ could be maintained?

One with answers and one without.

I *just* got an email from alga, who is working on combining and editing the two lists. She expressed a couple of similar concerns. Briefly put, she said that we probably don't want an easy-answers/"Cliff's Notes" approach
-- and that maybe we don't want to give answers at all; couldn't we hint at the answers instead and make the reader do the work?

I thought about this for a moment and thought of a possible solution that might make everybody happy, both the people who want to incorporate answers (including me) and the people who don't. And this is going to make Dave Lebling laugh, I know...

InvisiClues!

What the heck are those, you ask? Well, the computer game company Infocom (which Dave helped found, BTW) published a very successful and long-lived series of "adventure games" in the 1980s, including the Zork series, _Trinity_, and one based on _The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy_. Adventure games are a text-based genre of computer fiction wherein you type commands like GO NORTH and TAKE SWORD and KILL TROLL, and the computer responds by describing your environment to you. Much of the game centers around puzzles that you must solve, such as how to open a locked treasure chest or how to get into a room with a very small door.

Infocom did not invent the adventure game, but they made many innovations. One of them was a way for players to get clues to puzzles without spoilers. InvisiClues came in little books that you could buy at the computer store where you bought the game or from Infocom itself. The

questions in the booklets were printed in ordinary ink, but the answers were printed in invisible ink. There were perhaps four or five progressively more detailed clues for each answer, and the last entry in the series just gave the answer straight. You would wipe a little pen that came with the book over the InvisiClues until you got to the level of detail that you wanted.

Example:

How do I get into the room with the tiny door?

1. Look around the hallway.
2. Do you see a bottle on the stand in the corner?
3. Did you read the bottle's label?
4. What do you do with a bottle that says DRINK ME?
5. Drink the contents of the bottle and it will make you small enough to fit through the door.

... and so forth. There was also a certain percentage of bogus questions (sometimes with very entertaining bogus answers) scattered throughout, so that you couldn't be sure that the other questions referred to real things in the context of the game, thus avoiding the questions becoming spoilers themselves, to a certain extent at least.

Later Infocom games incorporated InvisiClues directly into the games via a menuing system. After Infocom was eaten by Activision and the text-based games were neglected in favour (oooooh...) of flashier graphical games, Netters "liberated" the text of the InvisiClues booklets and incorporated it into a series of files for a program called UHS, standing for something like "Universal Hint System" -- a standalone, generalised version of Infocom's earlier menuing systems.

Whew. So the point I'm making is that a system like the one described above -- perhaps UHS itself, or perhaps some web-based setup -- could be used so that we could have a list of questions with answers, but no one would be getting more than they wanted, or less than they wanted! And of course we should prepend the proviso that no one should read the "FAQ" until they have read TBOTNS at least twice, as I mentioned in my original message.

This whole thing reminds me of the controversy in Japan over books for sale there that contain a list of Zen koans together with their "answers." I have seen one myself in the States. They do indeed contain the "real answers" (as far as I can tell), but any Zen teacher will tell you that it is the process of arriving at the answer yourself that is the real answer. Anyone who thinks a koan answer book or our FAQ is a shortcut to instant understanding deserves what they get.

What do you good folks think?

Ron H-E

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