

FAQ (Seeley's piece)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 02 Dec 1999

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Ron Hale-Evans — 02 Dec 1999, 17:02

Here is Donn Seeley's article, as promised. Does anyone know him? Can we get his permission to merge his questions with mantis's? (Thanks, mantis, BTW.)

Ron H-E

p.s. I believe the Asimov novel referred to is The Robots of Dawn with its society functioning through holographic communication.

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site utah-gr.UUCP Posting-Version: version B 2.10.1 6/24/83; site utah-gr.UUCP Path:
utah-gr!donn From: donn at utah-gr.UUCP (Donn Seeley) Newsgroups: net.sf-lovers Subject: Re:
Gene Wolfe's Book of the New Sun Message-ID: <1252 at utah-gr.UUCP> Date: Fri, 23 Nov 84
06:27:52 MST Date-Received: Fri, 23 Nov 84 06:27:52 MST References: <639 at loral.UUCP>
<380 at petsd.UUCP> Organization: CS Dept., University of Utah Lines: 80

I've been out of town and just recently managed to get caught up with everything -- otherwise I would have attended to this earlier. (Perhaps not coincidentally, my trip was to recover my library from storage, including THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN!) Beware: some spoilers may lurk in the following discussion...

In the last chapter of THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH, Severian says:

Have I told you all I promised? I am aware that at various places in my narrative I have pledged that this or that should be made clear in the knitting up of the story. I remember them all, I am sure, but then I remember so much else. Before you assume that I have cheated you, read again, as I will write again.

Wolfe is something of a fan of detective fiction (as you might guess from his story 'The Rubber Bend'), and the last several chapters consist of the summation which the great detective always makes at the end of the story. Of course Wolfe doesn't want to spoil the fun of finding the answers, so he answers things obliquely, and you have to read carefully to guess at what particular puzzle is being explained.

I don't like to spoil the fun either, but I will mention some points to direct your re-reading that stem from things I've noticed or read elsewhere.

+ Easy one: Can you draw Severian's family tree? There are a number of red herrings which appear in the course of the books but the answer to this is fairly clear by the end of CITADEL.

+ What is the connection between the gold coin which Vodalus gave to Severian, and Dr. Talos? What relates it to the Sun and to the old mausoleum in the necropolis of the Citadel? Bonus question, unrelated: What was the original function of the Citadel?

+ What generates the apparitions of Master Malrubius and the dog, Triskele? This should be easy to answer, perhaps more so because of the recent Asimov novel. (There does seem to be a curious parallel between Asimov's universe and Wolfe's...)

+ What really happened in the climactic event of THE CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR? I don't believe this is stated directly but it is relatively straightforward to guess.

+ What is the basis of the Urthian religion? Analogies with at least two of our religions come to mind.

+ Who is the Conciliator? What is Severian's connection to him, and to the New Sun? Who is responsible for this connection?

+ Finally, why is a rose's thorn as efficacious as the Claw? If you understand this, you understand the core of the books.

You have 30 minutes. Put your pencil down to indicate when you have finished. Start now.

There are lots of fun things to look for besides plot events, of course. One is tracing the origins of the stories and legends which the people of Urth tell. Another is catching references to Jorge Luis Borges' works; two places to look are the story of Domnina's encounter with Father Inire, and 'The Tale of the Student and His Son'. (There are others, too...) Another is looking for little clevernesses -- for example, what book in the set of four which Severian fetches for Thecla does he NOT describe? (I wouldn't have noticed this if Wolfe hadn't mentioned it in an article.) If you fancy this sort of thing, it helps to have a copy of THE CASTLE OF THE OTTER and to read 'The Books in THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN' in PLAN[E]T ENGINEERING (which also has a map of the continent on which Nessus is located).

Wolfe started working on THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN in 1975 and the last volume wasn't published until 1983. Think of all the effort that went into it -- it shouldn't be surprising that Wolfe wants the reader to do some work too.

If all else fails, you can see if the answers are in THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN when it comes out,

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