

TBOTNS FAQ

The Urth list — 7 messages, 5 voices, 12 Dec 1999

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Christy — 12 Dec 1999, 14:05

I've been eavesdropping on this FAQ conversation (though I fear it's dying down) and I can't help but feel that there is a skewed approach being taken to the project.

Is it the duty of the FAQ to initiate one into the "mysteries" of TBOTNS? Or to initiate one into the method of reading Gene Wolfe? The curious system of Wolfe infers a lot of assumed knowledge that, time and time again, we have proved that we don't have. So the chance of a neophyte having it is even slighter.

So: shan't we we give readers a better sense of Wolfe's background, so we know the mind we are up against when we interpret? Shan't we quote interviews and essays when coming up against the rough stuff? Shan't we familiarize FAQ users with the Gene Wolfe leitmotifs/literary topoi: ancient Greeks, British Isles mythology, old school SF, Borges and Poe, etc? Shan't we stick to solid ground rather than the drag-out debates, for example the continent one?

I would help with the FAQ where needed, and I feel that a lot of us are saying the same. I volunteer =mantis= for the chair. If we were in a big Congress and I were sitting next to him, I would raise his hand forcibly when the issue was raised. After all, he's the only one here who has got a book under his belt, vanity press or otherwise.

In any case, I feel like the FAQ should tell us something more of Gene Wolfe, what he has written, what philosophies he has expressed, who he IS and how much of himself he has thrown into his work, before any speculation is made to who Severian's parents are and what Wolfe's pantheons consist of.

-C-

William H. Ansley — 12 Dec 1999, 18:41 · follows Christy

Christy <cglst7+ at pitt.edu> wrote:

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Is it the duty of the FAQ to initiate one into the "mysteries" of TBOTNS?
Or to initiate one into the method of reading Gene Wolfe?

Neither. A FAQ is a list of frequently asked questions and their answers. It is a device invented to prevent people from posting the same question over and over in a newsgroup (at which task is has generally been a notable failure) and to relieve other people from having to reply with the same answer over and over or ignore the question (at which task it is a fair success; of course the response, "read the FAQ" must be posted over and over, but this is a lot less effort).

(I am basing the above on my experiences reading newsgroups back when I used to do this a lot, years and years ago. Someone else's experiences may, of course, be quite different.)

What you are talking about, Christy, is not a FAQ. I would say it sounds like a books or at least a collection of essays. Perhaps it is mantis's book; I don't know if he covers all the ground you mention, I haven't yet decided to buy a copy. If it does, perhaps mantis would provide us with a group discount and send a copy to everyone on this list (lurkers included) <G>.

William Ansley

Fr.Inire — 12 Dec 1999, 15:54 · follows William H. Ansley

--- "William H. Ansley" <wansley at warwick.net> wrote:
Christy <cglst7+ at pitt.edu> wrote:

<snippo>

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But I can see where Christy may have gotten that idea
from the 'debate' so far (as i read it, anyway). The
FAQ is starting to sounds like a episode of Dueling
Dogmas for the list and Wolfean knowledge, and not
really an expansive attempt to help experts and
neophytes alike gain some context or coherency when
they have a question about some twist or turn or
another.

<snip>

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THAT is an excellent idea. I already have my copy,
natch ;-), but it is a useful and comprehensive

listing. Philosophy and generalities are not it's strength, but for anyone who took the time to sign up for this list, it is required (IMNSHO).

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Jeff "My dice hate me!" Miller

"The idea of verifying facts about the world through controlled repetition seems alien to just about everyone with the possible exception of Fr Inire, and he's a bug-eyed space monster . . ."-Jim Henley

Heavy Gear Swap @ <http://freecenter.digiweb.com/games/severian/meet.html> Gaming to keep War out of RealTime! '82 GS650G

Cass Peterson — 12 Dec 1999, 21:34 · follows Fr.Inire

Christy wrote:

Is it the duty of the FAQ to initiate one into the "mysteries" of TBOTNS?
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The latter, please. Some of us neophytes would prefer to discover the mysteries on our own, but would be grateful for any planar or other geographies.

The curious system of Wolfe infers a lot of assumed knowledge that, time
and time

again, we have proved that we don't have. So the chance of a neophyte having it is even slighter.

That's not an entirely safe assumption, albeit a rational one.

Cass

Ron Hale-Evans — 12 Dec 1999, 19:01 · follows Cass Peterson

Christy wrote:

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The latter, please. Some of us neophytes would prefer to discover the
mysteries on our own, but would be grateful for any planar or other
geographies.

What people don't seem to realise, and I keep trying to explain, is that it is possible to have **both** a list of hints for reading Wolfe, and a list of suggested answers that do not spoil the fun of neophytes, simply by encrypting the answers. Alternatively, one could have one document for questions and hints, and publish the suggested answers in another document altogether -- a low-tech, even no-tech way of assuring that people who want to see the answers can, and people who don't want to don't have to.

There's no reason to tailor the FAQ only to novices. Some of us want intelligent discussion of substance to arise from this, not just vague I-know-more-than-you-do hinting. Those who insist that no answers be published **anywhere** are declaring, "Someone is having some fun somewhere, and this must not be." (That's what the Puritan Brother said when he learned there was dancing in Ceylon.)

Ron

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/>>

Fr.Inire — 12 Dec 1999, 21:21 · follows Ron Hale-Evans

--- Ron Hale-Evans <[rwhe at apocalypse.org](mailto:rwhe@apocalypse.org)> wrote:

What people don't seem to realise, and I keep trying to explain, is that it is possible to have **both** a list of hints for reading Wolfe, and a list of suggested answers that do not spoil the fun of neophytes, simply by encrypting the answers.

For some reason this in practice may be really cool, but the I-know-more-than-you thing seems to be embedded in the idea of encryption. perhaps the practice will be different. One can hope!

Alternatively, one could

have one document for questions and hints, and publish the suggested answers in another document altogether -- a low-tech, even no-tech way of assuring that people who want to see the answers can, and people who don't want to don't have to.

I can't speak for Christy, but for myself the argument is not whether to answer or hint (though would we call the one version FAH for Frequently Answered Hints? ;->). It is about making the info accessible, in whatever form it is portrayed, to everyone.

There's no reason to tailor the FAQ only to novices. Some of us want intelligent discussion of substance to arise from this, not just vague I-know-more-than-you-do hinting. Those who insist that no answers be published **anywhere** are declaring, "Someone is having some fun somewhere, and this must not be." (That's what the Puritan Brother said when he learned there was dancing in Ceylon.)

No Debate there! It should not be dumbed down, but at the same time it need not all be written as if the reader is asumed to have read and memorized all of the various books and events therein. In some FAQs this is self regulating; I look for the simple question and find it, satisfied with the info. The advanced questions dazzle me, and some part may be recalled for later, and just having them there makes it accessible.

=====

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Christy — 13 Dec 1999, 17:48 · follows Fr.Inire

Thanks to Will Ansley for the FAQ definition. There is the certain amount of questions that we all could plausibly furnish answers to. "Who is Gene Wolfe? Did he invent Pringles? Are there any Gene Wolfe Reading Aids? Where do I get his rare books? Bibliography?" etc. I don't think that any of us are much worried about the answers to these, as they are readily and happily corrected, and should not involve a lot of ego.

Ah, it is the rest! And here is the heart of the matter: how can we agree on a body of questions that are indeed pressing, but that can also be elucidated by the present body, unified? I daresay I think I know the answer.

There is a point of diminishing returns in this area, and it is most often where we are not as learned as Wolfe. We of the list have shown that breaking point, time and time again, sometimes almost comically. Sometimes where an obscure literary reference or theological wisdom would do, the OED or a Greek or Latin dictionary will not suffice. This much is clear. Will we ever know how deep the name of Terminus Est truly goes? Probably not. With this, as with most topoi Wolfe delights in, we will never know the whole story, and that's why we love it like children do. And perhaps we can speculate when we look up the sword in a Latin dictionary. But it also helps to know that Terminus was the Roman god of landmarks, boundaries.

Likewise, in the Lexicon Urthus, Mantis speculates as to what Universal Death is: common sense generates a few possibilities. But if you read "Universal History" in Borges' Book of Fantasy, as Wolfe no doubt did, you could eliminate all but one. This is where I feel we have synergy, and where we can do some real good in interpreting Wolfe: providing a solid base of information (and not as much speculation) from our varied backgrounds and erudition.

What I've learned from reading Wolfe is: almost everything, every word, has its place. Wolfe sometimes assumes we have read everything that he has, and as such are equipped to unravel his work with a careful reading, but, more often than not, such is not the case. We do not live in a perfect world.

Now I've gotten off the beaten path. The FAQ is a good, great idea, it demands to be done. We already have the Lexicon Urthus and this list. Perhaps the best first step is to propose a set of questions. Since Will Ansley knows about such things, I nominate him.

-C-