

"Copperhead": What went wrong

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 03 Aug 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2760>

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Roy C. Lackey — 03 Aug 2001, 19:28

It turns out that I was all wrong about the apparent timeframe difficulties of "Copperhead" that I distracted the list with a few months back. The New President had not been in office for the fifteen months or so that I thought, which seemed to place added emphasis on his being referred to as "New". The president came to office in the usual way. His inauguration, the crash, the appearance of Jane Doe, and the day the story takes place were all in the same calendar year. There was no second spring of his presidency. Sorry about that. The story takes place in the middle of October.

How do I know this? Mantis told me so. A few weeks ago he e-mailed me to let me know that he had written to Gene Wolfe a few months earlier about "Copperhead", in the course of which he mentioned my squabbles about the timeframe, to which Wolfe replied as outlined above; he didn't see any problem with the timeline of the story. I reminded mantis of the reference to "the spring night" toward the end of the story, which had been my reason for going off on that tangent in the first place. There I left the matter until, to shorten this up, I received a note from Gene Wolfe today acknowledging that the "spring" reference in the story was an error and apologizing--of all things--for it. Sheesh. All that for a simple, one-word mistake that he was hardly accountable to me for. What can I say? They don't make 'em like that anymore.

-Roy

Michael Andre-Driussi — 03 Aug 2001, 18:16 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy wrote:

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It's like a game of "whisper down the alley."

In a letter to Gene Wolfe I said I liked "Copperhead" and I'd been echatting about it with Roy; how we were both thrown by that "new president" thing, but in different ways; and all my sense of civil war menace in the story; and then I alluded to Roy's timeline and how it didn't add up. (I also wrote that Roy got into the timeline habit through trying to talk sense to me about PEACE.)

That's why it is like a game of "whisper": if I had given him the timeline verbatim, we could have skipped a step or two.

Anywho, Gene Wolfe wrote back. I didn't pass the note on to Roy for weeks or months, I can't remember how long it was. Bad. By that point I had new ideas of how I had misinterpreted things in "Copperhead," for example, taking the presidential "campaign" as being something that goes on for a year before the election (which is how I tend to think of it), rather than something that starts only after the party convention nominates a candidate (which is how

Wolfe meant it). Roy cut right through all that fuzzy thinking with the text, of all things!

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While we're on the topic, let me back up to the top of the loop. A funny thing is, I didn't consciously think of Jane Doe as Lilith even when I wrote that the end place reminded me of the weird place in LILITH. (Hard to believe, but there you have it: duh?) Which, in turn, leads to another tidbit: years ago I started reading LILITH and then put it down as starting too slow, but then a couple years later I picked it up from where I left off and read it through (it got a lot better until close to the end where it faltered again). Having finished LILITH, I mentioned this to Gene Wolfe and he congratulated me, saying he had never been able to finish it himself -- so, unless he did so in the intervening span of vague time, I know he hasn't read LILITH itself.

Which is neither here nor there, really. The end place reminds me of a place in LILITH; Jane Doe definitely has a Lilith aspect to her; Gene Wolfe has not read LILITH.

That's all for now -- I have to read some Grimm's Fairy Tales to the locals immediately. When we left off last night, Snow White had just been killed for the first time by the wicked stepmother . .

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=mantis=