

GW sightings

The Urth list — 9 messages, 8 voices, 13 Aug 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4156>

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MBS 808 — 13 Aug 2003, 15:43

While websurfing at work, I do not always have time to read articles of interest that I happen upon so I print them out to read on my train ride home... usually no more than a handful of items, from a wide range of sources from pop culture stuff to news to tech to whatever...

Anyway, rare is it to find one GW reference, let alone two, so I thought I'd share them...

First - from a music review site that occasionally veers into other topics. This was one of those occasions and the author had suggestions for the final two Harry Potter books.

<http://www.furia.com/twas/twas0445.html>

GW reference: Half the revolutions are for laughs. Only half, but at least half. This isn't Beezus and Ramona, but neither is it Frodo and Sauron. Re-read Lloyd Alexander and The Princess Bride, not C. S. Lewis and Gene Wolfe. This will be the trickiest part of the final two years. Six and seven will make four and five seem frothy and untroubled, by comparison, but this is still a franchise built on adventure and awe.

Second, a review of a graphic novel, (another volume is briefly reviewed in this week's village voice).

<http://www.ninthart.com/display.php?article=251>

GW Reference: While this is the major plotline of "Sin-Eater," it's hardly the entire story. The most important character in the novel isn't Jaeger or the Grosvenors, but Anvard itself. Like Thomas M. Disch's 334 or Gene Wolfe's BOOK OF THE NEW SUN, FINDER creates a fully-realised world that exists as both a fascinating, detailed future world and as a sly commentary on our society.

I also stumbled upon a third this morning, from a more

likely source, an editorial from Night Shade Books.

<http://www.nightshadebooks.com/corona/corona12.html>

GW mention: In today's climate, an acknowledged master like Gene Wolfe would never have gotten a second or third novel published. In fact... I would hazard to say that without David Hartwell, most of Gene Wolfe's work would not be in print today. As a senior editor at Tor Mr. Hartwell has done a great job of advocating for quality material. And Patrick Nielsen Hayden -- who oversee's the Orb line of classic reprints -- has helped ensure the genre's history won't be lost. But, at the end of the day, even senior editors at one of the largest SF/Fantasy/horror publishing houses find themselves at the mercies of big media accountants and marketing types that insist a book is only as good as its initial six months of sales.

Matthew Weber — 13 Aug 2003, 15:47 · follows MBS 808

At 08:43 AM 8/13/2003 -0700, you wrote:
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<http://www.furia.com/twas/twas0445.html>

Glenn (the proprietor of The War Against Silence) is a formidable intellect and a tireless reviewer of pop music. He's been a presence on the Loud Family list for as long as I can remember, and his column is usually worth reading whether you're interested in what he's reviewing or not.

Matthew Weber
Curatorial Assistant
Music Library
University of California, Berkeley

We went through fire and through water.
The Holy Bible (The Old Testament): _The Book of Psalms_ 66:12

Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 14 Aug 2003, 02:57 · follows Matthew Weber

On Wednesday, August 13, 2003, at 08:43 AM, MBS 808 wrote:

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Don muses:

Technology will change this, I think. Just like with the music industry, it is becoming less and less expensive to do things yourself with a good degree of quality. And as the world becomes smaller and smaller (barring apocalyptic calamity) marketing becomes cheaper as well. It's only a matter of time before the myth of literature existing only through the graces of a publishing house loses it's meaning. Almost everything prior to the twentieth century was self published and I think it will go that way again, with the added benefit (or curse depending on your view of the masses) that those of small means can find the funds to bring their cherished works to print without interference from anyone on high. Still, I would dearly love to see a leather bound, single volume edition of BotNS as well as UotNS and the rest. Of course, that's not likely to happen unless GW prints them himself. (I for one would pay the exorbitant price to add those to my library.)

matthew.malthouse — 14 Aug 2003, 07:47 · follows Lisa Schaffer-Doggett

On 14/08/2003 03:57:09 Lisa Schaffer-Doggett wrote:

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<screams> It's too big! Two volumes, yes. But one would be too prone to damage in reading. (Unread books are not books, even "prestige" editions.)

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Well there was (is?) that Vance complete works. I was tempted but at the time couldn't guarantee having usd 1,000 or whatever it was available when it would have been needed.

However the idea might be sound: a subscription edition with intended print over-run. The runs sold on and any consequent profit on the production returned to the author as royalty and initial subscribers as refund. Copyrights might be a headache though.

Matthew

Michael Buice — 14 Aug 2003, 15:29 · follows matthew.malthouse

On Wednesday, August 13, 2003, at 09:57 PM, Lisa Schaffer-Doggett wrote:

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But if all of 300 million people in the US alone had 12 self-published novels, how would one decide what was worth reading? A hierarchy will still present itself with, perhaps more difficult, obstacles to obtaining an audience. One could easily imagine that publishing houses would simply become marketing houses for literature, with the same kind of standards. Given that anyone near a Barnes and Noble can publish something for a small fee, I guess this is already beginning.

Michael

Chris — 14 Aug 2003, 17:50 · follows Michael Buice

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Michael

And there's the rub. Nietzsche lamented the coming of universal literacy and advanced printing methods (whether he was serious or joking, I couldn't tell you) because he foresaw something like this coming. And it's been happening for a long time; the number of books out there is staggering, and even 100 years ago you could probably count on many of them being garbage to your taste. We cope with it by relying on a kind of consensus/trust system: we trust that if X publisher put the book out it may be in a subject we're interested in, and that it has at least some minimum standard of quality; we trust that if a lot of people are buying it, it must have at least some charm; on a more direct level we trust readers we know who have similar tastes, and if they recommend it we have a reasonable expectation that it will be worth reading. A self-published author is obviously at an enormous disadvantage, as he can only rely on the last of these methods to start with.

But the internet *is* making it easier to do this, and quickly - it *has* to just to make itself navigable, because it has an even greater explosion of information than exists in the printed world. Thus you have portals, filters, networks of people who share trusted sources of information and who in turn link with other networks of people... So I think it's very possible that a self-published writer could establish a buzz in this day and age. But it doesn't sound like a great solution for someone who depends on writing for their living, because god knows how long it would take to get profitable.

Civet

----- Original Message -----

From: "Michael Buice" <mabuice at uchicago.edu>

To: <urth at urth.net>

Sent: Thursday, August 14, 2003 4:29 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) GW sightings

But if all of 300 million people in the US alone had 12 self-published novels, how would one decide what was worth reading? A hierarchy will still present itself with, perhaps more difficult, obstacles to obtaining an audience. One could easily imagine that publishing houses would simply become marketing houses for literature, with the same kind of standards. Given that anyone near a Barnes and Noble can publish something for a small fee, I guess this is already beginning.

Michael

There is a middle way here. I see the future of quality science fiction and fantasy in the emergence of high quality small press and print-on-demand books. In England, Big Engine started to produce interesting and quirky books, but has unfortunately now run out of money; but the most exciting publisher that I have seen so far is Golden Gryphon in the US.

I've just taken delivery of Jeffrey Ford's collection "The Fantasy Writer's Assistant and other stoies", and the stories look quite Wolfe-like. (This is only a first impression; I look forward to reading some tonight).

They also publish story collections by Howard Waldrop, Michael Bishop, Andy Duncan, Ian Watson, Richard Lupoff, to name just some of my favorites, and are now publishing an anthology to celebrate there 25th publication. They are very nicely produced books, with a print run of two to three thousand, I think, and I find them addictively attractive. Have to stop myself spending money.

Speaking of Jeffrey Ford, I've just read "The Portrait of Mrs Charbuque" and enjoyed it very much. Has anyone else on the list read it. There are some (I think) knowing references to Gene Wolfe in the book, including an underworld character called Mr Wolfe, and an embedded story told by Mrs Charbuque about her mother's involment with or abduction by a possible were-wolf. The book is full of disguises and imposters, and is an extremely well-researched portrait of late nineteenth century New York. I thought it the most Wolfeian novel that I have read for a long time, even though Ford has said that he is tired of being compared to Wolfe.

I'm now trying to find his previous three books, starting with "The Physiogomy". Any opinions about these out there?

Allan

James Wynn — 14 Aug 2003, 19:19 · follows Allan Lloyd

Civet said:

So I think it's very possible
that a self-published writer could establish a buzz in this day and age.

But

it doesn't sound like a great solution for someone who depends on writing
for their living, because god knows how long it would take to get
profitable.

Crush responds:

Probably not much longer than it takes for a writer to find a publisher in today's market. While a lot of lousy books are blocked out of publishing companies, a lot of lousy books are greenlighted because the publisher thinks he can sell them. There *is* a market for crap out there.

Nietzsche didn't like the increase in literacy and publishing for the same reason he didn't like democracy. He thought the result of both lacked nobility -- that they churned out mediocrity. But Nietzsche (while right) was wrong (about so much). There is no guarantee or even likelihood that limiting access to power (whether political or literary prominence) increases the probability that those who gain it will be of higher quality. This is because there are so many different ways of judging "quality", and who judges the judges? There's no guarantee that an established noble class won't produce well-educated, yet inbred, corrupt, and lazy leaders. (Aside: Enron drew all its officers and employees from the very apex of the meritocracy -- top 10% of the top schools). Nor is there any guarantee that publishers won't largely choose to publish the literary equivalent of "Baywatch".

New Publishing will probably take the place that literary mags like "Amazing" and "The New Yorker" used to have. A writer can self-publish and still seek an established market for the same work. An obscure self-publishing author that makes very little money is arguably better off than an obscure author that can't find a market for his work. True, in the overwhelming din it will be difficult for a single author to become a superstar, but it will be easier for more good writers to make a living at their craft and to develop it putting it in front of readers.

Also, there will be more literary jobs in supporting industries. Consider the potential future market for reviewers in this new world. Think of the increased prominence of peer awards. How else will the bookstores be able to weed the marketable crap from the unmarketable? Consider the potential market for experts from the publishing industry to advise self-publishers. Actually, as in the California Goldrush where most of the wealth was made by selling shovels to prospectors, more money in new publishing overall will be made by the supporting industries. Yet, consider the potential for a strange work to have success that no one could have anticipated. And more jobs for illustrators of course.

-- Crush

Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 15 Aug 2003, 03:16 · follows James Wynn

On Thursday, August 14, 2003, at 10:50 AM, Chris wrote:

[lots of snipping]

But the internet *is* making it easier to do this, and quickly - it *has* to just to make itself navigable, because it has an even greater explosion of information than exists in the printed world. Thus you have portals, filters, networks of people who share trusted sources of information and who in turn link with other networks of people... So I think it's very possible that a self-published writer could establish a buzz in this day and age. But it doesn't sound like a great solution for someone who depends on writing for their living,

(Don isolates this part)

because god knows how long it would take to get profitable.

Civet

But you see, writing isn't profitable as it is. Harlan Ellison had to work in TV. GW was an engineer. Most writers have to work other jobs, as teachers, editors, critics, painters, plumbers,

salesmen or whatever. And I mean published writers. It's almost a guaranteed vow of poverty. There's often no rhyme or reason to who gets published, it takes a god's day for an accepted work to go from manuscript to printed book, and I have found a lot of nice books for my library for \$9.98 on the remainder shelf at the local bookstore. On top of that there is the pressure to make a book marketable because "You just might make it someday and be a real writer." I say good riddance to the whole parasitic structure. One of my great pleasures is picking up an unknown book and being surprised by how good it is. The Book of the New Sun blew my mind out of both ears when I read it the first time. It was like being a kid again and reading Lord of the Rings - simply a transcendent moment. One I fully never expected to have again. But I digress (I love writing that. It makes me feel like a supervillain. :)). If everyone self publishes, the writers will get much more of the profit, the lousy books will languish unread (but still exist to stroke the writer's ego) and word of mouth will spread for good books just as it did in the past. In my decidedly biased opinion, of course.

Don