

Lexicon Urthus

The Urth list — 13 messages, 5 voices, 21 Jul 2005

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4476>

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Maru Dubshinki — 21 Jul 2005, 21:44 · in reply to Maru Dubshinki

Oops. Apologies all, my bad. I thought gmail had deleted the first draft, not sent it.

Won't happen again, I promise!

~Maru

for what's it worth, I think the first one is easier to read.

pthwndxrclzp — 21 Jul 2005, 21:50

If MA-D/Mantis were to grant a public license, and my doing so would be within the constraints of such a license, I would be delighted/honored to digitize the book and make the results available to the list members. Given the passion and commitment of most if not all of us, it seems a first-water tragedy (or vicious crime, take your pick) that the book is essentially unavailable.

That said (well, written), and alternatively, should Mr. Mantis be reading or sent a copy of this discussion, I should point out that <http://www.lulu.com/> could make printed copies available nearly overnight, at whatever price MA-D deemed suitable (with a good and well-deserved commission on each going directly to him -- I think lulu charges about seven bucks for a perfect-bound copy, so with a price point of, say, \$20, I think he'd do okay, and he'd have a bunch of newly-delighted customers).

For what it's worth, my \$.02 on the subject. Er, two-hundredths of a card. Whatever.

-Aquastor

~Maru wrote:

I was not active on this list when mantis was, nor have my occasional trawls through the archive (is it just me, or are the archive digests broken? <http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v212.shtml> gives me a 404.) really revealed much of mants' personality to me. Is it within the realm of possibility that he might release LU under the GNU Free Documentation License:

Maru Dubshinki — 21 Jul 2005, 21:58 · follows pthwndxrclzp

What is the status of Lexicon Urthus? Is it still a going concern? 'Cause Sirius says that they are completely and utterly out of LU, they've been so since 2002, there are no plans for a corrected second edition, or even a second printing; also, no copy on Abebooks, Amazon, Ebay or what-have-you is available for less than 100 US\$. Also, mantis appears to have moved on with other fiction and essays, making LU look like a classic example of abandonware or an orphaned work (just rather young). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orphaned_works

I am curious because it strikes me that the LU would make a surpassingly excellent basis for the much-discussed FAQ for this ML. I, however, have nil personal experience with Druissi, and I've read only a few posts by him, since I first joined this list long after he ceased to be active here. I need to know: is this within the realm of possibility? Would mantis/Andre-Druissi allow a work, which will probably never see print again, which was only ever aimed at a faction of a faction of a fraction of the reading audience, and a small fraction at that, to be licensed, improved and used as a basis for a vocab section for the FAQ? Would he find licensing under the GPL free documentation license, or the Creative Commons attrib-derive-sharealike-nocommercial license, or another CC license, would he find it impossible? http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNU_Free_Documentation_License
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Text_of_the_GNU_Free_Documentation_License
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/>
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/>

Is this but a pipe dream? Is it worth pursuing?

~Maru

Maru Dubshinki — 22 Jul 2005, 09:55 · in reply to pthwndxrcclzp

On 7/22/05, pthwndxrcclzp <aquastor at gmail.com> wrote:
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-Aquastor

As long as you mean what I think you mean by 'public license', that's great! Now I can tell mantis that all he has to do is make a simple statement, and we'll do the rest, which is a good selling point.

A minor point: is the mantis at siriusfiction.com address still good? Or am I going to have to send an email to sales at siriusfiction.com, and a snailmail to Sirius fiction's po box, with a request to forward to MA-D? Or shall I do all three?

~Maru

going to work on rough draft of letter now.

James Wynn — 22 Jul 2005, 09:58 · follows Maru Dubshinki

...one could make an argument that online copies would not cannibalize a print-on-demand edition. At least for me, physical text is superior to bits, and worth paying for.

One could make that argument, but most people will never get around to actually crossing the line and buying a book -- particularly a \$30 reference book -- if the same information is available for free...despite their best intentions. It's just human nature. Still, I'm surprised a third-party publisher has not successfully made a paperback offer that was financially worth Mantis' while.

I'm very proud of my particular copy, and I only wish more Gene Wolfe fans would visit my house so I could gloat over it.

J

pthwndxrc1zp — 22 Jul 2005, 10:03 · in reply to James Wynn

Ha! I just got mine back from loaning it to another list member, and I have to confess, given the high cost of potentially replacing it, I was chomping on my nails during the entire loan period.

But it came back in perfect condition, and everybody involved was happy. (Well, except for Mantis, who could have made \$\$\$ off the situation if only the infernal thing had been even half-reasonably available. Grrrr.)

Aq

On 7/22/05, James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net> wrote:

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Maru Dubshinki — 22 Jul 2005, 10:17 · in reply to James Wynn

Argument time! Cory Doctorow, who releases his novels in a multiplicity of formats, many of which are more convenient to read (such as Palm editions), estimates his sales have at least *tripled* because of people tasting his novels online and then buying the print version for perusal. I see no reason why the same principle would not hold for LU- would you buy a 30\$ reference book sight unseen? With no verification of the contents besides what a few reviews say? (Err... That's a hypothetical you, just for the record.)

And as far as the third-party goes... I'm not surprised at all. The surprise would be if the converse happened. I mean, didn't LU not sell out its first printing? Didn't a bunch of unsold copies have to be auctioned off on Ebay? That doesn't sound like a potential blockbuster, or even a modest seller, unfortunately. Too restricted in its appeal.

~Maru

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David DiGiacomo — 22 Jul 2005, 10:18 · follows Maru Dubshinki

I had no trouble getting a copy to read via interlibrary loan. It's not as good as owning it, of course.

Maru Dubshinki — 22 Jul 2005, 10:23 · in reply to David DiGiacomo

I did try that. For one the few times ever, interlibrary loan failed me! I don't know what to believe in now.

~Maru

On 7/22/05, David DiGiacomo <david at slack.com> wrote:

I had no trouble getting a copy to read via interlibrary loan. It's not as good as owning it, of course.

Maru Dubshinki — 22 Jul 2005, 11:26 · in reply to Maru Dubshinki

Alright, I'm done. Here's the rough draft; critique as you will:

Dear Mr. Andre-Driussi:

On behalf on the Urth.net mailing list [0], I would like to ask you to re-license "Lexicon Urthus" with a free-er license; by 'free' I mean free as in speech [1], or the 'free software' sense [2].

I ask because your work is very well-known on the list, as are you, but it is nigh impossible to acquire. People like myself, who were not around during the original printing of "Lexicon Urthus", now find it impossible to acquire a copy. No physical book stores possess any of the run of 1000 books; Sirius Fiction says it is completely out, with no plans for a corrected second printing, or a second edition [3]. Abebooks, Amazon, Ebay etc. all demand a absolute minimum of 100 US\$ for a copy, which may not even be in mint condition! Simply put, \$ 100 is not doable for the vast majority of Wolfean readers, and a year is a long time.

Releasing your work under a permissive license would cost you very little; commercial prospects for "Lexicon Urthus" appear minimal, due to the fact that by its very nature it appeals to a limited and select group, so potential profit is very slim (though there is some demand [5]). Furthermore, if you feel there are opportunities for future editions, you could simply release it under a Creative Commons [6] license reserving commercial use of "Lexicon Urthus" exclusively to yourself, but freely allowing non-profit usage of it [7], or perhaps under another similar license [8]; or possibly even into the public domain [9] (which, however, from our perspective would be ideal. Public domain is the freest licensing scheme, and the simplest to understand and work with). Or you could choose the GNU Free Documentation License [10].

There are strong reasons to believe that a freely available online edition will not cannibalize sales of "Lexicon Urthus"- Firstly, the person who will read more than a smidgen of an online edition is very probably a fan of Gene Wolfe's work, and so would buy an edition for convenience, as reading online fatigues the eyes and is not always possible, if they don't buy just to support critical Wolfe literature or for their collection; Secondly, more likely, viewers will be looking up a few entries. Seeing the quality of the entries, they may well be more motivated to buy, since "Lexicon Urthus" would then not be a book of unknown quality with a deterring price (Cory Doctorow [11] notes on the Wikipedia article on him (a project known for its success and its use of a free license [12]) that his books have sold very well, thanks to his licensing practices [13]). Thirdly, all the licenses suggested would allow you to incorporate our work into any future editions for free.

Whichever you choose, be it one of those I suggested or a license of your own devising, you need only reply with a refusal, or with a simple statement saying "I hereby release my "Lexicon Urthus" under the X license." And that's it- one of your fans has already volunteered [14] to scan and format it; then the rest of us can set to work improving it, fixing the small errors others have caught [15], etc.

What motivation do I have to ask? Simply that "Lexicon Urthus" could be an excellent basis for the long-discussed Urth.net FAQ, since it disposes of just about every vocabulary related question, is a primary source document for many of the most popular theories, and is comprehensive.

Thank you for your time. I hope you will consider my suggestions seriously.

~Maru Dubshinki

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[3] <http://www.siriusfiction.com/#lexicon>

[4] <http://lists.urth.net/htdig.cgi/urth-urth.net/2004-December/000159.html>

pthwndxrc1zp — 22 Jul 2005, 11:29 · in reply to Maru Dubshinki

Wait, now I'm confused. I thought the previous email noted that one can get a spiral-bound copy for about twenty-five bucks plus shipping. Isn't that sufficient for most any need for the present? I'd hate Mantis to feel like we were pushing him, given that the text is apparently readily available (assuming you don't inherently loathe spiral-bindings)....

On 7/22/05, Maru Dubshinki <marudubshinki at gmail.com> wrote:

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 22 Jul 2005, 13:43 · in reply to pthwndxrcclzp

I agree. If it's available POD (even spiralbound), and is being revised, then I say leave it at that. There is no need to ask for a GNU-type license.

On 7/22/05, pthwndxrcclzp <aquastor at gmail.com> wrote:

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Maru Dubshinki — 22 Jul 2005, 20:28 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

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I agree. If it's available POD (even spiralbound), and is being revised, then I say leave it at that. There is no need to ask for a GNU-type license.

Well, I was careful to point out that GNU's license was not the only option, that Creative Commons had several different possible licenses, that it was not all-or-nothing (all rights reserved vs. public domain). Indeed, the more I examine it, the less I like the Gnu documentation license (the GPL is still the best thing since Lisp and sliced bread, but that is

neither here nor there); it has some rather nasty provisos. I myself, in my many contributions to Wikipedia, do not use the GNU doc license. I release my articles and edits into the public domain. Still, I wish mantis had just noted on his website that he was revising it, that it was gonna be published (and not just a 'maybe') before I got all revved up. And as I've said before, there is no real need to ask... for now.

~Maru

that wasn't supposed to sound sinister