

TWK: The books

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 01 Dec 2005

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Roy C. Lackey — 01 Dec 2005, 02:30

Very thoughtful, James.

2) A mysterious complex central character that is, for some undefined reason, destined to conquer all comers and rise to a predetermined glorious fate (it is unlikely Able would have been beaten in hand-to-hand combat with anyone at that remote pass even before he went to Skai: "the sea" would have "risen" within him and he'd have wiped out all comers); when I say "destined", I mean it much more strongly than would be applied to, say, Conan the Barbarian.

I quite agree.

[snip]

I think Tor Publishing recognized this when they were creating buzz about the book. They were claiming this was Wolfe's first entry into juvenalia (and thus something "new" from Wolfe). That was simply not true. This is not a book "for kids". This book is not going to end up in any Middle School library, any more than any of the Sun cycle novels are, or the Latro stories-- much less than FIFTH HEAD.

I wonder how well TWK actually sold, and if there was a significant drop in sales of the second book relative to the first. If I were young, I don't think I would have bothered with the second book, and I had/have more patience than most. There really isn't much of a surface story there; not what I would call a "page turner", and, from what I know of today's youth and their short attention spans, I don't understand how anyone -- the author or the publisher -- could have believed the book could be successfully marketed as YA. And those efforts made to appeal to young people might well turn off more mature buyers. I know I don't normally buy YA books.

[snip]

And I think many people have become resigned (which they had not regarding NEW SUN when this list started) to the fact that some Wolfe mysteries will never be resolved--so why wrestle with it as much?

Sad, if true. Without the mysteries, how much is left? Too much of what makes the plots tick, to say nothing of any deeper understanding, is bound up with the puzzles, and that seems to be more the case with each new book. Who really reads Joyce? At what point does an author become a victim of his own cleverness?

Consequently, while Wolfe will likely continue to produce novels that are read by other fiction writers, I don't think Wolfe *can* break out popularly with another novel until he produces something like "The Silmarillion of

the

New Sun". Having Wolfe EXPLAIN something...that would be new. But that might

spoil the books for people who have been crazy about them up 'til now-- people cannot possibly like Wolfe's explanation as much as their private theories of what is going on.

That's what Wolfe tried with THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN, and many readers

didn't like it -- including some on this list -- for precisely the reason you gave. When an author tries to communicate one thing and the reader understands something else, then one or the other has failed.

-Roy