

Urth geochronology

The Urth list — 16 messages, 9 voices, 30 Jul 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4679>

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Jeffrey Lefstin — 30 Jul 2006, 23:58

Jeff Wilson wrote:

More ambiguous. At one point he says Urth is "perhaps a million years in our future."

If we were really trying to deduce the age of Urth from the text, it must be older than that. At several points Severian mentions the lack of volcanic activity on Urth and the solidification of the Urth's interior. I'm not a geologist, but a few million years, or even a few tens of millions of years, isn't going to cut it if we assume that volcanic activity has ceased due to natural cooling and decay.

But since Wolfe is not a hard SF writer I wouldn't make too much of it.

Transentient — 31 Jul 2006, 02:21 · in reply to Jeffrey Lefstin

Okay I'm rapidly running out of easily-obtainable Wolfe books to read. I've recently started on Castle of Days, and I am ready to proclaim the stories in Gene Wolfe's Book of Days to be, IMO, Wolfe's best short fiction.

I'm particularly fond of "How I Lost the Second World War and Helped Turn Back the German Invasion," I think it is officially my very favorite Wolfe short story. It's just a perfect little piece of science fiction - it is alternate history, has a clever ending, a terribly fun exposition of a logical game, contains the real world inside of it, as a board game, and, I am convinced, that business with the transistor is meant to explain how the real world relates to fiction, though which side of the transistor represents which, I am not sure.

And "Forlesen," wow, I haven't caught up on all of the more enlightened discussions to take place on this list about that one yet, but to me it seems like he might actually be talking about Gnosticism in there. The day that Forlesen leads is a life in the imperfect universe created by the Demiurge, who is either Mr Frick or the man in the black suit who asks him which Explainer he wants. Hmm...perhaps Forlesen is Jesus or the actual Christian God.

Right let me go catch up on those past posts before I waste too much bandwidth speculating...

Daniel D Jones — 31 Jul 2006, 11:40 · in reply to Transentient

On Sunday 30 July 2006 22:21, Transentient wrote:

Okay I'm rapidly running out of easily-obtainable Wolfe books to read. I've recently started on Castle of Days, and I am ready to proclaim the stories in Gene Wolfe's Book of Days to be, IMO, Wolfe's best short fiction.

I've just grabbed a whole handful of his other (ie non-solar) stuff. 5thHoC was incredible, everything I'd expect from Wolfe. The Island of Doctor Death... was equally impressive. (Other

than "La Befana," which I thought to be a bit of a gimmick story.) "Innocents Abroad," however, has been ...well, underwhelming. It isn't _bad_ but the stories don't seem to have the depth and impact that I expect from Wolfe.

I haven't got my hands on _Book of Days_ yet, but I will soon.

Macronaut — 31 Jul 2006, 14:44 · in reply to Jeffrey Lefstin

A good point but, as the cooling sun teaches, we cannot discount action by intelligent beings as the cause of apparently natural phenomena. Given mankind's other advanced technology, it's more than possible that men engaged in some large-scale activity which, intentionally or not, resulted in the cooling at an accelerated rate.

Macronaut

--- Jeffrey Lefstin <jeff.lefstin at stanfordalumni.org>
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Jeff Wilson — 01 Aug 2006, 03:02 · in reply to Jeffrey Lefstin

Jeffrey Lefstin wrote:
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volcanic activity has ceased due to natural cooling and decay.

We can't assume it's natural because one of the Great Beasts (Erebus) lives in/on/as a volcanic mountain itself. They sap energy from Urth the same way the black beans/worms sap the old sun. This, combined with the 19th century refrigeration model gleaned from old books that are the source of other similar misteachings, more than explain the apparent deviation from 1981 geology.

But since Wolfe is not a hard SF writer I wouldn't make too much of it.

Gene Wolfe is a very hard SF writer when he wishes to be; in "How I Lost the Second World War and Helped Turn Back the German Invasion" , victory in a motor race hinges on the quantum mechanical workings of the transistor.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

don doggett — 01 Aug 2006, 05:47 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Hi all,

I've just finished reading Blood Meridian by Cormac McCarthy and I wish to express that it is one of the finest modern novels I have ever read, neck and neck w/ BotNS and Tim O'Brien's The Things They Carried. It is also quite possibly the most violent literary book ever written. Incredible.

Don

maru dubshinki — 03 Aug 2006, 00:19 · in reply to don doggett

On 8/1/06, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote:
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Don

I have to ask, why you think it is so marvelous? I read that just last year, and I remember thinking in incomprehension that the judge was a marvelous character, but that the rest seemed pretty pointless and gratuitous (Harold Bloom's criticism notwithstanding).

~maru

don doggett — 03 Aug 2006, 17:40 · in reply to maru dubshinki

--- maru dubshinki <marudubshinki at gmail.com> wrote:

[regarding Blood Meridian]

I have to ask, why you think it is so marvelous? I
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year, and I remember thinking in incomprehension that the judge was a marvelous character, but that the rest seemed pretty pointless and gratuitous (Harold Bloom's criticism notwithstanding).

I have to admit I haven't read Bloom's criticism. The book was recommended to me by a couple of friends. I would agree that much of the goings on in it are pointless and gratuitous but I would argue that that is precisely the point of the book. At its base level the book is about the violent convulsions that created the westward expansion in this country. And having lived in the southwest desert for the past two years, I have to say it is still one of the most casually violent (in attitude if not physicality) places I have ever resided. But for me, this aspect of the book on its own would make a pretty pedantic read. It's the biblical rhetoric and the elevation of every action to the level of myth that sets this book apart for me. In my mind the scalp hunters are no different from the Argonauts (read Graves' Hercules my Shipmate or John Gardner's Jason and Medea) or the Achaeans at the walls of Troy, violent, unreflective men whose unchecked impulses are raised by poetry to epic significance. It's a western myth in an old world down and dirty blood sacrifice kind of way that unsettled me in my gut. I feel there's even more to it, especially in the interplay between the Kid and Judge Holden, but I'm not far enough away from my reading to think about it clearly.

But that's my two cents. I think it's a brilliant book but I know plenty of people who couldn't finish it because of the violence or who thought it was a pretentious waste of time. To each their own.

regards
Don

Daniel D Jones — 23 Sep 2006, 14:55 · in reply to maru dubshinki

On Wednesday 02 August 2006 20:19, maru dubshinki wrote:
On 8/1/06, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote:

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Still off topic but these comments intrigued me, and so I purchased the book. First, I have to agree that it's an excellent novel. I thought the kid was as interesting as the Judge, albeit in a different manner. You do realize that the book, while fiction, is heavily based on real events? Many of the characters, including Glanton and Judge Holden, were real people. If you're not already conversant with it, you might find the following interesting:

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/HNS/Scalpin/heads.html>

In case the URL gets distorted by email:

<http://tinyurl.com/gweur>

It may make the violence less gratuitous to realize that it's reasonably historically accurate.

Second, the volume I picked up included Harold Bloom's introduction. After reading it, I'm tempted to smack him upside the head with Stephen King's latest novel. Wouldn't you assume that a literary critic would realize that an introduction is read BEFORE you read the book, and that giving away the ending of the work in question is probably not a good idea? If anyone else decides to read the book, you might want to read Bloom's intro as an afterward.

Matthew Keeley — 23 Sep 2006, 21:57 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

I was in a bookstore last night and actually considered buying Blood Meridian or All the Pretty Horses. I read No Country for Old Men earlier this year and thought it was great, so I figured I should try another one of his books. So bleak, yet so persuasive.

By the way, I understand that McCarthy has a new book, The Road, coming out very shortly. It's about a father and son trying to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. Advance word on the book seems good, though I don't think it's getting the same praise as Blood Meridian or the Border Trilogy (All the Pretty Horses, The Crossing, and Cities on the Plain).

-Matt

On Sep 23, 2006, at 10:55 AM, Daniel D Jones wrote:

On Wednesday 02 August 2006 20:19, maru dubshinki wrote:

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don doggett — 01 Oct 2006, 04:01 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

--- Matthew Keeley <matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com> wrote:

By the way, I understand that McCarthy has a new book, *The Road*, coming out very shortly. It's about a father and son trying to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. Advance word on the book seems good, though I don't think it's getting the same praise as *Blood Meridian* or the *Border Trilogy* (*All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, and *Cities on the Plain*).

I'm a little less than halfway through it (It's a quick read) so I'll reserve final judgement, but it's pretty f'd up. I mean that as a compliment, though.

Humanity is winding down to zero and it's not going gracefully. No postman, no Mad Max, no Mother Abigail to set shit straight, not even a Vic and Blood (though I caught a hint of a reference). The narrative choices that McCarthy's made are making this book a very interesting read. I'd say I'm looking forward to the end, but the truth is I'm kind of dreading it; another compliment to the novel's power.

Don

Daniel D Jones — 01 Oct 2006, 12:57 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

On Saturday 23 September 2006 10:55, Daniel D Jones wrote:
Second, the volume I picked up included Harold Bloom's introduction. After reading it, I'm tempted to smack him upside the head with Stephen King's latest novel. Wouldn't you assume that a literary critic would realize that an introduction is read BEFORE you read the book, and that giving away the ending of the work in question is probably not a good idea? If anyone else decides to read the book, you might want to read Bloom's intro as an afterward.

Just to set the record straight, I've found out that Bloom did not write the essay as an introduction to the book. It's part of a longer work which discusses several novels. The blame for selecting it as an introduction belongs to some nameless editor, not to Bloom.

Transentient — 01 Oct 2006, 13:23 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

I also read this last month because it was mentioned on this list. I really thought it was excellent.

What I don't understand, though, is why this book is considered part of the "litchrature" genre and not "gorefest cowboy horror" genre. My copy of the book had a tagline or quote on the front cover that was like, "A classic American novel of regeneration through violence," and my response to that is: wtf does that even mean?

It is interesting how, if a writer can get some "official literature" status early in their careers, whenever they choose to write something that is fantasy, horror, mystery, or even blatant sf (and sorry I can't think of any examples) the literary press will make excuses and struggle to point out that it isn't really genre, because it is written by a "serious" writer and not a "genre" writer.

But I haven't seen much crossover the other direction.

don doggett — 01 Oct 2006, 14:32 · in reply to Transentient

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It doesn't mean anything to me, but Michael Herr wrote it (he wrote Martin Sheen's monologues in Apocalypse Now, and the very excellent book Dispatches) so you're sposed to look at it and say, oh, Michael Herr digs it so I'll buy it too. I hate those things myself. They ruin a perfectly nice book cover. On a more Wolfe related but still OT note, Neil Gaiman has just published a new book of short stories called Fragile Things. I have it and haven't read it but I think he is far and away at his best in the short story medium so I'm pretty excited about it.

Don

Alexander, Bryan — 04 Oct 2006, 16:29 · in reply to don doggett

Why not horror... because it's a historical novel, an antiwestern, primarily. The kid travels right from the old frontier through to California, and the novel touches on all sorts of western tropes along the way: naturalism, the imposition of law, the cult of the outlaw, Mexico, etc. It is horrific, I'll grant you that. It felt like a very violent novel from the start.

"regeneration through violence" is Richard Slotkin's classic formula about American frontier lit. Heroes head out, confront horror, are redeemed by their violent response. What's weird is that Blood Meridian isn't redemptive at all. Had the blurber actually finished it? No spoiler here, but cf the conclusion of Melville's Confidence-Man.

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

From: urth-bounces at lists.urth.net on behalf of don doggett

Sent: Sun 10/1/2006 10:32 AM

To: The Urth Mailing List

Subject: Re: (urth) Blood Meridian - still utterly and completely off topic

Transient <transient at gmail.com> wrote:

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Daniel D Jones — 05 Oct 2006, 00:11 · in reply to Alexander, Bryan

On Wednesday 04 October 2006 12:29, Alexander, Bryan wrote:

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California, and the novel touches on all sorts of western tropes along the way: naturalism, the imposition of law, the cult of the outlaw, Mexico, etc. It is horrific, I'll grant you that. It felt like a very violent novel from the start.

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You don't think that the kid was redeemed by his experiences? What does the Judge mean when he tells the kid he failed him? Why do they part ways as they do? Why does the book end as it does?