

Are old questions OK?

The Urth list — 15 messages, 9 voices, 20 Oct 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4739>

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Scott K — 20 Oct 2006, 09:21

Hi all-

I only recently joined the list, having first waited until I'd finished "Return To The Whorl" to avoid any spoilers. I've chimed in a couple of times about this and that, the comic book version and whatnot, but have been shy about posing new questions which may have come up a million times before. I have come to the conclusion that, like in scuba diving, there are really very few truly dumb questions, though on a list like this they may have been discussed before ad nauseum. Therefore I feel emboldened to ask a few questions of my own, starting with (as a somewhat basic starting point):

-What's the general reception in these rarified Wolfe circles of the Borsky book, "Solar Labyrinth?" I found it an interesting read for the first few chapters, having skipped to areas I found of most interest, but on reading the whole thing through I'm dead set against some of his assertions, and thinking that he's seeing too much into everything for his own aggrandizement, i.e. "the Navigator was JFK." What? That seems to me the most silly thing in the book, though overall he brings up a lot of good points, but I've never seen the Wolfe series dissected and discussed by anyone before. I know the Urth archives go back a long ways but I'm not sifting through all of that at once. Ultan's place on a day pass! Most of the friends I've recommended it to had trouble getting through it, or they read it as straight sci-fi on the surface and didn't notice any of the finer details, mostly waiting for the next sword fight or monster, or whatever. I've just never heard it discussed much, but I feel I have a good foundation now in some of the book's basic mysteries, thanks in part no doubt to the Borsky book, but what do you all think of his work overall? I think he raises a lot of good questions but some of his conclusions are kinda crazy to the point where it seems that every minor character with a scrap of dialogue has a blood tie to Sev or the Autarch, or some secret circle that was never really mentioned in the text ("magicians"). So, let the flaming begin- comments, anyone? Besides, the misogyny streak is kinda starting to bore me and I never read Dr. Island, but thinking of picking up Peace and Doors...

-Scott K.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 20 Oct 2006, 15:40 · in reply to Scott K

On Fri, 20 Oct 2006 02:21:41 -0700, "Scott K" <scott at skatemonk.com> said:

the misogyny streak is kinda starting to
bore me

Aw, shucks. Just when I was about to upload my Wolfe pastiche, "The Shapechanger and the Prostitute." <gr>

But seriously, I'd love to see an interviewer ask Wolfe about (or an academic address) this fascination he seems to have with prostitutes, which begins in FIFTH HEAD and runs all the way through to the latest Latro novel, where, once again, we are "graced" with yet another low-rent girl as a major character. For my money, this comes very close to Wolfe's jumping the shark moment and he's now looming dangerously on self-parody.

I also find it curious that no one has mentioned the skiffy premise in THERE ARE DOORS yet: i.e., mate with women even once, fellows, and you'll die -- now there's an inducement to chastity! Though the tone and style are different, this is something I expect more from the likes of Richard Calder than a happily-married father of four children.

Then there's Wolfe's barbed attitude toward feminism, present in both his non-fiction and some of his shorter work like "In Looking Glass Castle." Methinks he's not particularly fond of it.

And lastly, if Wolfe's work appealed equally to men and women, wouldn't we be likely to see more of the fairer sex in this august forum? I don't remember seeing any statistical breakdown, but it seems to me there have never been more than one or two women posting at any particular time, even during the list's heyday.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - Access your email from home and the web

b sharp — 20 Oct 2006, 18:52 · follows Rex Lycanthrosaurus

Scott K asks:

What's the general reception in these rarified Wolfe circles of the Borsky book, "Solar Labyrinth?"

I've heard venom and derision heaped on Borsky by some members of the old guard from here. I applaud him for daring to raise a lot of questions about BotNS and publish outside the confines of this list. My main complaint would be that he didn't stick around in here long enough to debate some of his ideas and stay open to correction and/or refinement.

I've seen others single out the example that bothers you the most, "i.e. the Navigator was JFK." I'm too young to remember the Kennedy funeral, but I appreciate Borski's guess because nobody else ever, that I know of, has the slightest clue what "the Navigator" story (told by prisoners in the antechamber) was about. It is incomprehensible to me that Wolfe meant nothing by it...or that it is a red herring. The best working hypothesis gets my vote until something better comes along. If Borski and Wolfe saw the same video clips of the JFK funeral then, maybe that's it.

I'm also accepting of this hypothesis because it fits a theme of 60's pop culture references I think I see in BotNS which include the movie Swiss Family Robinson, TV shows Gilligan's Island and Lost In Space (all 3 based loosely on Robison Crusoe), facelift surgery, drug culture and of course Neil Armstrong on the moon. Anyone else see others? (I reject another proposed candidate: radiation warning /fallout shelter signs because I think the identification was based on an incorrect interpretation of the term "teratoid symbols".)

Personally I think Borsky wasn't comprehensive enough in trying to identify Severian's family members but way waaaaay too aggressive in applying cryptonymic analysis to make hundreds of very hard to swallow links between just about everything and everybody in the story. But once again, I'll praise him for having the gall to publish his ideas and increase the involvement of old and newer Wolfe fans.

-bsharp

Chris — 20 Oct 2006, 20:40 · in reply to b sharp

I do not recall anyone "heaping" "venom" or "derision" on Borski. Borski was a contributor to this list for a while, if I recall correctly, and well-liked by people here - even those of us who think his theories are too much of a stretch. This does not mean we have to accept his theories, or obligate us to praise them for having merits we don't think they have. Nor does it incline us to accept at face value, on the basis of Borski's authority, anything a poster wants to use to argue their own points. Arguments from authority are shady business anyway, and when the position being argued is controversial, such reasoning is not going to get a warm reception.

As far as "Solar Labyrinth" goes, I think I posted my thoughts on it some time ago, and they may (or may not) be in the archives. The book has value, even though I don't agree with most of its conclusions (or many of its premises), if for no other reason than the fact that Borski has been very attentive to the text and brings up many thought-provoking points that may have passed unnoticed, or been forgotten, on your first (or second, or third, or fourth) reading of the series.

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Adam Thornton — 20 Oct 2006, 22:11 · in reply to b sharp

On Oct 20, 2006, at 11:52 AM, b sharp wrote:
of course
Neil Armstrong on the moon.

The picture isn't actually Armstrong, and as far as I can tell it's not a faithful description of *any* of the Apollo photographs. I remember trying to figure out which picture it was a few months ago and coming up dry: I couldn't find any earthrises taken from the Lunar surface with an astronaut and a flag in the frame.

Not that I don't agree that it's *supposed* to be an Apollo astronaut; I just think that Wolfe didn't have the source photograph at hand and conflated several (for instance, <http://history.nasa.gov/ap11ann/kippsphotos/apollo.html> has an Earthrise and a Buzz Aldrin Saluting the Flag picture. Make one the background of the other and you pretty much have the described picture.)

Adam

Jeff Wilson — 21 Oct 2006, 04:28 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam Thornton wrote:
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other possibilities are:

- * a later Apollo mission
- * subtle difference in previous universe cycle
- * the picture is a painting based on the original photographs, possibly via multiple degrees of reproduction and copying

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Adam Thornton — 21 Oct 2006, 06:55 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Oct 20, 2006, at 9:28 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:
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There's an Apollo 16 earthrise too, but, again, no astronauts.

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#3 seems most likely. I mean, "Astronaut with earthrise" IS a better composition.

Adam

Fred Kiesche — 21 Oct 2006, 09:20 · follows Adam Thornton

Greetings:

There is an Apollo 17 shot of the flag, and astronaut and the Earth. However it is more of an upwards angle shot, and does not show the lunar horizon.

I'm pretty sure it is one one of the Apollo picture sites. I'll dig around and post a link if I can find it.

Fred Kiesche (FPK3)

My books are water; those of great geniuses are wine. Everybody drinks water. (Mark Twain, "Notebook")

Over 7,000 postings served! See The Eternal Golden Braid (<http://theeternalgoldenbraid.blogspot.com/>).

Jeff Wilson — 21 Oct 2006, 12:26 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam Thornton wrote:
On Oct 20, 2006, at 9:28 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:
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I don't see where the ms mentions an earthrise?

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

Adam Thornton — 22 Oct 2006, 00:59 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Oct 21, 2006, at 5:26 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:
Adam Thornton wrote:

On Oct 20, 2006, at 9:28 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Well, I, uh, don't have the books here...but I thought the picture was astronaut, standing on moon by flag, with Earth in background.

Maybe it's my memory that's faulty.

Adam

Jeff Wilson — 22 Oct 2006, 02:18 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam Thornton wrote:

On Oct 21, 2006, at 5:26 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Amazon to the rescue:

"The picture he was cleaning showed an armored figure standing in a desolate landscape. It had no weapon, but held a staff bearing a strange, stiff banner. The visor of this figure's helmet was entirely of gold, without eye slits or ventilation; in its polished surface the deathly desert could be seen in reflection, and nothing more."

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 22 Oct 2006, 03:39 · follows Jeff Wilson

On Sun, 22 Oct 2006 12:18:32 +1000 Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

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But also: "There's your blue Urth coming over his shoulder again, fresh as the Autarch's fish."

Tim Walters — 22 Oct 2006, 03:51 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Astronaut/painter Alan Bean has several near misses:

http://galleryone.com/bean_prints.htm

I can't find one with all the elements Wolfe mentions, but perhaps there's one somewhere in

Bean's oeuvre.

Jeff Wilson — 22 Oct 2006, 04:01 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

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gold, without eye slits or ventilation; in its polished surface the

deathly desert could be seen in reflection, and nothing more."

But also: "There's your blue Urth coming over his shoulder again, fresh as the Autarch's fish."

Interesting; maybe it's a Fresnel lens dual image, or even some more exotic form of changing picture.

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

Jeff Wilson — 22 Oct 2006, 04:09 · in reply to Tim Walters

Tim Walters wrote:

Astronaut/painter Alan Bean has several near misses:

http://galleryone.com/bean_prints.htm

I can't find one with all the elements Wolfe mentions, but perhaps there's one somewhere in Bean's oeuvre.

"Straightening Our Stripes" is very close indeed, but unfortunately was painted in 1985.

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