

Wolfe at the Beach: Two Reviews

The Urth list — 6 messages, 4 voices, 28 Aug 2007

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4898>

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Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 28 Aug 2007, 16:42

It rained a little bit more than I would have liked on vacation this year so I was able to do a fair amount of reading and not get sand kicked in my face (though the wife tried). If, however, you wish to read

Pirate Freedom without knowing anything at all, you may wish to skip the second half of what follows, though I've attempted to remain spoiler neutral.

Shadows of the New Sun is a nice collection of interviews and essays, several of the former of which are conducted by members or alumni of this list. I'm a big fan of interviews, so mostly I enjoyed them, but there is a fair amount of repetition from interview to interview. I'd therefore not recommend reading them straight through, all in a clump, as I did, but to skip around a bit. The same with the essays, which I didn't enjoy quite as much as those in _Castle of Days_ (Wolfe's sense of humor may be a little too quirky for me.) It also strikes me as strange that when you get to the final interview editor Wright cautions the reader that "[Wolfe's] occasionally terse responses should remind any critic or commentator that he or she is in the presence of a writer every bit as unreliable as his narrators." So--what?--don't take the interviews seriously or just read them as fiction?

I was also appalled at some of the copy editing in this book. There are numerous typos, which doesn't seem so strange when you consider much of the material has been culled from fan sources, but _Shadows_, after all, hails from a prestigious academic press and Wright calls further attention to the shoddy editing in the introduction by claiming none of the interviews have been changed except to clean up typographical errors. See the fourth full paragraph on p.15 and tell me someone/something other than a spellchecker has gone over it. My favorite blunder, however, involves Michael Andre-Driussi, who we're told "is working on a second edition of the Lexicon, which will correct many of the errors as well as adding new ones." So I guess that tells us when Lexicon Urthis 2.0 will come out -- when mantis finishes adding all the new errors! <gr>

"As a boy," Gene Wolfe has written, "I was very fond of pirates," and his latest offering seems written expressly for that boy. In fact, the intended audience for this one seems even more YA than _Wizard Knight_ though it's not being marketed as a juvenile, but as fantasy. _Pirate Freedom_, however, has **no** fantasy elements unless you wish to count Father Chris's temporal displacement (curiously unexamined by the narrator), nor is there much in the way of metaphysical or spiritual dithering, considering Chris-the-pirate has taken Holy Orders. Instead, we're treated to a very straight forward historical adventure with many asides about the true nature of piracy (as opposed, say, to pop versions) and the narrative voice will probably remind you of Wizard's Able. Wolfe seems to have lots of fun with his dramatis personae, incorporating not only two characters from New Sun, but also naming a pirate after one of his fellow writers. But far and away, _Pirate Freedom_ is Wolfe's least challenging and unoblique novel, with virtually no unsolved mysteries or (for me) lingering resonance. As such, I took it to be the literary equivalent of a sorbet -- something to cleanse the pallet in preparation for more substantial fare to come (though I'm not encouraged by the early word on his next two novels).

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - Accessible with your email software
or over the web

Roy C. Lackey — 28 Aug 2007, 21:20 · follows Rex Lycanthrosaurus

Just a note to set the facts straight.

-Roy

Rex Lycanthrosaurus wrote:

My

>favorite blunder, however, involves Michael Andre-Driussi, who we're told "is working on a second edition of the Lexicon, which will correct many of the errors as well as adding new ones." So I guess that tells us when Lexicon Urthis 2.0 will come out -- when mantis finishes adding all the new errors! <gr>

I forwarded Rex's post to mantis, who wrote:

Right. Well, given the context, I share Rex's pain at typos--from both sides (reader and publisher), or more sides, if possible.

Setting that aside, the "blunder" attributed to Wright is actually 100% accurate. That is, I said it, or wrote it, and he is repeating it verbatim, with perhaps too straight a face.

mantis went on to add:

Again, I understand how he could have taken it as a blunder since he was being irritated by real typos, so I'm not being critical of Rex.

And I can also see how a self-deprecating remark given by myself might lose humor when repeated by another, and even seem deprecating or condescending (if not a flat out blunder).

=Michael=

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 29 Aug 2007, 00:36 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Apologies to both mantis and Peter Wright if "errors" was deliberate and a puckish attempt at humor. I thought for sure from the phrasing and context that "errors" had been substituted for "entries." My bad.

As for Nick Gever's gentle counter-assertion that there are indeed sfnal elements in the book, he's right, but they play such an insubstantial part in the narrative, that Pirate Freedom would be no different without them. I still certainly have my doubts about the book being "Fantasy" although oddly enough I'll probably vote for Gibson's Spook Country as being one of my top sf novels for the year.

One should also keep in mind that Gene Wolfe is a writer of consummate grace, regardless of marketing categories.

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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - One of many happy users:
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Stuart Hamm — 29 Aug 2007, 01:43 · in reply to Rex Lycanthrosaurus

Amen to the Gibson plug...I loved "Spook..." although not quite as much as "Pattern Recognition"

Philip K Dick meets Paul Auster

I just wish he was as prolific as GW and I didn't have to wait so long between releases

Rex Lycanthrosaurus <lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm> wrote:

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Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 29 Aug 2007, 03:07 · in reply to Stuart Hamm

Interestingly, Gibson borrows one of the Wolfe's classic techniques in "Spook Country" -- i.e., refusing to identify a major character by name, in this case "the old man" -- although if you've read "Pattern Recognition," you can probably guess who he most likely is.

Similarly, Father Christopher's last name is never stated in Pirate Freedom, although Wolfe does provide several clues about its ultimate identity. Perhaps it's even the same as a certain list alumnus -- one with a hard to pronounce Italian name?

On Tue, 28 Aug 2007 18:43:11 -0700 (PDT), "Stuart Hamm" <hammstu at sbcglobal.net> said:

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as "Pattern Recognition"
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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - The way an email service should be

Dan Rabin — 29 Aug 2007, 03:59 · in reply to Rex Lycanthrosaurus

Just a reminder that _Pirate Freedom_ is not yet published (Amazon US and UK both cite November 13 as the release date). It's delightful to hear some impressions from early readers, but I (for one) would welcome restraint on the spoiler front.

-- Dan Rabin