

PF review

The Urth list — 14 messages, 10 voices, 30 Nov 2007

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4943>

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bill reilly — 30 Nov 2007, 13:40

For those interested, I posted my review of Pirate Freedom, from my review column in Realms of Fantasy magazine, on my blog:

<http://community.livejournal.com/theinferior4/199336.html>

brunians at brunians.org — 30 Nov 2007, 15:33 · in reply to bill reilly

Hey, that's a pretty neat review.

I'd want to run out and buy the book if I didn't already.

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Never miss a thing. Make Yahoo your
homepage. _____

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 30 Nov 2007, 20:45 · follows brunians at brunians.org

On Sat, 01 Dec 2007 00:40:53 +1100 bill reilly <gdeonn at yahoo.com>
wrote:

For those interested, I posted my review of Pirate Freedom, from
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That's an excellent review.

One point: was it really to protect Chris that his father put him in a monastery? I thought about that, but how much protection would it actually offer, compared to other options? And Chris in the early period spends a fair chunk of time back home - Christmas, 8 weeks over summer ...

His father seems to have some personal experience of monasteries: he thinks abbotts "bring you down".

On Chris' hypocrisy: framing & limiting his whole confession is his assertion that he had no choice but to act badly - those times are not these times, and so on. But he did he have choices.

A critical point for me is right at the beginning of his career, in Veracruz. He helps a priest minister to slaves; he could keep on doing that, but instead chooses to return to the Weald.

Actually, I suppose the real beginning is just before that, when he excuses himself for stealing bread: God isn't going to send him to hell for any amount of venial sinning. Then he quickly progresses to assault, violently stealing a chicken. His older self helps him do it - a little scene encapsulating the whole of Chris' story.

Chris is indeed a bad man. But he has direct encounters with Christ (or at least believes he does). In one of them, Christ tells him that all that is needed is for Chris to love him. What to think about that? You can be a mobster and a pirate, but if you love Christ it doesn't matter? Is that good theology? For me it might serve as a *reductio ad absurdum* against that theology; but what's Wolfe's view?

paul witcover — 30 Nov 2007, 22:22 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com wrote:

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All excellent questions, many of which I continue to puzzle over! I've been a little disappointed by the critical reception of this novel so far -- the majority view seems to be that it's a light-hearted romp, just pure fun, without any of the weightier issues normally present in his

work. It's baffling to me that the book could be so significantly misapprehended.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 30 Nov 2007, 23:16 · follows paul witcover

On Sat, 01 Dec 2007 07:45:16 +1100 thalassocrat at nym.hush.com wrote:

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Oops - screwed that up. The Veracruz episode happens before he is taken by Captain Burt, of course. But I think the point stands: he does have lots of opportunities to become what he was trained to be at the monastery, and he dabbles in them, but in the end he rejects them. When he does become a priest, as "Chris2", it's a time-filler while he plots his return to Novia - one which he pursues conscientiously, but still not the main game.

James Crossley — 30 Nov 2007, 23:48 · in reply to paul witcover

On 11/30/07 2:22 PM, "paul witcover" <gdeonn at yahoo.com> wrote:

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Not that I think he wants to be misunderstood, but Wolfe tends to purposely disguise his meanings, and in PF he seems to have pushed that tendency about as far as it can go. The book almost begs for readers to see it as simply a boy's adventure. I'd bet that a significant portion of casual readers (if Wolfe still has any of those) wouldn't be aware of the SF nature of the story, granting that time travel is a mite fantastical, but not even noticing that Chris's reverse time travel begins in our future. The moral questions are buried even deeper.

Wasn't there something in the review about the brightness of the Caribbean sun helping us forget about the inevitable shadows? That says it right.

James

Adam Thornton — 01 Dec 2007, 00:02 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On Nov 30, 2007, at 2:45 PM, <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com>

<thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:

You can be a mobster and a pirate, but if you love Christ it doesn't matter? Is that good theology?

It's good Protestant theology [0].

Which is odd, given the religious affiliations of Chris, Wolfe, and most Mafiosi.

Adam

[0] Yes, yes, I realize that I'm being reductionist to the point of inaccuracy as well as awfully snarky, but honestly, that bit in James about faith without works being dead *is* one of the bits that Protestants prefer to ignore in favor of the bit from Ephesians about grace being a gift that no works can attain. Slap that into a sermon with John 3:16 and you can make a case that faith alone--irrespective of works--is sufficient. Which I am sure is a great comfort to those who prey with delight on their fellow men but go to bed secure in the knowledge that they are the Elect.

Matthew Groves — 01 Dec 2007, 00:12 · follows Adam Thornton

thalassocrat wrote:

Chris is indeed a bad man.

To me, the most chilling insight into Chris's "half-monstrous" nature comes when he is recounting having saved the slaves in the Spanish stockade outside Portobello. Chris says this incident was the exception, but that "That just makes it sweeter."

Was anyone else struck by the constant references to swords and daggers of various shapes, often very carefully described, always being taken away or found or lost or traded or given? And all the guns and the importance of their size. Chris and Capt. Burt "share the captain's cabin with a long nine." Later he puts a long nine stern chaser in his cabin on the Castillo Blanco. Also doubloons and coin purses of various sizes being taken by force or carried or lent. It all struck me as Freudian. In particular, the incident on Hispaniola when Chris and the Buccaneers parlay with the Spanish and they take Chris's coin purse seems to be the source of a great deal of Chris's rage.

gwern0 at gmail.com — 01 Dec 2007, 01:56 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On 2007.12.01 07:45:16 +1100, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com scribbled 0 lines: ...

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Wolfe is a Catholic, and I believe the pithy formulation is 'salvation by faith alone', and not works; hard cases make for bad law, but if salvation by faith alone works for even a degenerate Chris, then surely it must have sufficient virtue for lesser sinners?

gwern

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 01 Dec 2007, 12:26 · follows gwern0 at gmail.com

On Sat, 01 Dec 2007 09:22:18 +1100 paul witcover <gdeonn at yahoo.com> wrote:

All excellent questions, many of which I continue to puzzle over! I've been a little disappointed by the critical reception of this novel so far -- the majority view seems to be that it's a light-hearted romp, just pure fun, without any of the weightier issues normally present in his work. It's baffling to me that the book could be so significantly misapprehended.

In fact, isn't it quite clear that Chris is a monster? He sins, wilfully and in complete knowledge of what he is doing. Even when he is given a chance to undo his sinful acts, he rejects it, and instead uses the opportunity to try to ensure he will sin in the same way, again. His confession is worse than worthless.

Look: the whole story is supposed to be a kind of confession. No matter how you look at it, there is at least one thing for which he definitely needs the premium-level forgiveness package: the killing of Michet. Assume that everything else can be marked down to circumstances, battle, bad luck, youth, whatever. He killed Michet when Michet was offering him reconciliation, while he was effectively unarmed, and solely to preserve his respect as captain. The Michet killing triggers the whole "confession".

He comes back from the past. He can, perhaps, undo Michet. Whether or not he can actually alter the future/past, he has an obvious moral obligation to try to do so. But he wilfully chooses not to try. He does not go to visit himself in Jersey. He obviously plans to act exactly as Ignacio did during his "own" youth, and do everything to ensure that "Chris1" follows exactly the same trajectory as "he" did, so he can take over Novia when "Chris1" goes back to the future.

He is going to ensure that his youthful self sins in exactly the same way, so his older self can benefit. He preys not only on others, but also on his own youth.

I think Chris is perhaps the most unambiguously evil character Wolfe has presented in a novel. I find it breathtaking.

"Sometimes I have had to slip." Maybe, sometimes, but when he came back to the future he had a miraculous chance to try to undo the slips - and he rejected it.

Matthew King — 01 Dec 2007, 16:24 · in reply to Matthew Groves

On Nov 30, 2007, at 6:12 PM, Matthew Groves wrote:

And all the

guns and the importance of their size. Chris and Capt. Burt "share the captain's cabin with a long nine."

You find the same emphasis on number and size of guns in Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin novels. I think it is better to take a naval commander's obsession with gunpower at face value. A sizeable stern-chaser is not the same thing as a sizeable-stern chaser.

Michael Straight — 05 Dec 2007, 19:56 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Paul, that's a great review. Thanks for sharing.

And yet one of the commenters at your website offers one of best perspectives for reading Wolfe that I have yet seen:

"I suppose Wolfe makes of the reader a priest, and puts him on the receiving end in the confessional, and shows him at its most squirmy how tough it is to love (and forgive!) thy neighbor, harder far than loving God and yet its essential corollary. And thus we can safely assume that Wolfe shares our repugnance while simultaneously putting it aside in favor of compassion for his character, so essential to a believable — let alone a soulful — portrayal of him?"

Wow. I don't think there's a book Wolfe has written that is not illuminated by that idea.

Rostrum

David Duffy — 05 Dec 2007, 21:38 · in reply to Michael Straight

On Wed, 5 Dec 2007, Michael Straight wrote:
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Two things I thought about after reading this comment were: C. is unrepentant, and comments that he cannot offer absolution to others who are in that state (_Peace_ anyone?); the other is a la _the Power and the Glory_ etc, that even a bad priest is still efficacious.

I'm not completely happy with the central event in the story, the time-slips. We have no hints about its nature, whether supernatural or technological. I have no problem with supernatural/fantastical displacements providing they don't have disturbing effects on overall causality ;) ie unhappy young man yearns to slip back in time to the romantic age of pirates, mysteriously it happens, and today comes back to tell his story and mourn his lost love. And I don't mind a _By his Bootstraps_ or even a _New Sun_. But in the latter, I want some kind of a rationale for my closed timelike curves eg meddling superintelligences ;)

David Duffy.

paul witcover — 06 Dec 2007, 13:38 · in reply to Michael Straight

Michael Straight <mfstraight at gmail.com> wrote: And yet one of the commenters at your website offers one of best perspectives for reading Wolfe that I have yet seen:

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Wow. I don't think there's a book Wolfe has written that is not illuminated by that idea.

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Yes, I thought so too!