

Urth - Geology vs Humanity

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 03 Dec 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5259>

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O'Donnell, Tim BOSI — 03 Dec 2008, 12:13

Hi fellow Tim!

While I think the central question of how far in the future of the book is unknowable (I don't think Wolfe knows based on interview)

there are two strong options emerging - a several thousand years and several million years.

I guess which one you choose is based on your inclination - I would never have gone with an artistic argument about the book, I would

lean towards the scientific possibilities in the book. But I see your viewpoint as valid also and I am glad you mentioned it.

I guess the question that is emerging for me is Is it important how far in the future the book is set?

Vance in the Dying Earth series never gave any clues to the passage of time and thus escaped this trap.

Wolfe in scattering some clues for the reader has dug himself a hole (or built a cliff-face) his readers are struggling to escape.

I am currently reading The Books of the Short Sun (import only in Ireland, so frustrating!).

I came across a line last night that made me smile:

"As with so many other riddles, it is easy to speculate but impossible to know which speculation is correct - if any are."

On Blue's Waters, Ch 6.

Tim Walters

It's also debatable that Urt's core really is cooling. The learned Ultan and Palaemon seem to get most of their education from the piles of books in the Library, and may have no way to know which books have outdated theories; they may have enjoyed Bellamy's Looking Backward and gotten the notion that the refrigeration of the earth is a foregone conclusion in the wisdom of the ancients.

What's the artistic point of the cliff scene, world-famous for its evocation of deep time, if not to show that a gazillion years have passed?

What's the artistic point of mentioning the cooling of Urth's core, if not to show that a gazillion years have passed?

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John Smith — 03 Dec 2008, 13:41 · in reply to O'Donnell, Tim BOSI

--- On Wed, 12/3/08, O'Donnell, Tim (BOSI) <Tim.O'Donnell at bankofscotland.ie> wrote:
I guess the question that is emerging for me is Is it
important how far in the future the book is set?

I think it's an INTERESTING question, and I have certainly enjoyed hearing the wide range of opinions and the evidence cited.

Best wishes,

Jack

Tim Walters — 03 Dec 2008, 17:17 · in reply to O'Donnell, Tim BOSI

O'Donnell, Tim (BOSI) wrote:
Vance in the Dying Earth series never gave any clues to the passage of
time and thus escaped this trap.

I don't have time to look for a pull quote right now, but I'm pretty sure that somewhere he makes it clear that it's far, far in the future, far enough for the sun to have weakened naturally.

And while the subgenre is named after Vance's book, he wasn't the only (or first) to write in it. Vance's model was Clark Ashton Smith's Zothique stories. Richard Lupoff wrote "One Million Centuries." Arthur C. Clarke got a toe in with "The City And The Stars." Ultimately the trope goes back to Wells' "The Time Machine." I'm pretty sure all of these are explicit about the passage of eons, and it's an important part of their effect.

I believe Wolfe is following this tradition.

Tim Walters | The Doubtful Palace | <http://doubtfulpalace.com>

Lane Haygood — 03 Dec 2008, 17:21 · in reply to Tim Walters

On Wed, Dec 3, 2008 at 11:17 AM, Tim Walters <walters at doubtfulpalace.com> wrote:
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Tim Walters | The Doubtful Palace | <http://doubtfulpalace.com>

It's also instructive to note that the Dying Earth subgenre is very pulpy, esp. in the Clark Ashton Smith (and his imitators) vein. Vance brought a little more literary panache to the genre, but its roots are pure pulp.

Pulp is often willing to sacrifice logic and good science for dramatic effect.

-Lane
