

Weekly blog links

The Urth list — 46 messages, 20 voices, 14 Apr 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5407>

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Gwern Branwen — 14 Apr 2009, 03:40

A nice discussion of "The Toy Theater" in The Best of Gene Wolfe:
<http://www.locusmag.com/Roundtable/2009/04/reading-gene-wolfe.html>

"...Does anyone have any better answers than this? I'm ducking a whole series of issues, I realise: is the narrator a reliable one? Is Lili, in turn, reliable in her claims about Stromboli? Why does the narrator give us so few clues about what he himself is feeling? (In this, he's very much like other Wolfe protagonists.) That a story of, I guess, no more than 3000 words can generate so much exegesis (and a feeling that you've still not exhausted it) is a huge tribute to the density that Wolfe achieves in his best short fiction."

gwern

Mo Holkar / UKG — 14 Apr 2009, 04:28 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

At 04:40 14/04/2009, you wrote:

A nice discussion of "The Toy Theater" in The Best of Gene Wolfe:
<http://www.locusmag.com/Roundtable/2009/04/reading-gene-wolfe.html>

"...Does anyone have any better answers than this? I'm ducking a whole series of issues, I realise: is the narrator a reliable one? Is Lili, in turn, reliable in her claims about Stromboli? Why does the narrator give us so few clues about what he himself is feeling? (In this, he's very much like other Wolfe protagonists.) That a story of, I guess, no more than 3000 words can generate so much exegesis (and a feeling that you've still not exhausted it) is a huge tribute to the density that Wolfe achieves in his best short fiction."

There are quite a few advocates (including Dave Tallman on the wiki) of the theory that the narrator is himself a puppet, dismissed by this commentator. I don't buy it myself either, but it is slightly nagging...

best,

Mo

~ # ~

WolfeWiki now at:

<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/>

Jonathan Goodwin — 14 Apr 2009, 05:18 · in reply to Mo Holkar / UKG

I believe I came to that conclusion a few years ago myself.

I recently made some disappointed comments on Pirate Freedom:

<http://www.jgoodwin.net/?p=647>

How many of you agree that the Wolfe of Fifth Head, Peace, New Sun, Endangered Species (partially), and Death of Dr. Island and OS and OS is not even recognizably the same author as that of Pirate Freedom, An Evil Guest, or the Short Sun? (Shared concerns, yes. The quality of execution, however, is more like that of a bad imitator.)

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brunians at brunians.org — 14 Apr 2009, 05:32 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

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Just a thought.

Of course, you may just be a ouanquerre.

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Jonathan Goodwin — 14 Apr 2009, 05:44 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

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Dozois's introduction to FHC in *_Modern Classics of Science Fiction_* (viewable via google books) might shed some additional sociology-of-publishing light on this.

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Chris P — 14 Apr 2009, 07:02 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

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I am not trying, in this case, to even argue with your conclusion. I just think your reasoning is not as clear as you think, because you're mixing up the possible questions that could be asked here and answering, at least in part, the wrong one.

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Transient — 14 Apr 2009, 12:08 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

Did you really mean to include Short Sun in the list of books / series that are not the same? And not Knight / Wizard?

What strikes me about the later books is that the narrative itself feels more coherent and the books are smoother from start to finish. I think you can see this with Solider of Sidon which has a dramatically different feel that the previous two books. It is like the machinery for producing the story went from analogue to digital. Short Sun is kind of a transitionary series.

On Apr 14, 2009, at 1:18 AM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

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John Watkins — 14 Apr 2009, 12:41 · in reply to Transient

I think Short Sun (which I'm rereading now) is as good as anything Wolfe ever wrote. I can't say the same about Pirate Freedom or Soldier of Sidon.

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 8:08 AM, Transient <transient at gmail.com> wrote:

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Adam Thornton — 14 Apr 2009, 14:10 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

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You're selling Short Sun and maybe AEG short. (I didn't like Pirate Freedom either.)

I think **that's** a mistake.

Adam

James Wynn — 14 Apr 2009, 14:37 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 12:32 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

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FWIW I think it was an appropriate question. It seems I'm not the only one who thought so.

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Jonathan Goodwin — 14 Apr 2009, 14:48 · in reply to Chris P

I mentioned Dozois and publishing because I think it shows that Wolfe achieved success* with a certain approach exemplified best by FHC and never seemed to abandon it fully, perhaps because of editorial and audience expectations. What MS did Dozois reject, for example? Maybe this is known.

*Not really commercial success, true. But I think his good critical reputation is justified and am a booster generally, which is why I am so bitterly disappointed in some of the recent work.

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 2:02 AM, Chris P <rasputin_ at hotmail.com> wrote:

All other things aside I don't see what "sociology of publishing" has to do with the quality of a particular work. The work stands or falls on its own merit. It seems like you are taking for granted that certain aspects of the work are inferior and then, when asked for a reason, attempting to explain

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Jonathan Goodwin — 14 Apr 2009, 14:49 · in reply to Transient

I left Knight/Wizard off because I have not yet read Wizard, but I agree that it probably belongs there.

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 7:08 AM, Transient <transient at gmail.com> wrote:

Did you really mean to include Short Sun in the list of books / series that are not the same? And not Knight / Wizard?

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brunians at brunians.org — 14 Apr 2009, 15:17 · in reply to James Wynn

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Jonathan Goodwin — 14 Apr 2009, 15:37 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

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Robin Dunn — 14 Apr 2009, 15:42 · in reply to Transentient

It's possible Wolfe spent more time editing the Book of the New Sun than most of his other works - I remember being very impressed that he had all four books in draft form before publishing the first.

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James Wynn — 14 Apr 2009, 16:03 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

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I think I can explain this feeling.

Superman in his own comic has the feeling of a god and savior. However, put him in The Justice League, and he suddenly seems like a project manager in a cape (at worst) or a player manager on an athletic team (at best). You put a bunch of superheroes in the same room and they're all diminished. Have them talk on the street at 2 in the afternoon in front of a movie theater and you've got camp. (But I *like* camp!)

Wolfe's fiction is like that. FHoC? Great. Peace? Astounding. BotNS? Miraculous. But he keeps doing it, doesn't he? He keeps creating dense, occulted fiction that readers might never find the bottom of. So some people (like Dozois) say, "Agh! It's a racket! He had *one* successful novel and he's just repeating it over and over because that's what people want." So, unique, intricately-crafted, difficult fiction is a racket?

(I realize Dozois doesn't put it quite that strongly. I've spoken with him and he considers Wolfe to be at least one of the best in SciFi)

The fact is that this is Wolfean fiction. He's often categorized with other New Science Fiction types like LeGuin and Tiptree and Dick but he's really nothing like them craftsman-wise. He had moderate success with FHoC, much less with Peace, far less with Devil in the Forest, and then he blew the doors off with New Sun. It's probably agreed that "Free Live Free" and "There Are Doors" and "Castlevision" and "Pandora" are not as riveting as Soldier of the Mist and Solider of

Arete. Solider of Sidon was less popular as well IMO because Wolfe was dealing with less popularly familiar mythology (African). I haven't read Pirate Freedom, but based on the lack of discussion about it here, it probably doesn't have the universal appeal of some others. "A poet is a man who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times." Randall Jarrell

On the other hand, IMO, Wolfe's subtlety has unexpected effects on the reader. On first read, I thought AEG was a decent, but unspecial Wolfean novel in the style of SciFi pulp. I thought I understood it. It was only later that I realized that the puzzles themselves --let alone the answers-- had gone right over my head.

Many people find Long Sun accessible and satisfying because they think it has a generally reliable narrator and the narrative is not so occulted. They are wrong. I think the most valid criticism of Short Sun (I don't agree with it) is that it's very well crafted but it's just tooooo Wolfean: It's a bridge too far. Yet, many of the puzzles in Long Sun that readers didn't know were puzzles are resolved in Short Sun--can ONLY be resolved in the Short Sun--and the answers go right over those readers heads because they weren't looking for answers. So is that a defect in the books?

J.

Fernando Q. Gouvêa — 14 Apr 2009, 16:03 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Well, I don't know. I remember when reviewers used to complain that Wolfe was too difficult (for example, an infamous review by Orson Scott Card). There's no doubt he reacted to that and tried to be more accessible at times. For me, however, it's not a matter of decline over time, but of variability. No author can hit the jackpot always. Fifth Head, Peace, New Sun were roughly contemporaneous, after all, with Devil in a Forest, Free Live Free, There Are Doors, Castleview.

To my taste, Castleview and Pandora are distinctly weaker than Pirate Freedom or An Evil Guest.

Similarly with the shorter work. Wolfe seems to have weighted his "Best" volume heavily towards the older stuff, but I'm not convinced that the newer stories are not as good. Different, certainly. But "Ziggurat", say, is as good a story as "The Death of Doctor Island", and perhaps better. For one thing, it's far more complex morally.

Fernando

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Fernando Q. Gouvea
Carter Professor of Mathematics
Colby College Editor, MAA FOCUS
5836 Mayflower Hill Editor, MAA Reviews
Waterville, ME 04901 <http://mathdl.maa.org/mathDL/19/>
<http://www.colby.edu/~fqgouvea>

What makes the universe so hard to comprehend is that there's nothing to compare it with.

James Wynn — 14 Apr 2009, 16:09 · in reply to Robin Dunn

It's possible Wolfe spent more time editing the Book of the New Sun than most of his other works - I remember being very impressed that he had all four books in draft form before publishing the first.

I'm convinced that Wolfe must have had "The Book of the Short Sun" well-plotted before "Nightside of the Long Sun" was published. New Sun was conceived as a single novel. It was only the business of publishing that caused it to be broken into four.

J.

brunians at brunians.org — 14 Apr 2009, 16:29 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

No doubt about Chomsky.

To verify my intuition that this was some type of phonetic attempt at "wanker," I searched and saw that someone on another forum calling himself "brunians" applied this epithet to Chomsky, thus verifying another intuition I had.

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FWIW I think it was an appropriate question. It seems I'm not the only one who thought so.

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brunians at brunians.org — 14 Apr 2009, 16:39 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

By the way, as far as I know 'ouanquerre' is an alternate spelling of wanker. Sort of like 'buncombe' (for bunkum). I certainly didn't invent the word. Henry Mencken invented buncombe, maybe ouanquerre too.

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On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 12:32 AM, ?<brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Josh: So why don't you like the book, Jon? I understand from your article that you don't like it: that is abundantly obvious. But I think a review of this nature would be more useful if you would include a paragraph - even half a paragraph - where you give your reasons for not liking it.

Jon: I thought I did in the post, but here it is again: I think the book (and several others) rely on the author's well-earned reputation for subtlety to mask or adorn what are essentially undeveloped pot-boilers. The time-travel aspect of *Pirate Freedom* illustrates this nicely, I think.

Josh: i want to apologize for my last remark, which I was very wrong to pass.

You are entitled to your opinion, of course, I was at the tail end of a frazzled day.

I don't agree with you about *Pirate Freedom*, but these couple of sentences

do make more clear your problems with the book. ?Again, my apologies.

FWIW I think it was an appropriate question. It seems I'm not the only one who thought so.

J.

Jonathan Goodwin — 14 Apr 2009, 16:46 · in reply to Fernando Q. Gouvêa

I agree with you about "*The Ziggurat*," but I also think *_There Are Doors_* is a much better book than the two most recent novels. I also don't think that *Pandora* or *Castlevue* is encumbered by unnecessary (or, "inorganic") Wolfeanism in the way I thought *AEG* or *PF* was, which would fit the audience/editorial expectation hypothesis.

2009/4/14 "Fernando Q. Gouvêa" <fqgouvea at colby.edu>:

Well, I don't know. I remember when reviewers used to complain that Wolfe was too difficult (for example, an infamous review by Orson Scott Card). There's no doubt he reacted to that and tried to be more accessible at times. For me, however, it's not a matter of decline over time, but of variability. No author can hit the jackpot always. *Fifth Head*, *Peace*, *New Sun* were roughly contemporaneous, after all, with *Devil in a Forest*, *Free Live Free*, *There Are Doors*, *Castlevue*.

To my taste, *Castlevue* and *Pandora* are distinctly weaker than *Pirate Freedom* or *An Evil Guest*.

Similarly with the shorter work. Wolfe seems to have weighted his "Best" volume heavily towards the older stuff, but I'm not convinced that the newer stories are not as good. Different, certainly. But "*Ziggurat*", say, is as good a story as "*The Death of Doctor Island*", and perhaps better. For one thing, it's far more complex morally.

Fernando

How many of you agree that the Wolfe of *Fifth Head*, *Peace*, *New Sun*, *Endangered Species* (partially), and *Death of Dr. Island* and *OS* and *OS* is not even recognizably the same author as that of *Pirate Freedom*, *An Evil Guest*, or the *Short Sun*? (Shared concerns, yes. The quality of execution, however, is more like that of a bad imitator.)

--

=====

=
Fernando Q. Gouvea ? ? ? ? ? Carter Professor of Mathematics — Colby
College ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? Editor, MAA FOCUS
5836 Mayflower Hill ? ? ? ? ? ? Editor, MAA Reviews
Waterville, ME 04901 ? ? ? ? ? ? <http://mathdl.maa.org/mathDL/19/>
<http://www.colby.edu/~fqgouvea>

What makes the universe so hard to comprehend is that there's nothing to
compare it with.

Matthew Groves — 14 Apr 2009, 19:04 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 10:17 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> (repeatedly) wrote:
ouanquerre

Is this some sort of modish spelling of "wanker"?

Jeffrey Brent McBeth — 14 Apr 2009, 19:11 · in reply to Matthew Groves

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 02:04:15PM -0500, Matthew Groves wrote:
On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 10:17 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> (repeatedly) wrote:
ouanquerre

Is this some sort of modish spelling of "wanker"?

Yup, so popular, that google shows him and one other guy using it.

Jeff

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over
the man who cannot read them."
-- Mark Twain

brunians at brunians.org — 14 Apr 2009, 19:14 · in reply to Matthew Groves

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 10:17 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> (repeatedly)
wrote:

ouanquerre

Is this some sort of modish spelling of "wanker"?

It's not particularly modish. It may be very old.

.

David Stockhoff — 14 Apr 2009, 21:45 · follows brunians at brunians.org

No doubt you are right, Josh. I'm sure it's Occitan or Languedoc. That would explain the paucity
of Google hits. ----- Message: 7 Date: Tue, 14 Apr 2009 15:14:26 -0400 (EDT)
From: brunians at brunians.org Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links To: "The Urth Mailing List"
<urth at lists.urth.net> Message-ID: <13080.72.171.0.145.1239736466.squirrel at
brunians.org> Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 10:17 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> (repeatedly) wrote:

ouanquerre

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It's not particularly modish. It may be very old.

brunians at brunians.org — 14 Apr 2009, 23:13 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Possibly so.

.

No doubt you are right, Josh. I'm sure it's Occitan or Languedoc. That would explain the paucity of Google hits. -----

Message: 7 Date: Tue, 14 Apr 2009 15:14:26 -0400 (EDT) From: brunians at brunians.org Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Message-ID: <13080.72.171.0.145.1239736466.squirrel at brunians.org> Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 10:17 AM, <brunians at brunians.org> (repeatedly) wrote:

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avast! Antivirus: Outbound message clean.
Virus Database (VPS): 090414-0, 04/14/2009
Tested on: 4/14/2009 5:45:21 PM
avast! - copyright (c) 1988-2009 ALWIL Software.
<http://www.avast.com>

don doggett — 15 Apr 2009, 01:55 · follows brunians at brunians.org

Doggerel

www.don-doggett.blogspot.com

Many people find Long Sun accessible and satisfying because they think it has a generally reliable narrator and the narrative is not so occulted. They are wrong. I think the most valid criticism of Short Sun (I don't agree with it) is that it's very well crafted but it's just tooooo Wolfean: It's a bridge too far. Yet, many of the puzzles in Long Sun that readers didn't know were puzzles are resolved in Short Sun--can ONLY be resolved in the Short Sun--and the answers go right over those readers heads because they weren't looking for answers. So is that a defect in the books?

I agree, and I would go a step farther and say that LS and SS are really one novel. SS is basically a continuation of the epilogue in LS and doesn't stand at all on its own. And LS is brilliantly written (better than New Sun, really) but the plot is unsatisfying without the revelations of SS.

Don

Stuart Hamm — 15 Apr 2009, 02:11 · in reply to don doggett

I agree FWIW

I am a big fan of the short stories (earlier than later), and TBotNS got me hooked for life...but for my "Desert Island " book I would take? Long Sun and Short Sun as 1 book and be happy to read it over and over and over and over and....

?????????-\\~S~//-

???? Skype? stuart.hamm

myspace.com/stuhamm

? ??? stuarthamm.net

--- On Tue, 4/14/09, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote: From: don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Date: Tuesday, April 14, 2009, 6:55 PM

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www.don-doggett.blogspot.com

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Don

John Watkins — 15 Apr 2009, 02:21 · in reply to don doggett

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 9:55 PM, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote:

Doggerel

www.don-doggett.blogspot.com

Many people find Long Sun accessible and satisfying because they think it has a generally reliable narrator and the narrative is not so occulted. They are wrong. I think the most valid criticism of Short Sun (I don't agree with it) is that it's very well crafted but it's just tooooo Wolfean:

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I think that Long Sun stands just fine on its own, but is certainly better with Short Sun as well. Short Sun is really Gene's treat for his biggest fans, no one else could read it.

I do agree that Nettle is apparently the best writer of Wolfe's characters.

Don

Allan Anderson — 15 Apr 2009, 04:19 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

Interesting write-up, Jon. Although I found a fun blend of salty adventure and mystery in Pirate Freedom, I can sympathize with your finding it dry for a pirate story and pointlessly convoluted when you try to poke behind the curtains.

But it has some other virtues! There's the neat sort of breakdown of the pirate myth at the hands of the modern narrator. There's the tension between lawlessness and law (political, moral, violent) -- the fine balance between consensual governance and rule by intimidation on the ships.

While you found the puzzles and mysteries disappointing, my biggest complaint would be about the barren characters. They all seemed like one-dimensional puppets dancing around Chris. They start off full of flavor, like the liberated slave Azuka, but then never seem to develop past the first taste. Even if it's done for effect, showing the limits of the narrator, it's still disappointing.

I don't blame him for knocking off a couple of shorter, lighter works, though. And I'm looking forward to teasing out the puzzles of An Evil Guest (just about halfway through now, and enjoying the style and dialog).

On Apr 13, 2009, at 10:18 PM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:
I believe I came to that conclusion a few years ago myself.

I recently made some disappointed comments on Pirate Freedom:

<http://www.jgoodwin.net/?p=647>

How many of you agree that the Wolfe of Fifth Head, Peace, New Sun, Endangered Species (partially), and Death of Dr. Island and OS and OS is not even recognizably the same author as that of Pirate Freedom, An Evil Guest, or the Short Sun? (Shared concerns, yes. The quality of execution, however, is more like that of a bad imitator.)

There are quite a few advocates (including Dave Tallman on the wiki) of the theory that the narrator is himself a puppet, dismissed by this commentator.

I don't buy it myself either, but it is slightly nagging...

best,

Mo

~ # ~

WolfeWiki now at:

<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/>

Matthew Keeley — 15 Apr 2009, 04:38 · in reply to John Watkins

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 10:21 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04@gmail.com> wrote:

I think that Long Sun stands just fine on its own, but is certainly better with Short Sun as well. ?Short Sun is really Gene's treat for his biggest fans, no one else could read it.

I do agree that Nettle is apparently the best writer of Wolfe's characters.

Don

Short Sun frustrates me a bit; it has some wonderful moments like the sewers on Green, and it's nice to see certain returning characters, but I think Wolfe overdoes (or his characters overdo) some aspects of the book. For example, did we really need all that Scottish-like dialect from Pig? And I sometimes wish Wolfe would cut back on the long dialogues about How Things Work - Taluses, ships, etc.

Perhaps I should reread Short Sun - There are parts of it I like just as much if not more than New Sun, and that is very high praise from me.

I liked An Evil Guest and Pirate Freedom, but both seem to me to be minor Wolfe. I'd take Castlevue over either of them, though I'm rather biased, as I'm a great fan of Arthurian lit.

-Matt

David Stockhoff — 15 Apr 2009, 12:01 · follows Matthew Keeley

I find BotNS has a comic aspect that has receded with each Sun novel since. Almost every scene in which Severian deals with other people is either a hilarious set piece or a riff on a well-worn tale: Severian in the catacombs with Ultan, Severian in bed with Baldanders, Severian on stage with Dr Talos. Shadow keeps me in a constant state of chuckling.

I miss this tone in the later books. Silk's tale sometimes has a sly sense of humor, but SS seems to have almost no sense of humor at all, as far as I recall. I assume this is partly because a comedy of manners is hard to pull off when the society itself is formless and the "manners" unspecified, as among the isolated farms of Blue. Or else it's just harder to detect. It may also be because Wolfe started to treat his subject more seriously, if he did do so.

But another likely factor is that BotNS was written with dozens, if not hundreds, of literary

predecessors in mind, and fantasy and satire are rarely far apart. Urth's society is recognizable; the Whorl's is not, or at least not so readily. And the later books' antecedents seems to lie less in Chesterton and Vance than in older myth. IMHO.

Message: 4

Date: Tue, 14 Apr 2009 19:11:56 -0700 (PDT)

From: Stuart Hamm <hammstu at sbcglobal.net>

Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <648691.66443.qm at web81408.mail.mud.yahoo.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

I agree FWIW

I am a big fan of the short stories (earlier than later), and TBotNS got me hooked for life...but for my "Desert Island " book I would take? Long Sun and Short Sun as 1 book and be happy to read it over and over and over and over and....

?????????-\\~S~//-

??? Skype? stuart.hamm

myspace.com/stuhamm

? ??? stuarthamm.net

--- On Tue, 4/14/09, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote:

From: don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links

John Watkins — 15 Apr 2009, 12:12 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Oreb remains funny throughout, but I agree--there's little humor in Short Sun. It's a melancholy work.

On Wed, Apr 15, 2009 at 8:01 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

I find BotNS has a comic aspect that has receded with each Sun novel since.

Almost every scene in which Severian deals with other people is either a hilarious set piece or a riff on a well-worn tale: Severian in the catacombs with Ultan, Severian in bed with Baldanders, Severian on stage with Dr Talos. Shadow keeps me in a constant state of chuckling.

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Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <648691.66443.qm at web81408.mail.mud.yahoo.com>
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--- On Tue, 4/14/09, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote:
From: don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links

Transient — 15 Apr 2009, 12:27 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

On Apr 15, 2009, at 12:38 AM, Matthew Keeley wrote:
And I sometimes wish Wolfe would cut back on the
long dialogues about How Things Work - Taluses, ships, etc.

No! You cannot have this. ;/

Matthew Keeley — 15 Apr 2009, 13:11 · in reply to Transient

On Wed, Apr 15, 2009 at 8:27 AM, Transient <transient at gmail.com> wrote:

On Apr 15, 2009, at 12:38 AM, Matthew Keeley wrote:
?And I sometimes wish Wolfe would cut back on the
long dialogues about How Things Work - Taluses, ships, etc.
No! You cannot have this. ;/

I didn't think I'd get it. And I do like it sometimes - I'm actually fairly fond of the talus section, for example, or the section on librarian recruitment in Shadow.

-Matt

James B. Jordan — 15 Apr 2009, 13:50 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

At 12:44 AM 4/14/2009, you wrote:

How many of you agree that the Wolfe of Fifth Head, Peace, New Sun, Endangered Species (partially), and Death of Dr. Island and OS and OS is not even recognizably the same author as that of Pirate Freedom, An Evil Guest, or the Short Sun? (Shared concerns, yes. The quality of execution, however, is more like that of a bad imitator.)

Remember that The Devil in a Forest is an earlier work, and also a juvenile (as Pirate is for young adults). Also, remember that Wolfe has always written transformative homages to other writers, and in a

lighter vein (as Evil Guest): I think of the early Big Fat Robot Nero Wolfe detective stories. At the same time, I don't think a writer nearing 80 is going to embark on a project as immense as the New Sun quartet.

Nutria

James B. Jordan
Director, Biblical Horizons
Box 1096
Niceville, FL 32588
<http://www.biblicalhorizons.com>

David Stockhoff — 15 Apr 2009, 14:04 · follows James B. Jordan

True. And Oreb's comic relief tends to highlight that melancholia, at least in retrospect.

Much of the tone in BotNS comes from Severian himself, of course, and he experienced everything he narrates. The later narrators are, for me, harder to get a grip on, especially since they are less settled in terms of identity. Also, Nettle narrates from a distant (and unexalted) perspective.

Message: 4
Date: Wed, 15 Apr 2009 08:12:04 -0400
From: John Watkins <john.watkins04@gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links

Adam Thornton — 15 Apr 2009, 14:17 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Apr 15, 2009, at 7:01 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:
I find BotNS has a comic aspect that has receded with each Sun novel since. Almost every scene in which Severian deals with other people is either a hilarious set piece or a riff on a well-worn tale: Severian in the catacombs with Ultan, Severian in bed with Baldanders, Severian on stage with Dr Talos. Shadow keeps me in a constant state of chuckling.

Moby-Dick works like that too. The scene with Baldanders at the inn is, of course, a direct homage.

Also, if you're looking at me in confusion, yes, _Moby-Dick_ is funny. Often really, really funny. I recommend it.

Adam

James Wynn — 15 Apr 2009, 15:05 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff:
But another likely factor is that BotNS was written with dozens, if not hundreds, of literary predecessors in mind, and fantasy and satire are rarely far apart. Urth's society is recognizable; the Whorl's is not, or at least not so readily. And the later books' antecedents seems to lie less in Chesterton and Vance than in older myth. IMHO.

Well, the older myths are certainly close to the surface in SS, as they are in LS. But for literary references, I recommend you read ER Burrough's "Mars" series and Lan Wright's "The Last Hope of Earth" (aka "The Creeping Shroud"). Also, Wright's "Pictures of Pavanne" has some rather obvious homages in LS/SS. I haven't read anything else by Wright, but it wouldn't surprise me. Also, Dan'l recently identified Heinlein's "Orphans of the Sky" as an identifiable reference. "Pinocchio" is an important source. Yarboro's "Hyacinths" about about artists who dream stories for televised entertainment might have been on Wolfe's mind. Fleming's "Brazilian Adventure" is a source for LS. I haven't re-read it since reading SS, but it wouldn't be unlikely since it is about a boat ride up the Amazon river.

There are almost certainly more. SS has an aroma of many secret flavorings which I cannot identify.

J.

John Watkins — 15 Apr 2009, 15:18 · in reply to James Wynn

Undoubtedly an inadvertent omission--SS has aspects of Lewis's Ransom books.

On Wed, Apr 15, 2009 at 11:05 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
David Stockhoff:

But another likely factor is that BotNS was written with dozens, if not hundreds, of literary predecessors in mind, and fantasy and satire are rarely far apart. Urth's society is recognizable; the Whorl's is not, or at least not so readily. And the later books' antecedents seems to lie less in Chesterton and Vance than in older myth. IMHO.

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There are almost certainly more. SS has an aroma of many secret flavorings which I cannot identify.

J.

David Stockhoff — 15 Apr 2009, 15:43 · follows John Watkins

Oh, Moby-Dick is hilarious! I wouldn't have laughed at it 20 years ago, but now I see it. The characters are over the top, and the long didactic sections---since we're talking about Wolfe's occasional lectures--are very funny.

Message: 6
Date: Wed, 15 Apr 2009 09:17:40 -0500
From: Adam Thornton <adam at io.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <78777252-67CC-4A69-80DE-55CA120A5E97 at io.com>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=US-ASCII; format=flowed; delp=yes

On Apr 15, 2009, at 7:01 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

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Adam

Jerry Friedman — 15 Apr 2009, 17:07 · in reply to John Watkins

--- On Wed, 4/15/09, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:
Undoubtedly an inadvertent omission--SS has aspects of
Lewis's Ransom books.

...

I'd be interested if you'd point those out (or some, if there are too many).

My impression of /Pirate Freedom/ is what James Jordan confirmed-- it was a YA book. The time travel is obviously necessary if you want to have a contemporary (or quasi-modern) become a Pirate of the Caribbean. Brother Ignacio's being the older Chris was predictable for someone who's read a lot of sf, and maybe unnecessary--Chris can try to go back just by going to the monastery in Cuba, without knowing who he's going to turn into.

Jerry Friedman

John Watkins — 15 Apr 2009, 17:15 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

The obvious one, to me, is that the series is a trilogy set on three different worlds. The first is set on an old world and deals with a human being coming into contact with that world's native race, which is tall and slender in appearance and which is "better and wiser" than humanity. He discovers that the religion of this alien species is a cognate, at least in some aspects, with his

own. The second book deals, in part, with that human being's subsequent adventures on a jungle world in which he is wound unto death and miraculously restored (albeit Lewis retconned the severity of Ransom's wound a little.) The third is set, in part, on the narrator's home world.

I would also hazard that Ransom's shift in personality from the Tolkienesque hero of *Perelandra* to the Williamsesque Christian/Arthurian figure of *That Hideous Strength* may have intrigued Wolfe--a flaw in Lewis's books, Wolfe makes the shifting nature of his narrator the strength and core theme of his own.

On Wed, Apr 15, 2009 at 1:07 PM, Jerry Friedman <jerry_friedman at yahoo.com> wrote:

--- On Wed, 4/15/09, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:

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Jerry Friedman

David Stockhoff — 15 Apr 2009, 17:19 · follows John Watkins

John, I think you have a thesis.

Message: 5

Date: Wed, 15 Apr 2009 13:15:06 -0400

From: John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links

To: jerry_friedman at yahoo.com, The Urth Mailing List
<urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID:

<93d4039f0904151015q64f6ebdf1bb707ebf5d17c2df at mail.gmail.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

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Jerry Friedman — 16 Apr 2009, 03:26 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

--- On Tue, 4/14/09, Matthew Keeley <matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com> wrote:
From: Matthew Keeley <matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Weekly blog links
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Tuesday, April 14, 2009, 10:38 PM
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with *Short Sun* as well. ?*Short Sun* is really
Gene's treat for his biggest
fans, no one else could read it.

I'll go along with that.

...

Short Sun frustrates me a bit; it has some wonderful
moments like the
sewers on Green, and it's nice to see certain returning
characters,
but I think Wolfe overdoes (or his characters overdo) some
aspects of
the book.

I think he overdid the returning characters, too.

For example, did we really need all that
Scottish-like dialect from Pig?

No. Nor did we need the mechanical verb-at-the-end sentences in Dorp. Oreb and the catachrest in LS were cute, but gimmicks like these strike me as going too far to make your characters sound different.

And we didn't need LS to consist entirely of dramatic scenes, in the sense of "The Cat in the Starfleet's Attic". I'm glad that in NS and SS, our narrators get to ruminate occasionally.

And I sometimes wish Wolfe would cut back on the
long dialogues about How Things Work - Taluses, ships, etc.

Me too, whether I can have it or not.

Perhaps I should reread *Short Sun* - There are parts of it I
like just
as much if not more than *New Sun*, and that is very high
praise from me.

...

For me, Horn's relationships with Sinew and Krait are among the best things Wolfe has ever done.

Jerry Friedman