

Urth Digest, Vol 63, Issue 5

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 10 Nov 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5510>

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David Stockhoff — 10 Nov 2009, 18:41

I was fortunate enough to read TFHoC first, as far as novels. I started noticing Wolfe as a writer of short stories.

I sympathize with the complaint that the narrative of TWK is harder to follow. The universe in which it occurs is at least as complex as TBotNS's, having several levels as well as time "travel." Not many smart and literate humans would be up to the task of coherently telling such a story. And on top of all that, Abel seems to be from the "real" world, which is of uncertain relation to the several otherworlds.

I think the illusion of "reality" is much better sustained in the Sun and Whorl. That is to say, (1) it's more science fiction than fantasy and (2) it seems to take place in "our" universe, so at least my expectations were higher in terms of coherence. I approached those texts thinking, "Make me believe!" With TWK, I simply thought, "Wizards! Knights! Giants! Oh my!"

Reading TWK, I spent the first book wondering whether elves, dwarves, and orcs were going to show up---how far was Wolfe going to take this Mabinogion or Morte d'Arthur? Another way to put it is that basic relationships (such as geographical or temporal) seem less important, more flexible than in Sun and Whorl. And Abel doesn't try very hard to help us.

Message: 3

Date: Mon, 9 Nov 2009 20:18:59 -0600

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>

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

Subject: Re: (urth) Wizard-Knight sucks, or, is there any scholarly research on it?

Message-ID: <0BBF4DDCD1B34379934AD0C15DE19953 at eMachinePC>

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

reply-type=response

Maybe Abel really is dumb and illiterate, but it was sometimes difficult to follow the narrative because Abel is a bad storyteller.

Well, honestly, the part about being a bad story-teller is true of Severian, as well (to the extent that it IS true). The Book of the New Sun was the first Wolfe story I'd read. I told the guy who recommended it that I thought Wolfe was a great creator of worlds but only a so-so writer. Then I read The Fifth Head of Cerberus and decided that --based on the two novels-- he was the best science fiction writer I'd ever read. But the "weaknesses" in the story-telling in TWK (if they are weaknesses) are the same as those in TBotNS.

J.

adamattman — 10 Nov 2009, 22:23 · follows David Stockhoff

that's plausible.

and it reminds me of this: (taken from:
<http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/wolfeint.html>)

Q: What is the difference between science fiction and fantasy?

GW: Plausibility, really. Science fiction is what you can make people believe; fantasy is what people have to suspend disbelief for. Many physicists believe that there will never be a faster-than-light drive -- it's impossible. But you can make people believe in one, since they don't know much physics. And there are some physicists who believe it is possible. If you talk about somebody genetically engineering unicorns, it's probably fantasy, because people don't believe in it. But it's so close that you can almost touch it; we're almost at the point where we can make a unicorn.

So it's all a matter of plausibility. Do people think, "The future might be like this?" If so, it's science fiction. If they think, "This could never happen," that's fantasy.

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J.

brunians at brunians.org — 10 Nov 2009, 23:23 · in reply to David Stockhoff

I believe that TWK is Wolfe's speculations as to what might become of a decent and relatively innocent young man of Celtic and Germanic descent, who is not a Christian or, indeed, particularly religious, after he dies violently.

It is cast in the form of a letter from beyond the grave.

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