

"been teaching literature for over 35 years"

The Urth list — 70 messages, 12 voices, 05 Sep 2013

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6431>

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Jeff Wilson — 05 Sep 2013, 21:52

Paul Cook has a ranty go at books he doesn't consider SF, including BOTNS. He considers the presence of medieval and Arthurian tropes with poor sfnal world building like the Urth failing to wobble from the lack of a moon (!!) to be false advertising.

<http://amazingstoriesmag.com/2013/09/science-fiction-science-fiction/>

Alas, the site editor has blocked comments after a torrent of coutner-ranting, but has offered to publish a suitably impersonal counter-column submission.

Would anyone like to join me in compiling some quotes and citations that poke holes in some of his underinformed opinions?

in particular:

- there's no moon, so the earth should wobble
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- events in vast antiquity not referred to, antiquity "not used"
- "Book Two has a long fairy tale inserted in the middle of the novel that goes absolutely nowhere and adds nothing to the novel"

It would be best to stick to the original 4 volumes and the pre-Urth short-stories if we can.

Jeff Wilson - < [jwilson at clueland.com](mailto:jwilson@clueland.com) >

A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab

< <http://www.tamut.edu/cil> >

David Stockhoff — 05 Sep 2013, 22:29 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

"No moon"? Am I missing something?

Also, this guy has written nothing I've ever heard of. I did find this, however:

<http://www.teleread.com/chris-meadows/sf-writer-paul-cook-warns-of-science-fictions-infection-by-girl-cooties/>

On 9/5/2013 5:52 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Christopher Simon — 05 Sep 2013, 22:36 · follows David Stockhoff

"Bujold tips her hand in the eloquence of her language (normally a good thing) and the attention to detail that only women would find attractive: balls, courts, military dress, palace intrigues, gossiping, and whispering in the corridors."

Kinda sexist too, isn't he?

-----Original Message-----

From: "Jeff Wilson" <jwilson at clueland.com>

Sent: 9/5/2013 5:52 PM

To: "urth at urth.net" <urth at urth.net>

Subject: (urth) "been teaching literature for over 35 years"

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David Stockhoff — 05 Sep 2013, 22:42 · in reply to Christopher Simon

Here's another gem:

"(Let's set aside the morality of investing our interest in a character who tortures people. Remember, the violence in Wolfe is partially influenced by the overt violence in the early 1980s of Orson Scott Card.

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Urth — 05 Sep 2013, 23:26 · in reply to David Stockhoff

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Sent from my iPad

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Craig Brewer — 06 Sep 2013, 00:41 · in reply to Urth

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Christopher Simon — 06 Sep 2013, 01:23 · follows Craig Brewer

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-----Original Message-----

From: "Urth" <jordonflatourth at gmail.com>
Sent: 9/5/2013 7:27 PM
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) "been teaching literature for over 35 years"

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aaron — 06 Sep 2013, 01:41 · in reply to Christopher Simon

Saw this first on facebook. After I read the article and realized the comments were closed, I left a comment on David Langford's FB post linking to it. In my comment I mentioned this person's inaccurate assumption that there is no moon in the New Sun world. The fact that it's green makes this person's comments even funnier. And Orson Scott Card? Please.

On Thu, Sep 5, 2013 at 9:23 PM, Christopher Simon
<kierkegaurdian at gmail.com> wrote:
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Jerry Friedman — 06 Sep 2013, 04:37 · in reply to Christopher Simon

You left out the best part of that quotation.

"But the romance elements creep in very early on. Bujold tips her hand in the eloquence of her language (normally a good thing) and the attention to detail that only women would find attractive: balls, courts, military dress, palace intrigues, gossiping, and whispering in the corridors. All of this is right out of Alexander Dumas."

Cook has just proved that Alexandre Dumas was a woman.

I supposed the violence in pre-1977 Wolfe is influenced by the shadow of Card thrown backward in time.

The part about volcanoes, mountain building, and subduction, though, is probably based on "I remembered that we rowed across the crater of a volcano. Might it not have been the Cumaean's kettle? Urth's fires were long dead, as Master Malrubius had taught us..." I don't know of anything that contradicts that--is there something?

Jerry Friedman

From: Christopher Simon <kierkegaardian at gmail.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>; "urth at urth.net" <urth at urth.net>
Sent: Thursday, September 5, 2013 4:36 PM
Subject: Re: (urth) "been teaching literature for over 35 years"

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Jerry Friedman — 06 Sep 2013, 04:40 · in reply to Christopher Simon

He certainly missed the sentence "When I had first come to realize, as a boy, that the green circle of the moon was in fact a sort of island hung in the sky, whose color derived from forests, now immemorially old, planted in the earliest days of the race of Man, I had formed an intention of going there..."? SotL, Ch. XIII.

Jerry Friedman

From: Christopher Simon <kierkegaurdian at gmail.com>

Jeff Wilson — 06 Sep 2013, 07:36 · in reply to Craig Brewer

On Thu, September 5, 2013 19:41, Craig Brewer wrote:
I've been teaching literature for over 15 years, and suddenly I feel very confident in my abilities....

I look forward to the time when I accumulate sufficient years to become infallible as well.

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
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Marc Aramini — 06 Sep 2013, 14:02 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 6, 2013, at 12:36 AM, "Jeff Wilson" <jwilson at clueland.com> wrote:

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Gerry Quinn — 06 Sep 2013, 15:45 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

But the Moon has no atmosphere — forests couldn't grow there!

Seriously, why bother responding? The guy is plainly clueless about any SF that exists outside very limited parameters. There are enough comments already pointing that out to him.

- Gerry Quinn

From: Jerry Friedman

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Jeff Wilson — 06 Sep 2013, 15:58 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On Fri, September 6, 2013 10:45, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Robin B. Smith — 06 Sep 2013, 16:00 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

It's already gotten more attention than it deserves.

On Fri, Sep 6, 2013 at 10:45 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

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From: Jerry Friedman <jerry_friedman at yahoo.com>

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Jerry Friedman — 06 Sep 2013, 17:11 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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Persuade the editor to do what??? Not let Cook write any more columns for him? That might work. The only reason to publish nonsense is that it's effective trolling, and since the editor closed the comments, he's probably not in favor of trolling.

Jerry Friedman

Jerry Friedman — 06 Sep 2013, 17:48 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

The part about volcanoes, mountain building, and subduction, though, is probably based on "I remembered that we rowed across the crater of a volcano. Might it not have been the Cumaean's kettle? Urth's fires were long dead, as Master Malrubius had taught us..." I don't know of anything that contradicts that--is there something?

By the way, Cook has this part backwards. He writes, "without vulcanism and tectonic plate induction in the ocean, carbon dioxide would not be removed from the atmosphere and recycled into the mantle where it can stay out of the atmosphere and not smother life."? However, subduction and vulcanism return carbon dioxide to the atmosphere after it's been sequestered in calcium carbonate on the sea floor. Without plate tectonics, the atmosphere would lose all its carbon dioxide in a million years.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=sZgB52BCa0UC&pg=PA173>

If Urth's tectonic activity has in fact stopped, then Wolfe does fail to address the problem of disappearing carbon dioxide--if it was known when he was writing. On the other hand, despite Severian's speculation that tectonicism might have stopped before the evolution of humanity, the actual stopping time might be much less than a million years before his time.

Of course, Erebus and Abaia might be scouring?extracting the CO2 from?oceanic calcium carbonate?to keep the ecosystem going, and their reason for wanting to enslave humanity might be only that they need humans to help with this process. Shortsighted of Severian not to go along.

Jerry Friedman

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 06 Sep 2013, 18:04 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

Interesting thought. Could the New Sun restart Urth's tectonic activity and thus its CO2 cycle? Would that put Floodmaster Severian and the Evil Twins on the same side?

As it happens, I'm reading an old Poul Anderson story about terraforming Venus. The colonists intend to flood the planet by starting up its dead vulcanism, releasing the water supposedly trapped in the mantle and spreading it across the surface. They also are busy converting the

paraformaldehyde/CO2 atmosphere into water and oxygen.

Now THAT'S science fiction! None of this silly torturer nonsense.

From: Jerry Friedman <jerry_friedman at yahoo.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Friday, September 6, 2013 1:48 PM
Subject: Re: (urth) "been teaching literature for over 35 years"

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If Urth's tectonic activity has in fact stopped, then Wolfe does fail to address the problem of disappearing carbon dioxide--if it was known when he was writing. On the other hand, despite Severian's speculation that tectonicism might have stopped before the evolution of humanity, the actual stopping time might be much less than a million years before his time.

Of course, Erebus and Abaia might be scouring?extracting the CO2 from?oceanic calcium carbonate?to keep the ecosystem going, and their reason for wanting to enslave humanity might be only that they need humans to help with this process. Shortsighted of Severian not to go along.

Jerry Friedman

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 06 Sep 2013, 18:28 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

Edit.

From: DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Friday, September 6, 2013 2:04 PM
Subject: Re: (urth) "been teaching literature for over 35 years"

Interesting thought. Could the New Sun restart Urth's tectonic activity and thus its CO2 cycle? Would that put Floodmaster Severian and the Evil Twins on the same side?

As it happens, I'm reading an old Poul Anderson story about terraforming Venus. The colonists intend to flood the planet by starting up its dead vulcanism [with hydrogen bombs], releasing the water supposedly trapped in the mantle and spreading it across the surface. They also are busy converting the paraformaldehyde/CO2 atmosphere into water and oxygen.

Now THAT'S science fiction! None of this silly torturer nonsense.

From: Jerry Friedman <jerry_friedman at yahoo.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Friday, September 6, 2013 1:48 PM
Subject: Re: (urth) "been teaching literature for over 35 years"

The part about volcanoes, mountain building, and subduction, though, is probably based on "I remembered that we rowed across the crater of a volcano. Might it not have been the Cumaean's kettle? Urth's fires were long dead, as Master Malrubius had taught us..." I don't know of anything that contradicts that--is there something?

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By the way, Cook has this part backwards. He writes, "without vulcanism and tectonic plate induction in the ocean, carbon dioxide would not be removed from the atmosphere and recycled into the mantle where it can stay out of the atmosphere and not smother life."? However, subduction and vulcanism return carbon dioxide to the atmosphere after it's been sequestered in calcium carbonate on the sea floor. Without plate tectonics, the atmosphere would lose all its carbon dioxide in a million years.

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Jerry Friedman

antonio at gmail.com — 06 Sep 2013, 20:44 · in reply to Robin B. Smith

My thoughts exactly. Terra is full of blabbering conceited illiterates. Which one are y'all going to hammer sense into next?

No dia 06/09/2013, ?s 17:00, "Robin B. Smith" <robinbsmith at gmail.com> escreveu:

It's already gotten more attention than it deserves.

Sergei SOLOVIEV — 06 Sep 2013, 20:52 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

J

To me one of the strongest points that can be used to rebuff Cook (who really seems to me a pompous idiot) is that most of the answers can be found in BOTNs itself - like Lune (the moon) he overlooked.

I think one of the aspects of the world described by Wolfe is loss of memory/unreliability of information Severian gets from others. Not long before, in times of Typhon, scientific information was much more available. So, why should we/he believe that plate tectonics and vulcanism really stopped? And if it stopped, why? Maybe Erebus, Abaia etc; have their role in that? Who knows where (how deep) their roots now are? But this fuzzy world picture is part of

what Wolfe describes!

And poor Cook thinks that our actual theories (like plate tectonics recycling CO2) are absolute truth?

According to the story of Cyriaca recently Urth was controlled by machines. Could they not (until recently) recycle all CO2? I think a very convincing answer may be built just on careful reading of BOTNs itself.

Cheers

Sergei Soloviev

Jerry Friedman wrote:

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Jerry Friedman

António Pedro Marques — 07 Sep 2013, 00:04 · in reply to Sergei SOLOVIEV

No dia 06/09/2013, às 21:52, Sergei SOLOVIEV <soloviev at irit.fr> escreveu:

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The person in question seems simple enough to think that if a character tells us some factoid about their world, then it must be so.

And poor Cook thinks that our actual theories (like plate tectonics recycling CO2) are absolute truth?

In that, alas, he is not alone. There are plenty of folks who think 'science' has got it all figured out. Usually, it's people who know very little of 'science' but like it a lot anyway.

Jeff Wilson — 07 Sep 2013, 04:26 · in reply to entonio at gmail.com

On Fri, September 6, 2013 15:44, entonio at gmail.com wrote:
My thoughts exactly. Terra is full of blabbering conceited illiterates.
Which one are y'all going to hammer sense into next?

Not the blabberer, the blabberer's gatekeeper. That is, taking a sufficiently persuasive rebuttal to the site editor that he asks the guy to clean up his act. I'm sure you would agree that a writer is more likely to heed their editor than a random reader?

Jeff Wilson - <jwilson at clueland.com >
A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
< <http://www.tamut.edu/cil> >

Jeff Wilson — 07 Sep 2013, 04:39 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

On Fri, September 6, 2013 13:04, DAVID STOCKHOFF wrote:
Interesting thought. Could the New Sun restart Urth's tectonic activity
and thus its CO2 cycle? Would that put Floodmaster Severian and the Evil
Twins on the same side?

I'm not sure if we've discussed it recently, but I believe the tectonic issues are moot because Sev's recognition of constellations from his era being visible over Apu Punchau's pampa put an upper limit of 50,000 - 100,000 years between them, due to apparent motion of the stars over time.

http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Popular_Science_Monthly/Volume_4/January_1874/Past_and_Future_of_a_Constellation

So, there's not enough time for current vulcanism to run down.

Jeff Wilson - <jwilson at clueland.com >
A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
< <http://www.tamut.edu/cil> >

Jerry Friedman — 07 Sep 2013, 17:52 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at clueland.com>
To: DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net>; The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

On Fri, September 6, 2013 13:04, DAVID STOCKHOFF wrote:
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So, there's not enough time for current vulcanism to run down.

I don't remember TUotNS well at all. Are you saying that we know plate tectonics was still going on in Apu-Punchau's time?

Jerry Friedman

Jerry Friedman — 07 Sep 2013, 17:54 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at clueland.com>

On Fri, September 6, 2013 15:44, entonio at gmail.com wrote:

My thoughts exactly. Terra is full of blabbering conceited illiterates.
Which one are y'all going to hammer sense into next?

Not the blabberer, the blabberer's gatekeeper. That is, taking a sufficiently persuasive rebuttal to the site editor that he asks the guy to clean up his act. I'm sure you would agree that a writer is more likely to heed their editor than a random reader?

I'd help with this.

Jerry Friedman

Jeff Wilson — 07 Sep 2013, 18:31 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On Sat, September 7, 2013 12:52, Jerry Friedman wrote:

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at clueland.com>

To: DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net>; The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

On Fri, September 6, 2013 13:04, DAVID STOCKHOFF wrote:

Interesting thought. Could the New Sun restart Urth's tectonic activity and thus its CO2 cycle? Would that put Floodmaster Severian and the Evil Twins on the same side?

I'm not sure if we've discussed it recently, but I believe the tectonic issues are moot because Sev's recognition of constellations from his era being visible over Apu Punchau's pampa put an upper limit of 50,000 - 100,000 years between them, due to apparent motion of the stars over time.

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So, there's not enough time for current vulcanism to run down.

I don't remember TUotNS well at all. Are you saying that we know plate tectonics was still going on in Apu-Punchau's time?

There's no reason to think they would have stopped any earlier for natural, gradual reasons. A loose black bean might be involved somehow, but even if that took effect instantly, it would still be taking effect instantly in Typhon's time, barely a thousand years before Sev's.

The slowing of geology processes and the refrigeration of the earth in somewhat of a historical time scale was once the current scientific thought in the 19th century (Bellamy mentions it in LOOKING BACKWARD), so the idea has a reason to be present and for the estimated time

necessary to be reckoned past, however mistakenly by the characters. But they have (or so it suits the translator G.W. to use) different works for mountain and volcano, and the crater lake of the averns is distinguished in kind from the mountain lake Diuturna, which seems off for such a living language to make plain if this is distinction found in a prehistoric detail of natural history.

Subtextually, Erebus in the south is very, very suggestive of Mt Erebus, the Antarctic volcano of our contemporal activity. There may be other, oblique references to vulcanism seen by human eyes in the books, but I'd have to hunt, or check the Lexicon, or both.

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
< http://www.tamut.edu/cil >

Jeff Wilson — 07 Sep 2013, 18:52 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On Sat, September 7, 2013 12:52, Jerry Friedman wrote:

I don't remember TUotNS well at all. Are you saying that we know plate tectonics was still going on in Apu-Punchau's time?

Aha! When Severian is struck by the Jailers' weapon, Urth trembles and the curtain wall section falls to match its place in his native time. His survival is attributed to the earthquake knocking him out of the line of fire or otherwise spoiling the gunner's aim, and everyone goes about their business. Ergo, earthquakes are known in Typhon's time and common enough in the area of Nessus that the inhabitants have become accustomed to them.

This is all described in URTN, however, and may indeed be a belated patch on previous BOTNS continuity as I expect the entire cyclic time thing is, unless we can find something in the first four volumes. The crooked sundial in Valeria's courtyard might be evidence....

Anyone recall any stuck doors or such mentioned?

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
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Jerry Friedman — 08 Sep 2013, 04:25 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

From: Ant?nio Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com>

No dia 06/09/2013, ?s 21:52, Sergei SOLOVIEV <soloviev at irit.fr> escreveu:

To me one of the strongest points that can be used to rebuff Cook (who really seems to me a pompous idiot) is that most of the answers can be found in BOTNs itself - like Lune (the moon) he overlooked.

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Severian gets from others. Not long before, in times of Typhon, scientific information was much more available. So, why should we/he believe that plate tectonics and volcanism really stopped?
And if it stopped, why? Maybe Erebus, Abaia etc; have their role in that?
Who knows where (how deep) their roots now are?

Or whether they have roots?

But this fuzzy world picture is part of what Wolfe describes!

The person in question seems simple enough to think that if a character tells us some factoid about their world, then it must be so.

Well, he might justifiably ask, if Wolfe intended plate tectonics to exist on Urth, how it makes the book better for Severian to tell us that it stopped. To improve the dying-earth atmosphere?

And poor Cook thinks that our actual theories (like plate tectonics recycling CO2) are absolute truth?

In that, alas, he is not alone. There are plenty of folks who think 'science' has got it all figured out. Usually, it's people who know very little of 'science' but like it a lot anyway.

It's hard to dispute that plate tectonics recycles CO2, since carbonate-containing rocks get subducted close to volcanoes that discharge CO2. The part that science might not have completely figured out is whether there are or could be other recycling mechanisms. Indeed, presumably with the genetic engineering that created the anpiels and dog-men and so forth, previous ages could have developed organisms that release CO2 from calcium carbonates on the ocean floor.

Jerry Friedman

Jerry Friedman — 08 Sep 2013, 04:34 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at clueland.com>

But they have

(or so it suits the translator G.W. to use) different works for mountain and volcano, and the crater lake of the averts is distinguished in kind from the mountain lake Diuturna, which seems off for such a living language to make plain if this is distinction found in a prehistoric detail of natural history.

We have words for geological features caused by glaciers, though the people who use those words aren't expecting another Ice Age any time soon. Also, Severian doesn't bother to specify "extinct volcano", which I think he'd do if he believed there were active volcanoes around.

[next post]

Aha! When Severian is struck by the Jailers' weapon, Urth trembles and the curtain wall section falls to match its place in his native time. His survival is attributed to the earthquake knocking him out of the line of fire or otherwise spoiling the gunner's aim, and everyone goes about their business. Ergo, earthquakes are known in Typhon's time and common enough in the area of Nessus that the inhabitants have become accustomed to them.

This is all described in URTN,

So it's irrelevant to Cook. I imagine most here will take it as evidence, though. Then an interesting question, as I said in my previous post, is how it makes the book better for Severian (or his source, Master Malrubius) to be lying or mistaken.

If TBotNS takes place a mere million years after (the analog of) our time, which Michael Andre-Driussi suggests is around an upper limit, I agree that there's no time for plate tectonics to come to a complete stop naturally. As Sergei Soloviev says, the question is why it happened. We might speculatively blame whoever put the black hole in the sun.

however, and may indeed be a belated patch on previous BOTNS continuity as I expect the entire cyclic time thing is, unless we can find something in the first four volumes. The crooked sundial in Valeria's courtyard might be evidence....

On the other hand, abandoned buildings in Nessus and giant humanoid sun-facing statues seem to last indefinitely.

Anyone recall any stuck doors or such mentioned?

Do earthquakes cause doors to get stuck?

Jerry Friedman

David Stockhoff — 08 Sep 2013, 12:41 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 9/8/2013 12:25 AM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

Well, he might justifiably ask, if Wolfe intended plate tectonics to exist on Urth, how it makes the book better for Severian to tell us that it stopped. To improve the dying-earth atmosphere?

I'm intrigued by Jeff's idea:

The slowing of geology processes and the refrigeration of the earth in somewhat of a historical time scale was once the current scientific thought in the 19th century (Bellamy mentions it in LOOKING BACKWARD), so the idea has a reason to be present and for the estimated time necessary to be reckoned past, however mistakenly by the characters.

We've seen plenty of evidence that Wolfe gleaned gems from the historical trash heap of incorrect comprehensions of the physical universe in writing BNS. In fact, one could take it a step further and say that his universe is entirely created from such pulpy cliches---

by which I mean to make a direct literary connection, because the pulp SF Wolfe admires, from Cthulhu to, I don't know, maybe Flash Gordon and beyond, consists almost entirely of disproven scientific assumptions. Look at how the surface environment of Venus has been (mis)conceived throughout the history of SF.

---knowing full well that they do not fit well together. Two other well-known cases of this are Severian's comments about geological strata and the various genetic theories of 5HC, which Lee has identified as BNS's thematic precursor. Would this not, in Wolfe's thinking, parallel all the valid but imperfect understandings of the *nonphysical *universe? It's all the same, on other words---the science we believe today will be the superstition of tomorrow.

So yes, it makes the book better.

Also, "death" is perhaps a relative term on a geologic time scale. In our time, small volcanic islands are created before our eyes. In Severian's, this may no longer occur, but the plates could experience settling for quite some time after the primary tectonic activity has either ceased or simply decreased enough that most people assume Urth is dead, because all the volcanoes are. Thus the earthquakes in Typhon's time.

Gerry Quinn — 08 Sep 2013, 13:19 · in reply to David Stockhoff

From: David Stockhoff

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Wasn't that prior to the discovery of radioactivity, though? [The limited lifespan that the Sun would have if its energy output were based on chemical or gravitational processes was also considered a problem for evolutionary theory, which required a longer timescale. But the Sun actually operates on nuclear fusion, and nuclear fission continues to heat the Earth internally.]

However I agree that Wolfe doesn't necessarily care where a scientific concept comes from. And he leaves matters intentionally vague; his motto is that the reader should not be able to disprove the scientific possibility of something (e.g. the gigantic godlings) as they do not have quite enough information to locate them in specific well-understood physical models. I do not think he always succeeds perfectly in this endeavour, but he does pretty well, and the reader should not fret too much about seeming scientific contradictions (or worse, build complex metaphysical hypotheses based on them).

One thing that strikes me is that the New Sun explicitly seems to restore the tectonic activity of Urth. This is predicted in the play of Dr. Talos ("continents will founder", etc.), and rendered explicitly in *_Urth of the New Sun_*.

It's hard to see scientifically how a white hole cancelling a black hole would do that - but seemingly it does. If so, one might argue for the theory that the black hole in the Sun somehow stopped plate tectonics. Perhaps what is in the Sun is not quite a black hole as we think of it. [For that matter, I think an actual black hole in the Sun would cause it to heat up - but even if I am correct, story clearly must trump science in this regard.]

- Gerry Quinn

Marc Aramini — 08 Sep 2013, 13:56 · in reply to David Stockhoff

there is that "thing" sleeping in the mine with the ape men, that Severian says he might "now" know what it is - related to tectonic movement? What is down there? Does a throwaway detail like that resonate with something else in the text?

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---knowing full well that they do not fit well together. Two other well-known cases of this are Severian's comments about geological strata and the various genetic theories of 5HC, which Lee has identified as BNS's thematic precursor. Would this not, in Wolfe's thinking, parallel all the valid but imperfect understandings of the nonphysical universe? It's all the same, on other words---the science we believe today will be the superstition of tomorrow.

So yes, it makes the book better.

Also, "death" is perhaps a relative term on a geologic time scale. In our time, small volcanic islands are created before our eyes. In Severian's, this may no longer occur, but the plates could experience settling for quite some time after the primary tectonic activity has either ceased or simply decreased enough that most people assume Urth is dead, because all the volcanoes are. Thus the earthquakes in Typhon's time.

David Stockhoff — 08 Sep 2013, 16:20 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 9/8/2013 9:19 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: David Stockhoff

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Wasn't that prior to the discovery of radioactivity, though? [The limited lifespan that the Sun would have if its energy output were based on chemical or gravitational processes was also considered a problem for evolutionary theory, which required a longer timescale. But the Sun actually operates on nuclear fusion, and nuclear fission continues to heat the Earth internally.]

Absolutely. Here's a clear summary of the four forces that create heat: isotopic decay (85%?), latent heat (5%?), residual heat (5%?), and gravitational differentiation (5%?): <http://phys.org/news62952904.html>. And yet the Earth IS gradually cooling.

However I agree that Wolfe doesn't necessarily care where a scientific concept comes from. And he leaves matters intentionally vague; his motto is that the reader should not be able to disprove the scientific possibility of something (e.g. the gigantic godlings) as they do not have quite enough information to locate them in specific

well-understood physical models. I do not think he always succeeds perfectly in this endeavour, but he does pretty well, and the reader should not fret too much about seeming scientific contradictions (or worse, build complex metaphysical hypotheses based on them).

Agreed. The hypothesis I had in mind was one supported by Wolfe's own remarks, to the effect that the ancients were just as smart as we are, just as foolish, and yet rarely completely wrong in their understanding of the universe. Their understanding was merely imperfect, as is ours. Thus gods and godlings may be as real as our scientific theories, cast-aside or not.

One thing that strikes me is that the New Sun explicitly seems to restore the tectonic activity of Urth. This is predicted in the play of Dr. Talos ("continents will founder", etc.), and rendered explicitly in *_Urth of the New Sun_*.

My thought exactly, although "founder" could simply mean "drown." If you do read it that way, I assume this would be caused by gravitational shocks from the New Sun's approach, leading not only to temporarily increased plate movement but perhaps also to increased heat+shear forces in the mantle, as I assume would arise in any massive transfer of energy to a planet.

As a side note, my conception of the New Sun's coming involves rapid (but sub-light-speed, so that it can be seen approaching) movement of a stellar mass across the galaxy with no deceleration and no inertia. Thus, rather than taking days, the catastrophic event takes only hours as the New Sun enters the solar system and "seats" itself at the center. It's quick. It's basically magic. Maybe I'm wrong.

It's hard to see scientifically how a white hole cancelling a black hole would do that - but seemingly it does. If so, one might argue for the theory that the black hole in the Sun somehow stopped plate tectonics. Perhaps what is in the Sun is not quite a black hole as we think of it. [For that matter, I think an actual black hole in the Sun would cause it to heat up - but even if I am correct, story clearly must trump science in this regard.]

My first question would be why the black hole did not cause the same effects (i.e., a flood) on approaching Urth, since none are mentioned.

One answer would be that it was small, having not yet eaten of the Sun; another would be that it did not approach but was inserted in place. Another would be that it wasn't a black hole as we now understand it---maybe more like the metaphorical opposite of a White Fountain, a kind of hyperdimensional drain pipe. Either way, suppression of heat-induced mantle activity doesn't seem a likely result, unless it magically drains heat from the entire solar system. Certainly reduced heat and light alone couldn't cool the upper mantle of a presumably volcanically active planet except by magic.

However, Wegener himself incorrectly thought that tidal drag was the primary cause of plate movement (he didn't realize the ocean crust moved too), and it's been proposed for certain Jovian moons as well. So depending on how we understand both the black hole and Earth tectonics, perhaps a case could be made for suppression by gravity. Maybe the black hole caused planetary orbits to slow (unless it sped them up), reducing tidal drag heat just enough to noticeably reduce volcanism and plate motion without changing interior conditions much. By the same token, a rapid shift in the other direction could wake them up again.

Gerry Quinn — 08 Sep 2013, 20:37 · in reply to David Stockhoff

From: David Stockhoff

On 9/8/2013 9:19 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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My thought exactly, although "founder" could simply mean "drown."

There was stuff about new continents rising too, though.

- Gerry Quinn

Sergei SOLOVIEV — 08 Sep 2013, 21:09 · in reply to Marc Aramini

The idea seems interesting, though to me the "thing" reminded (when I was reading) rather Balrog of Tolkien -

Another remark - I think that essential achievement of GW is creation of the atmosphere of "medieval" world in BOTNs, when there is very little reliable information (remember Severian's thoughts after his visit to sorcerer's willage about transmission of information about "magics"). If we compare it with our Middle Ages, since Antiquity there where scholars and educated people who knew that Earth is round, not flat, by the way, most of Roman Church hierarchy knew it, but people still believed in the flat Earth -

Sergei

Marc Aramini wrote:

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From: David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>

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

Sent: Sunday, September 8, 2013 5:41 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) "been teaching literature for over 35 years"

On 9/8/2013 12:25 AM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

Well, he might justifiably ask, if Wolfe intended plate tectonics to exist on Urth, how it makes the book better for Severian to tell us that it stopped. To improve the dying-earth atmosphere?

I'm intrigued by Jeff's idea:

The slowing of geology processes and the refrigeration of the earth in somewhat of a historical time scale was once the current scientific thought in the 19th century (Bellamy mentions it in LOOKING BACKWARD), so the idea has a reason to be present and for the estimated time necessary to be reckoned past, however mistakenly by the characters.

We've seen plenty of evidence that Wolfe gleaned gems from the historical trash heap of incorrect comprehensions of the physical universe in writing BNS. In fact, one could take it a step further and say that his universe is entirely created from such pulpy cliches---

by which I mean to make a direct literary connection, because the pulp SF Wolfe admires, from Cthulhu to, I don't know, maybe Flash Gordon and beyond, consists almost entirely of disproven scientific assumptions. Look at how the surface environment of Venus has been (mis)conceived throughout the history of SF.

---knowing full well that they do not fit well together. Two other well-known cases of this are Severian's comments about geological strata and the various genetic theories of 5HC, which Lee has identified as BNS's thematic precursor. Would this not, in Wolfe's thinking, parallel all the valid but imperfect understandings of the *nonphysical *universe? It's all the same, on other words---the science we believe today will be the superstition of tomorrow.

So yes, it makes the book better.

Also, "death" is perhaps a relative term on a geologic time scale. In our time, small volcanic islands are created before our eyes. In Severian's, this may no longer occur, but the plates could experience settling for quite some time after the primary tectonic activity has either ceased or simply decreased enough that most people assume Urth is dead, because all the volcanoes are. Thus the earthquakes in Typhon's time.

David Stockhoff — 08 Sep 2013, 21:45 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 9/8/2013 4:37 PM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: David Stockhoff On 9/8/2013 9:19 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

One thing that strikes me is that the New Sun explicitly seems to > restore the tectonic activity of Urth. This is predicted in the play of Dr. Talos ("continents will founder", etc.), and rendered > explicitly in _Urth of the New Sun_.

My thought exactly, although "founder" could simply mean "drown."

There was stuff about new continents rising too, though.

You're right---I had forgotten.

Jeff Wilson — 08 Sep 2013, 22:07 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Sun, September 8, 2013 11:20, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 9/8/2013 9:19 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: David Stockhoff

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in somewhat of a historical time scale was once the current scientific thought in the 19th century (Bellamy mentions it in LOOKING BACKWARD), so the idea has a reason to be present and for the estimated time necessary to be reckoned past, however mistakenly by the characters.

Wasn't that prior to the discovery of radioactivity, though? [The limited lifespan that the Sun would have if its energy output were based on chemical or gravitational processes was also considered a problem for evolutionary theory, which required a longer timescale. But the Sun actually operates on nuclear fusion, and nuclear fission continues to heat the Earth internally.]

Absolutely. Here's a clear summary of the four forces that create heat: isotopic decay (85%?), latent heat (5%?), residual heat (5%?), and gravitational differentiation (5%?): <http://phys.org/news62952904.html>. And yet the Earth IS gradually cooling.

Back in ~1980, I believe the isotopic decay source was the only one generally recognized, and it's possible that the metal depletion mentioned in the Book would be of **radioactive** metals, powering the great ships and robots aboard them. This explains a possible reason for there to be still funeral bronzes and moveable type in a metal poor world, and of course isotopes sent into space can't keep the crust lubricated.

However I agree that Wolfe doesn't necessarily care where a scientific concept comes from. And he leaves matters intentionally vague; his motto is that the reader should not be able to disprove the scientific possibility of something (e.g. the gigantic godlings) as they do not have quite enough information to locate them in specific well-understood physical models. I do not think he always succeeds perfectly in this endeavour, but he does pretty well, and the reader should not fret too much about seeming scientific contradictions (or worse, build complex metaphysical hypotheses based on them).

Agreed. The hypothesis I had in mind was one supported by Wolfe's own remarks, to the effect that the ancients were just as smart as we are, just as foolish, and yet rarely completely wrong in their understanding of the universe. Their understanding was merely imperfect, as is ours. Thus gods and godlings may be as real as our scientific theories, cast-aside or not.

One thing that strikes me is that the New Sun explicitly seems to restore the tectonic activity of Urth. This is predicted in the play of Dr. Talos ("continents will founder", etc.), and rendered explicitly in *_Urth of the New Sun_*.

My thought exactly, although "founder" could simply mean "drown." If you do read it that way, I assume this would be caused by gravitational shocks from the New Sun's approach, leading not only to temporarily increased plate movement but perhaps also to increased heat+shear forces in the mantle, as I assume would arise in any massive transfer of energy to a planet.

As a side note, my conception of the New Sun's coming involves rapid (but sub-lightspeed, so that it can be seen approaching) movement of a stellar mass across the galaxy with no deceleration and no inertia. Thus, rather than taking days, the catastrophic event takes only hours as the New Sun enters the solar system and "seats" itself at the center. It's quick. It's basically magic. Maybe I'm wrong.

I think the White Fountain is sub-stellar in magnitude and involves a form of negative mass, but otherwise as you say. Inertia is mitigated by the Kirbyesque machinery tended by the crews

below the surface of Yesod's artificial planet.

It's hard to see scientifically how a white hole cancelling a black hole would do that - but seemingly it does. If so, one might argue for the theory that the black hole in the Sun somehow stopped plate tectonics. Perhaps what is in the Sun is not quite a black hole as we think of it. [For that matter, I think an actual black hole in the Sun would cause it to heat up - but even if I am correct, story clearly must trump science in this regard.]

My first question would be why the black hole did not cause the same effects (i.e., a flood) on approaching Urth, since none are mentioned.

The black beans may have been seeds or kernels, quantum black holes humanly transportable and meant to grow later into larger ones. Some or most may have failed or merged, as it is later said that a singular worm gnaws at the heart of the sun. But that may be a bit if a gag on Wolfe's part, making them Mexican jumping beans!

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
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< http://www.tamut.edu/cil >

David Stockhoff — 08 Sep 2013, 22:40 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 9/8/2013 6:07 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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How far down would humans have to strip the mantle (using robots, of course) to mess with tectonics? Wouldn't the entire planetary surface have to be mined? or just where plates meet?

Gerry Quinn — 08 Sep 2013, 23:52 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: Jeff Wilson

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I interpret them as seeds of what later became the undersea lords - Erebus, Abaia et al.

(My pet hypothesis, admittedly coming from SF of a later era, is that they are nanotech-based seeds of near-Singularity level AIs.)

- Gerry Quinn

Jeff Wilson — 09 Sep 2013, 01:55 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Sun, September 8, 2013 17:40, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 9/8/2013 6:07 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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How far down would humans have to strip the mantle (using robots, of course) to mess with tectonics? Wouldn't the entire planetary surface have to be mined? or just where plates meet?

I have no idea, but it seems like no coincidence that *everywhere* in Sev's time anyone happens to delve into the earth, there is already evidence of previous diggers and builders. Even underwater, he discovers another huge drowned city beyond his own huge, newly drowned city. It apparently took only a few centuries to carve faces into every mountain in Sudamerica with the gear Typhon brought with him and was able to scrounge, and there have been many nations on Urth for many chiliads before him....

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David Stockhoff — 09 Sep 2013, 02:38 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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Jeff Wilson — 09 Sep 2013, 04:35 · in reply to David Stockhoff

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That, and the bits of plastic everywhere. Well, that would do away with any need for truly geologic time scales to explain Severian's remarks.

I'm not sure what you mean? What is it called?

I would think that any volume of plastic would indicate either enough time for new petroleum to form, or that not enough time had yet passed for processed plastic to crumble.

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
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Jerry Friedman — 09 Sep 2013, 04:47 · in reply to David Stockhoff

From: David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>

On 9/8/2013 12:25 AM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

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by which I mean to make a direct literary connection, because the *????*pulp SF Wolfe admires, from Cthulhu to, I don't know, maybe Flash

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????strata and the various genetic theories of 5HC, which Lee has
????identified as BNS's thematic precursor. Would this not, in Wolfe's
????thinking, parallel all the valid but imperfect understandings of the nonphysical universe? It's all
the same, on other words---the science we believe today will be the superstition of tomorrow.

So yes, it makes the book better.

Very interesting thoughts. Incidentally, they remind me of Severian's example of the hawk's nest. In the first place, it's fallacious. (Nest-building evolved in ground-living or even aquatic species before anyone got to the trees where one stick is useless.)? In the second, it seems that evolution by natural selection is the theory that Severian was taught. Does Wolfe see that as in the same category as other misconceptions he was taught?

Also, "death" is perhaps a relative term on a geologic time scale.

????In our time, small volcanic islands are created before our eyes. In ???Severian's, this may no longer occur, but the plates could ???experience settling for quite some time after the primary tectonic ???activity has either ceased or simply decreased enough that most ???people assume Urth is dead, because all the volcanoes are. Thus the ???earthquakes in Typhon's time.

Seems possible.

By the way, supposedly curative hot springs were important in ancient times. Are they mentioned anywhere in BotNS?

Jerry Friedman

Jerry Friedman — 09 Sep 2013, 05:19 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at clueland.com>

On Sun, September 8, 2013 11:20, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 9/8/2013 9:19 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Seems reasonable. It's certainly not from increased solar flux. However, that would be a LOT of energy. I'd wonder whether anybody at all could survive.

It's hard to see scientifically how a white hole cancelling a black hole would do that - but seemingly it does. If so, one might argue for the theory that the black hole in the Sun somehow stopped plate tectonics. Perhaps what is in the Sun is not quite a black hole as we think of it. [For that matter, I think an actual black hole in the Sun would cause it to heat up - but even if I am correct, story clearly must trump science in this regard.]

I think that a black hole, even as currently understood, would cool the sun if it were significantly cooler than the temperature of the interior of the sun. You can have some fun at <http://xaonon.dyndns.org/hawking/>.

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Wait, I thought the black beans grew into the sea monsters, which is why the woman had to throw them into the sea (instead of just dropping them on the ground) to make them effective. Robert Borski speculated along these lines.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=HykyT4UQ9JMC&pg=PA93>

Anyway, it would make literary sense if whoever or whatever made the sun cool also stopped plate tectonics (if it's stopped), and if the process that fixed one also fixed the other.

Jerry Friedman

Jeff Wilson — 09 Sep 2013, 06:03 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On Mon, September 9, 2013 00:19, Jerry Friedman wrote:

Seems reasonable. It's certainly not from increased solar flux. However, that would be a LOT of energy. I'd wonder whether anybody at all could survive.

Indeed, the Yesodis don't expect them to survive, which is why they settle the renewed earth with new people.

I think that a black hole, even as currently understood, would cool the sun if it were significantly cooler than the temperature of the interior of the sun. You can have some fun at <http://xaonon.dyndns.org/hawking/>.

It's really not fair to hold Wolfe to the standards of another 3-4 decades of theoretical physics. We no longer have the expectation of transcending space and dimension as when the Book was being written.

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Anyway, it would make literary sense if whoever or whatever made the sun cool also stopped plate tectonics (if it's stopped), and if the process that fixed one also fixed the other.

I think it's a stretch when she throws them on the *sun*'s grave.

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
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Gerry Quinn — 09 Sep 2013, 09:58 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

From: Jerry Friedman
[..]

On 9/8/2013 9:19 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

It's hard to see scientifically how a white hole cancelling a black hole would do that - but seemingly it does. If so, one might argue for the theory that the black hole in the Sun somehow stopped plate tectonics. Perhaps what is in the Sun is not quite a black hole as we think of it. [For that matter, I think an actual black hole in the Sun would cause it to heat up - but even if I am correct, story clearly must trump science in this regard.]

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if it were significantly cooler than the temperature of the interior of the sun.

You can have some fun at <<http://xaonon.dyndns.org/hawking/>>.

The Hawking temperature of a black hole in the sun doesn't matter. What matters is the energy emission from infalling matter as it accelerates and is compressed before reaching the Schwarzschild radius. Presumably it will form an accretion disk in the heart of the sun, but this will only happen when the radiation from the disk is sufficient to balance the hydrostatic pressure in a 'bubble' at the core of the sun. Which is pretty high pressure!

If the black hole is not parked in the centre but orbiting at some distance, it will cause a net increase in radiation. But over time 'friction' (in the most general sense) and mass increase will bring it to the centre.

So that's the first thing - the black hole is radiating pretty hard due to infalling matter. Actually it seems arguable that it might radiate about as much as was radiated from the same zone (the zone of balance) as was radiating before, in which case its direct influence on the sun's temperature would be slight considering the black hole alone.

However, the radiation from the black hole comes from already 'burned' solar matter. As it absorbs matter from the heart of the sun, more hydrogen-rich fuel will fall towards the centre of the sun. Surely this would be expected to release some extra energy due to nuclear fusion?

In the second place, as it absorbs the sun's core matter it should cause the sun to effectively age. Stars like the sun get hotter as they age, as the 'burn' zone where fusion takes place expands in radius. So for this reason, too, I would expect a black hole to cause the sun to heat up.

I'm sure - Wolfe's lack of detail wins again - one could find an argument for how cooling might occur. But on first principles, I'd expect a black hole dropped into the sun to have a warming

effect.

- Gerry Quinn

David Stockhoff — 09 Sep 2013, 11:49 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 9/9/2013 12:35 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

I would think that any volume of plastic would indicate either enough time for new petroleum to form, or that not enough time had yet passed for processed plastic to crumble.

Exactly. Severian doesn't call it plastic, but he refers to colored bits of something, so it has already crumbled.

Possibly it's a stretch and simply put there as a general clue to Severian's post-oil extraction time period. Since there could have been a vast amount of it lying around (probable; in fact I always took it as a bit of a joke, sort of dinosaurs-to-oil in reverse) I'd think it would be difficult to get a good estimate of how long it would take for all of it to disappear.

Jeffery Wilson — 09 Sep 2013, 12:01 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 9/9/2013 4:58 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

I'm sure - Wolfe's lack of detail wins again - one could find an argument for how cooling might occur. But on first principles, I'd expect a black hole dropped into the sun to have a warming effect.

In the late 1970s conception, a black hole is an Einstein-Rosenbridge to somewhere else; Abbadon in Urth's case. It's supposed to be literally sending part of the sun's substance and generated energy **away**. The remaining star is diminished in output per unit mass as well, as lighter stars are.

David Stockhoff — 09 Sep 2013, 12:13 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 9/9/2013 12:47 AM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

Very interesting thoughts. Incidentally, they remind me of Severian's example of the hawk's nest. In the first place, it's fallacious. (Nest-building evolved in ground-living or even aquatic species before anyone got to the trees where one stick is useless.) In the second, it seems that evolution by natural selection is the theory that Severian was taught. Does Wolfe see that as in the same category as other misconceptions he was taught?

Actually, I think his logic is not bad, given his lack of information:

... the first hawk to build one cannot have inherited its instinct to build from its parents, since they did not possess it. Nor could such an instinct have developed slowly, a thousand generations of hawks fetching one stick before some hawk

fetches two; because neither one stick nor two could be of the slightest use to the nesting hawks.

His conclusions are correct: neither hypothesis works. He seems to have a grade-school understanding of natural selection, but I think more to the point he is using logic to guess at an unguessable truth. He asks good questions but simply doesn't know how hawks evolved, and thus even these intelligent questions will not get him there:

The wheeling birds traced their hieroglyphics in the air, but they were not for me to read.

Also, "death" is perhaps a relative term on a geologic time scale.

In our time, small volcanic islands are created before our eyes. In Severian's, this may no longer occur, but the plates could experience settling for quite some time after the primary tectonic activity has either ceased or simply decreased enough that most people assume Urth is dead, because all the volcanoes are. Thus the earthquakes in Typhon's time.

Seems possible.

By the way, supposedly curative hot springs were important in ancient times. Are they mentioned anywhere in BotNS?

Not that I can recall.

Jeffery Wilson — 09 Sep 2013, 12:17 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 9/9/2013 6:49 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

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Ah! ".../the kind of sand that artists call polychrome (because flecks of every color are mixed with its whiteness) is actually not sand at all, but the glass of the past, now pounded to powder by aeons of tumbling in the clamorous sea."

/I can see the confusion of plastic with glass by unilluminated people, but it should be too light to mix with sand, and perhaps should be as familiar as Sev says prosthetic limbs are. / /

David Stockhoff — 09 Sep 2013, 12:39 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 9/9/2013 1:19 AM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

Anyway, it would make literary sense if whoever or whatever made the sun cool also stopped plate tectonics (if it's stopped), and if the process that fixed one also fixed the other.

That's basically what I was getting at. If we can't settle on a plausible physical explanation, there's always literary magic. The black hole (which after all is never called that) could simply taken as a general negative force and the NS as a positive one.

David Stockhoff — 09 Sep 2013, 12:41 · in reply to Jeffery Wilson

On 9/9/2013 8:01 AM, Jeffery Wilson wrote:

On 9/9/2013 4:58 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Right. As I suggested, a cosmic drain pipe, eventually replaced by a fire hose.

Gerry Quinn — 09 Sep 2013, 12:42 · in reply to Jeffery Wilson

From: Jeffery Wilson

On 9/9/2013 4:58 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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It doesn't matter (in engineering terms) whether stuff that reaches the event horizon goes somewhere else or not (that's kind of the definition of an event horizon). But an accretion disk outside the Schwarzschild radius is just standard dynamics for any super-condensed object. At a distance of several Schwarzschild radii, Newtonian physics will be reasonably accurate (albeit not in detail).

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// I can see the confusion of plastic with glass by unilluminated people, but it should be too light to mix with sand, and perhaps should be as familiar as Sev says prosthetic limbs are. //

You're right---glass, not plastic. I suppose the plastic is gone.

David Stockhoff — 09 Sep 2013, 12:46 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 9/9/2013 8:42 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Which is why I don't like the idea that the object has non-Newtonian effects outside/beyond the Sun.

Jeffery Wilson — 09 Sep 2013, 13:19 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 9/9/2013 7:42 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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What force acts on the matter to prevent it from following the usual swarm of elliptical orbits instead of the disk?

Marc Aramini — 09 Sep 2013, 13:42 · in reply to Jeffery Wilson

I've made a ton of science - biological claims about Wolfe ... But his interest as a symbolist always seems to me to keep the science at that level - it's representation rather than the hard application, like the giant nucleic acid building in House of Ancestors having some atavistic sympathetic vibration with the real person's genetic material it "matches". Accretion disks and schwarzschild radii seem ever so slightly "harder" than Wolfe's usual symbolic , tropish employment of science.

When he obsesses about something, it is usually closer to industrial engineering and the kinds of materials used - if I had to guess I would say theoretical physics are treated a little differently than the "let's build this based on these building properties" descriptions that crop up (like talus manufacturing - this is where science becomes less metaphorical for Wolfe)

We really should keep mid 70s or even earlier understandings in mind, unless we are just talking about probabilities here that are not lit crit in nature.

Are we talking about the text or the possibility of the text here? Because Borges or St Augustine will probably influence his treatment of a scientific mystery as much as his physics background

...

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 9, 2013, at 6:19 AM, Jeffery Wilson <jwilson at clueland.com> wrote:

On 9/9/2013 7:42 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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What force acts on the matter to prevent it from following the usual swarm of elliptical orbits instead of the disk?

Gerry Quinn — 09 Sep 2013, 13:50 · in reply to David Stockhoff

From: David Stockhoff

On 9/9/2013 8:42 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

It doesn't matter (in engineering terms) whether stuff that reaches the event horizon goes somewhere else or not (that's kind of the definition of an event horizon). But an accretion disk outside the Schwarzschild radius is just standard dynamics for any super-condensed object. At a distance of several Schwarzschild radii, Newtonian physics will be reasonably accurate (albeit not in detail).

Which is why I don't like the idea that the object has non-Newtonian effects outside/beyond the Sun.

Well, it could emit penetrating particles that have a heating effect when absorbed by matter.

Say it emitted a large pulse of particles similar to neutrinos, with a sufficiently small capture cross section that they could go through the Earth without much attenuation, but still much more absorbable by matter than neutrinos. If you give them a penetration depth of several Earth diameters, then for every 10^{12} tons or so mass-equivalent emitted in this form from the sun, you would heat the Earth by one degree. A few hundred times that amount emitted over a period of might be enough to restart tectonic activity. However, you then have the problem that it needs to be emitted over a rather long period, or the seas would boil, and the land would also become uncomfortably hot. I think however if this radiation was absorbed chiefly by iron and similar heavy metals, life-threatening consequences would be mitigated, especially if the pulse lasted a few hours. (This should also prevent dramatic consequences for Jupiter and Saturn. Skuld might have problems, though, if it is still inhabited.)

- Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn — 09 Sep 2013, 13:56 · in reply to Jeffery Wilson

From: Jeffery Wilson

On 9/9/2013 7:42 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

It doesn't matter (in engineering terms) whether stuff that reaches the event horizon goes somewhere else or not (that's kind of the definition of an event horizon). But an accretion disk outside the Schwarzschild radius is just standard dynamics for any super-condensed object.

What force acts on the matter to prevent it from following the usual swarm of elliptical orbits instead of the disk?

In a word, friction. The matter would be gaseous in this case and particles could not swirl in independent orbits. But even if it were composed of solid particles, they would soon collide, which would (1) heat the colliding particles (2) reduce their energy, and (3) set the colliding particles on closer trajectories than they were before.

- Gerry Quinn

Marc Aramini — 09 Sep 2013, 13:58 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Curious Gerry, do you have an extensive physics background? I have a biochem degree and I really love math to the more concrete calculus but physics was always one of my least favorite fields. If I were writing something this is the kind of information I would certainly gloss over, though of course half life and radioactive decay are familiar since I dealt with them all the time in chemistry.

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 9, 2013, at 6:50 AM, "Gerry Quinn" <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

From: David Stockhoff

On 9/9/2013 8:42 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Jeffery Wilson — 09 Sep 2013, 14:16 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 9/9/2013 8:56 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: Jeffery Wilson

On 9/9/2013 7:42 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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But all the stuff inside the sun's already colliding and touching.

How is the axis and irection of rotation of the disk picked?

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
< <http://www.tamut.edu/cil> >

Gerry Quinn — 09 Sep 2013, 14:30 · in reply to Marc Aramini

From: Marc Aramini

Curious Gerry, do you have an extensive physics background? I have a biochem degree and I really love math to the more concrete calculus but physics was always one of my least favorite fields. If I were writing something this is the kind of information I would certainly gloss over, though of course half life and radioactive decay are familiar since I dealt with them all the time in chemistry.

No, my degree is in engineering, but I have always taken an interest in physics.

Half the battle in this sort of thing is developing the confidence to do calculations with big, approximate numbers!

- Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn — 09 Sep 2013, 14:42 · in reply to Jeffery Wilson

From: Jeffery Wilson

On 9/9/2013 8:56 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:
From: Jeffery Wilson

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The Sun is already rotating, so its matter has angular momentum. Any difference in angular momentum gets magnified as an object shrinks (e.g. spinning skater pulling her arms in spins faster). And angular momentum is conserved - there's nowhere for it to go except into the black hole, and even then it's one of the three kinds of 'hair' a black hole can have - i.e. a black hole's

angular momentum can still interact with its surroundings, as can its electric charge and gravitational field. A rotating object has a defined axis as well as direction.

This has happened before as the solar system was formed: note how all the planets and asteroids are in a plane, rotating in the same direction (bar the odd outlier that had some heavy collisions that sent it on an unusual trajectory)? And the sun and planets also tend to rotate on their own axes in the same direction. The solar system has a specific axis of rotation, because collisions early on resulted in a single axis dominating.

Another example: water draining out of a bathtub picks a direction, and sticks with it.

- Gerry Quinn

Jerry Friedman — 09 Sep 2013, 14:57 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at clueland.com>

On Mon, September 9, 2013 00:19, Jerry Friedman wrote:

Seems reasonable. It's certainly not from increased solar flux.

However,
that would be a LOT of energy. I'd wonder whether anybody at all could survive.

Indeed, the Yesodis don't expect them to survive, which is why they settle the renewed earth with new people.

Good point.

I think that a black hole, even as currently understood, would cool the sun if it were significantly cooler than the temperature of the interior of the sun. You can have some fun at
<<http://xaonon.dyndns.org/hawking/>>.

It's really not fair to hold Wolfe to the standards of another 3-4 decades of theoretical physics.

That's why I said "even as currently understood". I was just thinking about what might happen with current physics, as I take it Gerry was too, not holding Wolfe to anything.

We no longer have the expectation of transcending space and dimension as when the Book was being written.

I don't remember that we did then--did we?

Wait, I thought the black beans grew into the sea monsters, which is why the woman had to throw them into the sea (instead of just dropping them on the ground) to make them effective. Robert Borski speculated along these lines.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=HykyT4UQ9JMC&pg=PA93>

Anyway, it would make literary sense if whoever or whatever made the sun cool also stopped plate tectonics (if it's stopped), and if the process that fixed one also fixed the other.

I think it's a stretch when she throws them on the *sun*'s grave.

I'm not following. What's a stretch? What's the sun's grave?

Jerry Friedman

Jeffery Wilson — 11 Sep 2013, 00:01 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 9/9/2013 9:57 AM, Jerry Friedman wrote:
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A popular treatment in print was THE IRON SUN: ACROSS THE UNIVERSE WITH BLACK HOLES (ISBN 0525134905, 9780525134909). Disney did a film called THE BLACK HOLE, and Blue Oyster Cult had some airplay with "Heavy Metal, Black and Silver".

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Jeff Wilson - <jwilson at clueland.com >
A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
< <http://www.tamut.edu/cil> >

Gerry Quinn — 11 Sep 2013, 00:18 · in reply to Jeffery Wilson

From: Jeffery Wilson

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Heh, I was going to mention BOC, along with Rush's Cygnus X-1!

- Gerry Quinn

David Stockhoff — 11 Sep 2013, 12:59 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 9/9/2013 9:42 AM, Marc Aramini wrote:

I've made a ton of science - biological claims about Wolfe ... But his interest as a symbolist always seems to me to keep the science at that level - it's representation rather than the hard application, like the giant nucleic acid building in House of Ancestors having some atavistic sympathetic vibration with the real person's genetic material it "matches". Accretion disks and schwarzschild radii seem ever so slightly "harder" than Wolfe's usual symbolic , tropish employment of science.

When he obsesses about something, it is usually closer to industrial engineering and the kinds of materials used - if I had to guess I would say theoretical physics are treated a little differently than the "let's build this based on these building properties" descriptions that crop up (like talus manufacturing - this is where science becomes less metaphorical for Wolfe)

That's very well put.

There seems to be a consensus here, if I may presume to summarize it:

(1) The Black Worm, whatever its nature, was put there to dim the sun.

We are told that it "ate" of the sun. Since the White Fountain correlates with the then-current theory of matter fountains, the Worm must have worked by progressively removing solar matter. The Worm also fits old mythical ideas about portents of decline and harbingers of doom, so it works well on a symbolic level. As an actual black hole, it presents problems.

(2) It DID dim the sun and cool Urth.

Did the Yesodis decide to shut down the experiment early? Was the intent to slowly freeze Urth to death? Was there a faction among them that wanted to give Urth one last chance? Their choice (Severian's choice too) was either to shut it down entirely or do another run with new subjects, but a few people escaped.

(3) It MAY also have somehow cooled Urth's mantle enough that volcanism stopped.

Known volcanoes are apparently dead (Erebus), and there is an atmosphere of stasis and decay. On the other hand, Urth may already have been really old. But earthquakes were known in Typhon's time, when the Worm appeared. Symbolic decay works better to explain this than physical cooling. The Worm could not have removed matter from Urth's mantle, so any direct effect on Urth would have to take a different path anyway.

(4) The White Fountain restored the sun's power.

Again, this would have been by adding or restoring matter to the sun. (Recall Silk's signs of addition and subtraction.)

(5) It also shocked Urth into catastrophic tidal floods---and possibly tectonic cataclysm as well.

I conclude the tectonics question is a red herring. If Urth is mere chiliads older, no one would notice the continents no longer moving (only the gradual subsidence of obvious activity). But if Urth is millions of years older . . . no one would remember any kind of activity at all, and STILL no one would notice the continents no longer moving. So any effects on continental movements would have been lost on virtually 100% of Urth's inhabitants. (Jonas might have been in a

position to notice such effects, but I don't think he mentions it.)

So what's the point? (I think this supports both Urth as 20,000 years in our "future" and an unnatural/supernatural/nonphysical explanation for any tectonic quiescence.) The quote from Dr Talus' play may be pure malarkey, or just a dramatic touch meant to get us to pay attention. Severian does not mention new volcanoes, new earthquakes, or new continents in UNS. If the continents do move again, it will be well out of the scope of his narrative.

Had Wolfe really meant us to think the Worm stopped plate motion---and that it was important---he would surely have inserted such motion into UNS to show that it had reversed. So my guess is either it wasn't important or it didn't "really" happen.

Anyway, this has been an interesting discussion!

David Stockhoff — 11 Sep 2013, 13:10 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 9/11/2013 8:59 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

Had Wolfe really meant us to think the Worm stopped plate motion---and that it was important---he would surely have inserted such motion into UNS to show that it had reversed. So my guess is either it wasn't important or it didn't "really" happen.

And the same for breaking the carbon cycle, if the hypothetical tectonic suppression actually progressed to total stasis.

Jerry Friedman — 11 Sep 2013, 16:46 · in reply to Jeffery Wilson

From: Jeffery Wilson jwilson at clueland.com

...

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???sun if it were significantly cooler than the temperature of the interior
???of the sun. You can have some fun at
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BLACK HOLES??? (ISBN 0525134905, 9780525134909). Disney did a film called
THE BLACK HOLE, and Blue Oyster Cult had
? some airplay with "Heavy Metal, Black and Silver".

Oh, okay. I think that at the time, the theory that black holes might lead to other universes (or other parts of this one), where they might be white holes, was still current. I think the theory of black hole radiation, in which black holes and white holes are the same thing, was also available (developed by Bekenstein in 1972 and Hawking in 1974).

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???the woman had to throw them into the sea (instead of just dropping them on
???the ground) to make them effective. Robert Borski speculated along these
???lines.

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I'm not following. What's a stretch? What's the sun's grave?

I'm thinking it's figurative reference like, "I feel like someone is
walking on my grave."

Are you trying to frustrate me, or did I miss a post about "the sun's grave"? What's a figurative
reference like that line?

Jerry Friedman