

This Week in Google Alerts: more _Land Across_

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 29 Dec 2013

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6498>

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Gwern Branwen — 29 Dec 2013, 16:48

<http://io9.com/dont-expect-to-figure-out-gene-wolfes-new-novel-the-f-1484516074> (review)

<http://www.bendbulletin.com/home/1591917-151/the-strange-lands-of-sci-fi-master-gene-wolfe> (review)

http://thebookofsilk.blogspot.com/2013_12_01_archive.html (character list)

<http://jdbookreview.com/gene-wolfe-no-comparison/> interview:

Whether you subscribe to the theory that Wolfe is some kind of hothouse-cultivated Ent, or “merely” a human genius, you’ll want to read his new novel _The Land Across_. The author graciously took the time to speak with me via email about the genesis of his typically inventive new work, the state of 21st-century SF, and many other subjects. An edited transcript of our conversation follows, below. — Paul Di Filippo

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Daniel Otto Jack Petersen — 29 Dec 2013, 17:53 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

*<http://jdbookreview.com/gene-wolfe-no-comparison/>

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For any other out-of-it sap like me, who didn't know what 'the Singularity' was that Di Filippo asked Wolfe about, here's a very helpful article I found (summary: it's 'the Rapture for nerds'):

<http://io9.com/5534848/what-is-the-singularity-and-will-you-live-to-see-it>

Knowing what it is makes Wolfe's answer all the more fascinating and tantalising...

-DOJP

On Sun, Dec 29, 2013 at 4:48 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern at gwern.net> wrote:

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gwern

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Gerry Quinn — 29 Dec 2013, 18:08 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

From: Gwern Branwen

<http://jdbookreview.com/gene-wolfe-no-comparison/> interview:

'Gene Wolfe easily admits to being a supernatural being. How else to explain his famous comment that editor Damon Knight, whose ORBIT series of anthologies helped launch Wolfe's career, “grew me from a bean?”'

Hmm, if we are to assume it was a black bean, it would not make him the nicest kind of supernatural being! [I'm assuming that the story of the black beans cast into the sea in BotNS is meant to refer to the origin of Abaia, Erebus and the rest.]

- Gerry Quinn

Antonin Scriabin — 29 Dec 2013, 20:48 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

The Singularity is a pretty popular trope in modern, mainstream sci-fi. Charles Stross' "Accelerando" and Harrison's "Light" come to mind. I didn't particularly care for either one, I think it makes for lazy writing. Tech becomes magic, but characters aren't mystified, they are experts. It is easy to explain away problems in the narrative.

On Dec 29, 2013 1:09 PM, "Gerry Quinn" <gerry@bindweed.com> wrote:

From: Gwern Branwen

<http://jdbookreview.com/gene-wolfe-no-comparison/> interview:

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- Gerry Quinn

Lee — 30 Dec 2013, 19:22 · follows Antonin Scriabin

Gerry Quinn: Hmm, if we are to assume it was a black bean, it would not make him the nicest kind of supernatural being! [I'm assuming that the story of the black beans cast into the sea in BotNS is meant to refer to the origin of Abaia, Erebus and the rest.]

With recognition of the lightheartedness of this reply, I truly do not think that Gene Wolfe considers himself to be the "nicest" of people.

I haven't met him in person but I know he is often described as "genial". Still in the tone of some of his answers to direct questions, I know he has a sharp side. But these are all external judgements anyway.

I find Wolfe's self-assessments best exemplified in his most autobiographical characters (Weer, Severian and Horn, imho). In these characters I find self-criticism which goes beyond acknowledgement of imperfection and which drifts toward true confession and self-condemnation.

Moreover, if the role of author may be considered as demiurgical creator, as has been discussed in other threads, perhaps the comparison of Wolfe himself to giant god-like monsters is apt. If "black beans" hold the origin of "Abaia, Erebus and the rest", then Scylla must be included and thus, by extension, Typhon/Pas and Echidna (whom I find difficult to disconnect from The Cumaeen).

Gerry Quinn — 30 Dec 2013, 22:48 · in reply to Lee

From: Lee

I haven't met him in person but I know he is often described as "genial". Still in the tone of some of his answers to direct questions, I know he has a sharp side. But these are all external judgements anyway.

Yes, he comes across as genial but often suddenly prickly at times.

<Shrug> I love the books, I'm not actually all that concerned about the author.

Moreover, if the role of author may be considered as demiurgical creator, as has been discussed in other threads, perhaps the comparison of Wolfe himself to giant god-like monsters is apt. If "black beans" hold the origin of "Abaia, Erebus and the rest", then Scylla must be included and thus, by extension, Typhon/Pas and Echidna (whom I find difficult to disconnect from The Cumaeen).

I don't believe Typhon had the same origin as the sea monsters. Typhon is relatively human, I think.

I doubt Wolfe would approve, but I do actually imagine the sea monsters in terms of 'singularity' concepts - they are creatures that can reconstruct themselves on a molecular level, and they have brains or other devices capable of powerful computations. They are gods [or demons] by our standards. I think the 'seeds' were nanofactories that built them. But that is equally true of all the seeds of living organisms.

- Gerry Quinn