

This Week in Google Alerts: Armstrong

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 28 Jul 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6583>

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Gwern Branwen — 28 Jul 2014, 15:24

- long TR interview already excerpted in separate thread:

<http://lists.urth.net/pipermail/urth-urth.net/2014-July/054936.html>

- http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/headline/2014/07/23/9bc1790e-061b-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f_story.html

book review, "_Neil Armstrong: A Life of Flight_ by Jay Barbree", Lee Billings:

At one point in Gene Wolfe's _Book of the New Sun_, a story set on a far-future Earth lapsed into a Dark Age, the narrator glimpses a "warrior of a dead world" in an enigmatic picture hanging in a dusty gallery. Clad in bulky white armor and a bubble-like helmet of polished gold, standing beside a stiff banner in a desolate gray wasteland, the "warrior" is actually an Apollo astronaut planting an American flag on the moon. For most of the inhabitants of Wolfe's fallen world, the moon landings and the people who made them had become little more than a half-remembered fairy tale.

I recalled Wolfe's scene while reading one of the final anecdotes in Jay Barbree's admirably accessible new book, a biography of Neil Armstrong, who died at age 82 in 2012. At the conclusion of a global tour promoting space exploration, Armstrong, the first man on the moon, sits in a roadside diner with Gene Cernan, the last, chatting over coffee about when humans might at last return to the lunar surface, and how we might someday visit Mars. More than 40 years ago, their Apollo missions had captivated billions, but now Armstrong and Cernan were retired and relatively anonymous, pining for a future that had never fully arrived.

Like most people Armstrong and Cernan now encountered, the server refilling their cups had no idea that his customers were living bookends to what, even now, is our modern era's most astounding adventure. Yet unlike in Wolfe's tale, the moonwalkers? fade to near-myth has happened not over countless millennia, but in less than a half-century. Somehow, as Apollo and its astronauts have aged, its legacy has been perversely twisted, with human interplanetary voyaging now routinely depicted as just an old-fashioned eccentricity of the

Cold War rather than the existential imperative it truly is. ...

- <http://apilgriminnarnia.com/2014/07/23/sham/> "The Sea a Sham Born of Uniformity: On Subverting the Normal with Gene Wolfe (#WritingWednesdays)":

From a writer's perspective and Wolfe's story really is a kind of narrative writer's workshop we can learn from his ability to disorient the reader. One can do that easily enough through strangers, dreams, foreign lands, or other dimensional realities; there are some brilliant examples of these in all of the best fantasy books. But Wolfe takes it a step further. He not only enhances the texture of his

world by having readers discover its idiosyncrasies, but he also disorients the reader by having her discover mundane realities in her world in new and surprising ways.

The following excerpt is a great example of this subversion of the normal. The protagonist falls asleep beside a giant. In his sleep he mounts a leather-winged beast and explores the dying globe that he has been forced to wander. Watch the way that Wolfe inverts our expectations, speaking of the vision ahead as a "sham of uniformity"

and a "purple waste." The Shadow of the Torturer is a narrative reprimand to the writer prone to info dump, as well as a template for the double inversion of the reader's expectation in entering the speculative universe:

The Shadow of the Torturer, "Chapter 15: Baldanders": "And then I dreamed?.

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<http://www.gvern.net>