

Book and Urth; A & M; black hole

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 19 Jun 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/836>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

adam louis stephanides — 19 Jun 1998, 16:58

Spectacled Bear wrote:

5) My final question is one that probably only Wolfe can answer, though the answer may be in some interview. We know that `_Urth of the New Sun_` was not part of Wolfe's original intention, but was written as a compromise with his editor.

I hadn't heard that. What happened?

I gave the citation earlier, but I'll quote what Wolfe says about it, because it's brief: "David [Hartwell] felt that I should add one more paragraph saying, Okay, Severian went to the universe next door and borrowed the white hole and fixed the sun and everybody lived happily ever after. I, on the other hand ... felt that a paragraph wasn't going to be enough." (Castle of Days, pp. 416-417) He goes on to say that they reached the compromise I quoted earlier.

You took the words right out of my mouth! It seems to me that any puzzles in BotNS ought to have answers in BotNS, subject only to modification by things we find out later in UotNS.

OTOH, `_Urth_` is evidence of Wolfe's intentions in writing BotNS, just as interviews with Wolfe are (although neither of these sources are infallible). So if we allow the interviews as evidence, as we usually do on this list, we should allow `_Urth_` as evidence also, even if we're only interested in BotNS.

And it seems clear to me that many puzzles in BotNS don't have answers in BotNS. For that matter, many of them don't have answers even in BotNS plus `_Urth_`, as far as I can tell (e. g. who is the extraterrestrial mind whom the Cumaeans contacts? Who lives on the other five continents of Urth? Who lives on Lune?)

Final Ignorant Question: what is Texas A & M, please?

A university. The A & M stands for "agricultural and mechanical."

Rostrum wrote:

Getting back to Adam's comments, I'm reminded of Borges, who was very interested in the idea of how our reading of a text changes because of what else we've read. (See especially "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" and "Kafka and his Precursors"). I think Wolfe very deliberately and successfully created with Exodus a book that almost rewrites the earlier books in the Long Sun series and am fascinated by how different a re-reading of them is after finishing Exodus.

Reading this list has convinced me that what Wolfe has done with Urth does in fact make BotNS more interesting than my original reading, and I'm way overdue in re-reading BotNS, but I'm also still interested in BotNS as it stands without Urth. I'd be interested in alternate interpretations of events in BotNS that Urth rules out.

This raises an interesting philosophical (and very Borgesian) question: can the meaning of BotNS by itself be different from the meaning of BotNS as part of the five-volume "Fictions of

the New Sun" (Peter Wright's useful term, IIRC) including _Urth_? The answer is yes if we go by the assumption that the author's intention determines the meaning and if Wolfe had in fact changed his mind about certain things between BotNS and _Urth_. It could also be yes, I think, even if Wolfe hadn't changed his mind, if we don't regard the author's intention as determinative.

Is it certain, for instance, in the first four books that Severian himself will one day become the Conciliator?

I would say there is no hint in the first four books that Severian was/will become the Conciliator. But I could be wrong.

Are there any reviews or discussions of BotNS I could get my hands on that predate Urth?

All the book review of the original volumes will of course predate _Urth_, and I'd assume some can be located in _Book Review Digest_ or _Book Review Index_, if you have access to those; there are also some in _Foundation_, if you can get hold of that. The problem with such reviews is that by their nature they will only be based on a superficial reading of the book(s). I believe Clute's essay in which he puts forth his controversial theory about Sev's mother was written before _Urth_; I don't remember in which of Clute's books this essay was included.

A fascinating, but at best difficult exercise! Some might argue it is impossible, that having read Urth, there are some possibilities we just won't be able to see in BotNS anymore. I can't imagine, for instance, pretending anymore that the Urth is so old that the Sun is dying of natural causes, even though I read the whole series without catching on about the black hole.

Actually, that particular fact was established in BotNS, although it certainly was easy to miss. The clearest evidence is in Dr. Talos's play: the Prophet's description of the "cancer" at the old sun's heart is quite clearly a black hole, though he doesn't use the term.

--Adam

Peter Grimes — 19 Jun 1998, 17:13 · follows adam louis stephanides

On Fri, 19 Jun 1998, adam louis stephanides wrote:

Is it certain, for instance, in the first four books that Severian himself will one day become the Conciliator?

I would say there is no hint in the first four books that Severian was/will become the Conciliator. But I could be wrong.

Of course I'm citation-less here, but I think that you are wrong. IIRC, there are at least a few clues vaguely scattered throughout BotNS that Severian maybe, just maybe is the Conciliator. The most obvious is the fact that the we discover that his powers don't come from the Claw of the Conciliator but from himself. These powers (healing people) are the same as those attributed to the Conciliator. In addition, the Conciliator is also referred to as the New Sun. We are certainly led to believe that Severian will bring the New Sun, which is another link.

I think there may be other clues but I couldn't say off hand.

And of course, all this is much more "obvious" (as much as anything by Wolfe is obvious) after reading UotNS because you're suddenly looking for clues (and possibly finding ones that aren't really there).

-Dave