

My reaction to IN GREEN'S JUNGLES

The Whorl list — 7 messages, 7 voices, 05 Dec 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1052>

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The Reverend Jacob Corbin — 05 Dec 2000, 03:21

Some discombobulated thoughts mere hours after plowing through IGJ:

-- I'm glad I went ahead and purchased the hardcover instead of waiting for the TPB. Notwithstanding my junkie-like desperation for the next SHORT SUN installment, the fact that I could leave the dust jacket at home averted many potentially-embarrassing situations. I know it's been discussed before on this list, but it bears repeating: that cover is an abomination. I mean, just look at it. Does it grab you and demand your attention, saying: "This book is superbly erudite, marvelously witty, and worthy of the closest scrutiny. It is the best its genre has to offer and you owe it to yourself to read it"? I'm afraid not. Instead, it shouts to unsuspecting passersby: "The person reading this is a socially-maladapted head case and is best given a wide berth!" Ehhh, I could go on for hours about SF's image problem, but I'll just stop here.

-- My only major complaint with the book was the repetitious Horn vs. the Despoiling Conquerors stuff. Now, obviously Wolfe wouldn't keep putting his characters in these situations if he wasn't trying to make a major point. And I'll grant that, like the Gaonese war, the Blanko fiasco allowed Wolfe to put Horn into a series of situations that would have been harder to contrive sans a background conflict. But why couldn't this have been allowed to *remain* in the background, like in OBW? The "climactic" battle suffered from a major case of deus ex machina. Wolfe spends large chunks of dialogue describing the relative might of Soldo's forces to ratchet up the tension and get us wondering what clever tactics will be used...but neglects to tell the reader that, oh yeah, Blanko had a bunch of heavy artillery just lying around. Handy, that.

-- I liked the way OBW dealt, to some extent, with the rearing of sons, and now IGJ has done much the same with daughters...as one would expect, given the dedications. Does anyone know if Horn's adventures in parenting bear any resemblance to GW's own?

-- I massively enjoyed almost every other aspect of the book. I probably gave a girlish squeal of glee when everyone turned up in Nessus. Unfortunately, thanks to my utter lack of discipline, I now have a very long wait for RTTW, and am going to have to spend the morning turning my bookshelves inside out in search of a suitable substitute...the methadone to GW's heroin, as it were. I'm open to suggestions.

Jacob G Corbin

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 05 Dec 2000, 08:50 · follows The Reverend Jacob Corbin

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While I agree with you in the general case, about SF's "image problem," I have to ask... Am I the only person here who likes the covers on OBW and IGJ? I find this frankly hard to believe; the marketing department at TOR can't be utter ninnies. (Though I do recall Deb Notkin once defining publishers as "companies whose job is to prevent the sale of as many books as possible.") The illustrations clearly represent important moments in the course of the book, without "giving away the plot;" additionally, they are competent (to say the least) in layout and execution. What, beyond this, anyone wants from a cover illo is beyond me.

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War is one of Wolfe's major recurring themes; wars take a major part in BotNS, BotLS, and now BotSS, not to mention a goodish selection of his shorter works. In all these he explores war from a surprisingly neutral standpoint -- that is, he doesn't seem to be taking either the Heinlein (STARSHIP TROOPERS) or the Haldeman (FOREVER WAR) position, but reporting neutrally: people do fight, these are some reasons why people fight, this is what it is like when people fight. War is not glorified but portrayed as horrible; but neither is it shown as always unnecessary and stupid. This is yet another of Wolfe's many remarkable accomplishments as a writer.

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Handy, that.

It's been a couple of months since I read IGJ (already!), and I devoured it with unseemly speed, but... I seem to recall that the heavy artillery was too heavy to move very far or with any great speed; thus it had not been particularly relevant to the war until Soldo's forces came close. One of the basic tactical facts of war: the defender has a natural advantage, because he can sit in the safest places and pick at the attacker, who must leave his safe places and advance to accomplish anything. This is doubly true when the territory being defended is the defender's home; both for obvious emotional reasons, but also because the defender has additional resources at that point. (This is one reason why a siege with a seemingly-overwhelming attacking force can drag on for so long.)

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I seem to recall hearing that his eldest was bitten by a shape-changing vampire as an infant... 8*)

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Okay, here's a couple. They are not at all Lupine, I think, but all should appeal to Wolfe fans as literate SF/F with content more complex than a big adventure.

1. Run, do not walk, to your local bookseller and demand that they sell you a copy of Peter Hamilton's THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION, which is the first volume of a truly massive space-opera. All three volumes are now out in massmarket p/b (actually all six volumes, because each volume had to be split for the p/b). This alone might well keep you busy until RttW hits. (Look, where else can you find a space opera that plausibly features Al Capone as a major character?) Fair warning though: if you can't handle horror of the Clive Barker style, avoid this; it contains some, uh, scenes that will turn your stomach.

2. On a completely different note, I can also recommend Kirsten Bakis's LIVES OF THE MONSTER DOGS. This is probably the closest to Wolfeishness of the recommendations I am offering here -- secrets, secret history, strange relationships, mad scientists, the works. I won't say anything more about it, just go look it up on Amazon.

3. If you haven't done so already, catch up with Gene Wolfe's favorite detective (and mine): Nero Wolfe, as chronicled by his assistant, Archie Goodwin, and his literary agent, the late Rex Stout (do not bother with the pathetic imitations by Robert Goldsborough). The ideal would be to read them in chronological order, but if you lack the will, the money, or the ability (that is, motive, means, and opportunity) to dig up all the books, some of the best are: TOO MANY COOKS; BLACK ORCHIDS; GAMBIT; OVER MY DEAD BODY; and THE DOORBELL RANG. Three

books deserve special mention, and should be read in the correct order, as they involve Wolfe's equivalent to Holmes's Moriarty, one Arnold Zeck: AND BE A VILLAIN, THE SECOND CONFESSION, and IN THE BEST FAMILIES. These build to a definite climax; they are collected in the omnibus TRIPLE ZECK (groan), which may be available in your local public library. (At any rate, most of them are fairly easy to find in cheap used paperback editions.)

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.

Peter Westlake — 05 Dec 2000, 17:05 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

At 08:50 2000-12-05 -0800, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

-- I'm glad I went ahead and purchased the hardcover instead of waiting for the TPB. Notwithstanding my junkie-like desperation for the next SHORT SUN installment, the fact that I could leave the dust jacket at home averted many potentially-embarrassing situations. I know it's been discussed before on this list, but it bears repeating: that cover is an abomination. I mean, just look at it. Does it grab you and demand your attention, saying: "This book is superbly erudite, marvelously witty, and worthy of the closest scrutiny. It is the best its genre has to offer and you owe it to yourself to read it"? I'm afraid not. Instead, it shouts to unsuspecting passersby: "The person reading this is a socially-maladapted head case and is best given a wide berth!" Ehhh, I could go on for hours about SF's image problem, but I'll just stop here.

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I liked the cover of OBW, though I agree that it does have potential for embarrassment; even then, a lot less than a simple description featuring "a blonde woman with no clothes" would suggest!

I didn't like the cover of IGJ, though. The mysterious figure of the Neighbour was reduced to a cartoon spider-horse-man, and the jungles didn't seem dense enough. Mind you, the jungles don't feel dense and "jungly" in IGJ, especially compared to the hints in OBW. There's no mention of the towering cliffs, or the "trees that eat trees that eat trees". That was a little disappointing, or would have been if what

was in the book hadn't been so good.

The overall cover designs also impressed me: the white strip at the top with the author's name just, I dunno, looks classy -- says in a clearly coded way, "this is a Major Writer."

The dark covers under the jacket, silver titles, and something about the pages at the very beginning also bespeak Quality.

Thanks for the recommendations, and for the warning about Peter Hamilton too.

Spectacled Bear.

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Kevin J. Maroney — 05 Dec 2000, 12:41 · follows Peter Westlake

At 08:50 AM 12/5/00 -0800, Dan'I wrote:

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While I could believe that the marketing (and design) departments at a major publisher are utter ninnies, I don't believe that the ones at Tor are. I rather like the covers of both _Blue_ and _Green_ --not just as covers, but as covers for those specific books, and I continue to be amazed by the hostile reactions to them expressed here.

I think the piece of art on the cover of _Whorl_ does not fit the book very well (although, or perhaps because it's the most literal of the three covers), but I think it's a lovely illustration, the best of the three.

Wombat, a.k.a. Kevin Maroney kmaroney at ungames.com
Kitchen Staff Supervisor, New York Review of Science Fiction
<http://www.nyrsf.com>

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.

William Ansley — 05 Dec 2000, 23:51 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

At 8:50 AM -0800 12/5/00, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

3. If you haven't done so already, catch up with Gene Wolfe's favorite detective (and mine): Nero Wolfe, as chronicled by his assistant, Archie Goodwin, and his literary agent, the late Rex Stout (do not bother with the pathetic imitations by Robert Goldsborough). The ideal would be to read them in chronological order, but if you lack the will, the money, or the ability (that is, motive, means, and opportunity) to dig up all the books, some of the best are: TOO MANY COOKS; BLACK ORCHIDS; GAMBIT; OVER MY DEAD BODY; and THE DOORBELL RANG. Three books deserve special mention, and should be read in the correct order, as they involve Wolfe's equivalent to Holmes's Moriarty, one Arnold Zeck: AND BE A VILLAIN, THE SECOND CONFESSION, and IN THE BEST FAMILIES. These build to a definite climax; they are collected in the omnibus TRIPLE ZECK (groan), which may be available in your local public library. (At any rate, most of them are fairly easy to find in cheap used paperback editions.)

Since recommending books seems to be in fashion at the moment, I'm going to chime in. First, I would like to very strongly second the recommendation for the Nero Wolfe books above. I think that there are about 30 of them and they are all well worth reading; I have read all of them more than once.

Second, I have been meaning to recommend Iain Pears' book _An Instance of the Fingerpost_ to this list for some time. It is a historical mystery/thriller that most reviews compare to Umberto Eco's _The Name of the Rose_. This comparison is apt, although I liked _Fingerpost_ better, but any reader of Wolfe will not be able to stop making comparisons between his books and Pears' novel.

Although Pear's writing style isn't much like Wolfe's, he is as good a writer (if such a statement has any meaning) and he uses trick after trick that we have seen in Wolfe's writing, each in his own way.

There is a (nearly) unnamed narrator, multiple narrators who may or may not be reliable, very important religious issues and a good deal of complicated politics. One big difference is that you do feel you have a pretty complete grasp of what really happened in the book when you are

done. But, despite this, I don't think even the most fervent admirers of ambiguity here will be disappointed.

This book is in print and available at Amazon.com and elsewhere I am sure.

William Ansley

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Endymion9 — 06 Dec 2000, 04:26 · follows William Ansley

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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The overall cover designs also impressed me: the white strip at the top with the

author's name just, I dunno, looks classy -- says in a clearly coded way, "this is a Major Writer."

I like both covers for the reasons you described. However, I have never been ashamed of letting my friends and associates know that I greatly enjoy reading scifi, watching Dr. Who, etc. and other things that I've heard people in NGs mention could embarrass them. I wouldn't want a book cover that fooled people into thinking I was reading a Physics book. So I have the same confusion as to what people want in a Wolfe cover. Perhaps if they mentioned which Wolfe covers from past books they approve of?

Dennis/Endy

<http://home.mindspring.com/~endymion9/index.htm>

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Michael Straight — 06 Dec 2000, 08:53 · follows Endymion9

On Wed, 6 Dec 2000, Endymion9 wrote:

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I'm not ashamed of scifi covers, I just don't think the artwork on the Short Sun books is very good. The multi-legged thing on the cover of IGJ just looks dumb. And Babbie looks too much like a teddy bear on the cover of OBW. And Horn's boat is too big, and I just don't like the style of the artwork in general. It seems too fuzzy, almost cartoonish.

I think the artwork on the Soldier books is the classiest. I like the Orb trade paperback versions of Shadow/Claw, Sword/Citadel (although I don't much like that illustration on the front of Sword/Citadel) - the original covers that someone put on a website a while back are even better. The illustration on Lake of the Long Sun is one of my favorites, Nightside and Calde are pretty good, but Exodus is not very interesting. The cover of Free Live Free didn't do a very good job of attracting me to the book, but once I'd read it I thought the illustration captured the characters very well.

I like the paperback cover for "Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories," but was disappointed that they wimped out on the title, shying away from the weirdness of it by making the second "and Other Stories" look like a smaller echo of the first rather than forcing people to puzzle it out and risk looking like they made a blooper (which I think would have done a better job of attracting attention to the book: "Look they screwed up the cover! No, wait...")

-Rostrum

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