

Is it SF?

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 14 Feb 2001

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Dan Rabin — 14 Feb 2001, 19:57

William Ansley writes,

I was also bothered by the impossibly large size of the (big) godling. Wolfe should make up his mind, is he writing science fiction or isn't he?

Should he? Or should he just write?

-- Dan Rabin

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

William Ansley — 15 Feb 2001, 01:25 · follows Dan Rabin

At 7:57 PM -0800 2/14/01, Dan Rabin wrote:

William Ansley writes,

I was also bothered by the impossibly large size of the (big) godling. Wolfe should make up his mind, is he writing science fiction or isn't he?

Should he? Or should he just write?

Well, of course, this question is unanswerable, since it boils down to a matter of opinion. But I will try to answer it below, nonetheless.

There is probably no SF writer who has not made many blunders of scientific fact, whether noticed by his or her readers or not. But, I feel my complaint is valid. Wolfe makes enormous use of many of the tropes of SF. This leads to an expectation that he is going to "play by the rules" of SF. You may object that there are no such rules, or at least no universally or even widely agreed upon ones, but I think there is one rule that we may request that an author follow, a rule that goes beyond SF: self-consistency. (If you think this is an unreasonable request, then we must agree to disagree.)

Wolfe has pointed out several times in TBotNS that a giant human being beyond a certain size (a size which the godling in RttW is certainly beyond) would be unable to move and probably crushed to death by his or her own weight, unless this giant mitigated the effects of gravity by means of underwater buoyancy or microgravity.

So, my complaint really boils down to this: I am disappointed that Wolfe is displaying lapses of consistency between the New, Long and Short Sun books of which the matter of the godling's size is only one example.

William Ansley

William Ansley

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