

Ozflash Revised, Part 4

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 10 Mar 1999

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William H. Ansley — 10 Mar 1999, 23:59

The New Improved Wonderful Eyeflash of Oz
Oz References in "The Eyeflash Miracles" Part 4

Little Tib, Nitty and Mr. Parker are picked up while hitchhiking by the driver of an old school bus which has been converted into a temple of the god Deva. The driver's name is Dr. Prithivi. He is a "Doctor of Divinity of the University of Bombay."

The bus stops at a "road-side park" which has a "lookout point" from which you can see "parts of seven counties." Dr. Prithivi comments on how he once saw a leopard at a summer cottage his family rented in the Himalayas.

Hearing this, Little Tib tries to remember what a leopard looks like but cannot. He then tries to visualize a cat. At first he cannot, but then he succeeds and an image appears in front of him. But it is not a cat, but a lion standing on its hind legs with a red ribbon knotted in its mane. It is dancing and Little Tib joins it in the dance. After he has danced for some time he is grabbed from behind by many hands. He realizes that he has been dancing in the air over the lookout point, with a very long drop below him.

I am counting this event as the third miracle. The lion Little Tib sees is almost certainly the Cowardly Lion from the movie The Wizard of Oz, at least in part. The lion's face starts out as a "kindly blur" and as they dance it becomes "clearer and clearer" until "it was a funny, friendly, frightening face." This certainly could be a description of Bert Lahr's lion makeup in the movie. After he got spruced up in the Emerald City, the Cowardly Lion did have a red ribbon in his mane[16]. The Cowardly Lion in the books also wore one or more ribbons but he was always described as walking on all fours like a real lion, so the dancing lion seems closer to the movie version. However the dancing lion never speaks and the Cowardly Lion doesn't dance in the books and the dancing he does in the movie is quite different from the dancing Little Tib's lion does, so the fit is not perfect.

Later, when Little Tib described what he thought was happening when the other people at the lookout point (there was a small crowd of them) saw him dancing on the air by himself, Dr. Prithivi decided that the lion might be Vishnu in his lion-headed form. There was a picture of Vishnu portrayed this way, destroying the demon Hiranyakasipu, painted on Dr. Prithivi's bus. Since Little Tib's lion was dancing to Indian flute music, this also seems to be a valid interpretation. Dr. Prithivi goes on to list other "significations" of the lion: among the Jews, an emblem of the tribe of Judah; in Islam, the son-in-law of Mohammed was known as the Lion of God; in Christianity, a winged lion is the badge of St. Mark and one without wings indicates Christ. When Dr. Prithivi asks Little Tib, "George, when you were dancing with the lion man, did you perhaps feel him to be the god?" Little Tib replies, "No, an angel."

Dr. Prithivi takes Little Tib to his bus/temple and asks him to pray to Deva. While Little Tib tries to do this he thinks about the rocks he might have fallen on when he was in the air. He dreams

of a rocky land where nothing grows. It is sunny and very hot and when he finds a cave he goes into it to try to escape the heat. But even though it is dark in the cave it gets hotter and hotter. Little Tib hears a tapping sound like a bag of marbles poured out, bouncing, onto a stone floor and stops to listen. He is captured by small, grotesque-looking men with torches and axes[17]. They are gnomes[18]. They take him before the Gnome King in his throne room, which is full of gold and jewels. Little Tib and the Gnome King have this exchange. The Gnome King speaks first.

"You have trespassed my dominions," he said. "How do you plead?" He looked like the other gnomes, but thinner and meaner.

"For mercy," Little Tib said.

"Then you are guilty?"

Little Tib shook his head.

"You have to be. Only the guilty can plead for mercy."

"You are supposed to forgive trespasses," Little Tib said, and as soon as he had said that, all the bright lamps in the throne room went out.

At this point Little Tib escapes. He finds his way to a lighted area with trees and grass and thinks he is outside for a moment. Then he notices that the trees are made of silver with gold leaves, the grass is a carpet of green gems and the sky is a vault of stone. Mechanical birds sing and fly about. The light comes from the trees somehow.

Little Tib is very thirsty by this time and nearly cries when he sees there is no water in the cave. Then he notices the trees have gold fruit. He picks one. It is the size of a grapefruit and he finds that he can unscrew it into two halves. Inside is a meal that is too hot to eat. Little Tib finally finds a container of scalding tea and he is so thirsty he tries to drink some, even though it blisters his lips.

Suddenly he is in the dark again, except for a small spot of light. He hears the tapping noise again and realizes this time that it is the pounding of hundreds and hundreds of picks. The gnomes are digging for gold in their mines. He sees the gnomes coming for him from the lighted area and he wakes up.

The nomes are introduced in *_Ozma of Oz_*. The land outside the Nome King's cave is very much as Wolfe describes it. Baum's Nome King's throne room is similar to Wolfe's description, but there are differences. Baum's nomes are constantly digging with picks and shovels when they are not smelting gold or hammering it in their smithies. They only stop when the Nome King needs them to serve as soldiers.

The Metal Forest is described in *_Tik-Tok of Oz_* (Chapter 19, "King Kaliko"). It is a sort of treasury for the nomes. Again some details differ from Wolfe's description[19]. The major one is that the cave of the Metal Forest also contains living trees called Hotel Trees which bear Three-Course Nuts (described in Chapter 22: "Kindly Kisses"). The fruits are cocoanut-sized and unscrew into three sections (soup, main course and dessert) but they are obviously the source of Little Tib's golden fruit.

The constant heat in Little Tib's dream was apparently due to his fever and he probably dreamed of drinking the scalding tea when Nitty was giving him his medicine with ice water.

William Ansley

[16] In the Oz movie, the ribbon in the Cowardly Lion's mane was red. In the book Ozma of Oz the Lion had a blue ribbon tied in a bow in his mane (in Chapter 8: "The Hungry Tiger"). Somewhat surprisingly, the color of this ribbon has no significance in the book.

[17] The description of the gnomes is based mostly on the illustrations in the book, as before.

[18] Baum consistently used the spelling 'nome' because he thought the word gnome with its silent 'g' would be too hard for a child reading the Oz books to himself. (Thank you, alga.) Wolfe "corrected" nome to gnome.

[19] Baum's metal trees are all gold and the underbrush is silver. There are no mechanical birds in Baum's Metal Forest, but in the twelfth Oz book, The Tin Woodman of Oz (Chapter 3, "Roundabout") the Tin Woodman has tin mechanical (clockwork) birds in the tin garden near his tin palace in the Country of the Winkies.