

Pyrexix slugs

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 02 Oct 1999

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Robert Borski — 02 Oct 1999, 01:38

Mr. Greene:

Nice bit of research and extrapolation. Congratulations. Here are my counter-arguments:

I think it unlikely that Hethor's slug and the former Mother Pyrexia are the same creature. When Severian finally encounters the snuffling slime creature in person, he describes it as a brown, pudding like mass nearly the size of a destrier -- presumably much larger than an old woman.

I think the key work here is "finally." The alcalde never mentions any giantism; nor does the little girl in the antechamber. Surely, something as big as a destrier crawling about would rouse somebody else in the antechamber, but this never happens. It's also quite possible the slug has grown since taking to the Saltus backwoods; remember, eighteen years have passed, and slugs never stop growing until they die. It's also recently dined on or engulfed Decumen, which may further have increased its size (hell, you should see my stomach after I eat buffet-style--it looks like I'm carrying twins).

More importantly, there is no indication that Hethor's pudding monster had reason to fear fire; instead, when Severian was faced with the monster in the wooden long house (during the battle of the magicians) the monster appears to be able to snuff out the torches remotely --

I never meant to imply the slug was afraid of fire. Certainly, Wolfe never says this. Rather, the alcalde says, "It didn't like the light, or the fire either." Nocturnal creatures, of course, shun daylight, and other than domesticated pets, all animals generally avoid fire--nocturnals even more so for the light it generates. But just as bees will attack anyone or anything that aggitates their hive, so too, if given the chance, might the slug attack the offending fire, especially if it's static and not being waved about by fearful villagers.

In light of the exceptional size of the creature and its ability to douse fires, it seems to be a far different creature from the nocturnal, fire-fearing ex-Mother Pyrexia -- Hethor's slug would have just doused any torches carried by Saltus villagers, and slurped them up in its destrier sized bulk.

My argument here is that the slug, whether you think it's Mother Pyrexia or not, is acting under the impress of Hethor. Before, it might have been happy to spend the rest of its days eating mulch in the dark, and done its best to avoid detection; compelled by Hethor, however, it must act at his bid, in the face of fire, Terminus Est, or anything else that might come between it and Severian.

One question for you, Carlton: if you don't think Mother Pyrexia has been turned into the slug,

how do you explain the alcalde's remark about how "a woman sealed in the dark long enough can become something very strange,
just like the strange things you find in rotten wood, back among the trees"? If he's not talking about a slug/grub/worm/larva here, what's left?

I also think the slug's demise by fire would appeal to Wolfe the ironist, since Mother Pyrexia is named after a physical condition that mimics burning.

Robert Borski

PS: imho you're also right about the Commonwealth = South America, "poisoned" Nessus being "Good Air" Buenos Aires--another example of Wolfe at his ironic best.