

At risk of getting in over my head . . .

The Urth list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 21 Oct 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5189>

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Eric Ortlund — 21 Oct 2008, 13:51

I re-read BLS and BNS last summer and found it deeply satisfying, especially after trolling this mailing list from its very beginning for clues. One thing still bothers me, which I hesitate to raise, because it's related to the whole idea that Blue and Green are Urth and Lune or some variety thereof, and I simply don't want to get into that (I don't buy it, but it's way too complex and has already been discussed a lot). Namely: how did Patera Quetzal get into the Whorl? My first thought was that Quetzal/the inhumis were present on Urth without Severian knowing; but, in an interview with Wolfe where he fielded questions from readers, Wolfe said that none of the major characters in BNS were inhumis, and that Quetzal was a "late arrival" on the Whorl - which I take to mean (perhaps incorrectly) that he somehow got on board after it was launched. But how? Are there any clues in the books that anyone knows of? There's talk in the book about the inhumis barely being able to survive the crossing from Blue to Green . . . and Quetzal's been on the Lander for a long time. And, if I remember correctly, he's not the only inhumis on the whorl. Anyone care to clarify things for me?

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Matthew King — 21 Oct 2008, 15:46 · in reply to Eric Ortlund

On Tue, Oct 21, 2008 at 8:51 AM, Eric Ortlund <eortlund@briercrest.ca> wrote:
Namely: how did
Patera Quetzal get into the Whorl?

IIRC, the Neighbors intentionally infected the Whorl, the idea being that the behavior of the inhumis would provide insight into the human condition.

Mr Thalassocrat — 22 Oct 2008, 00:16 · in reply to Matthew King

On Wed, Oct 22, 2008 at 2:16 AM, Matthew King <automatthew@gmail.com> wrote:
On Tue, Oct 21, 2008 at 8:51 AM, Eric Ortlund <eortlund@briercrest.ca> wrote:

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As SilkHorn explains to Vadsig in RTTW, while they are sailing from Dorp to New Viron.

There's a lot to think about in this. Just reviewing the conclusions I came to and seeing how they look now on reflection

Inhumu can only breed on Green. Just drinking a human's blood doesn't turn a primal inhumu into a self-aware being: only its children. The Neighbors must have taken primal inhumu from Green to the Whorl, gotten them to drink human blood, taken them back to Green to breed and then selected some of the offspring to re-introduce to the Whorl.

The Neighbors also took inhumu with them to their new world (also according to SilkHorn), and it must be the same kind of process, except on-going (as the infestation of the Whorl may not have been). Neighbors monitor themselves periodically by letting inhumu take some of their blood, transporting them back to Green to breed, and examining the nature of the offspring.

Everything suggests that the transportation of the inhumu must be *physical*, not astral travelling. An astrally-transported inhumu is no longer an inhumu. The Neighbors need space ships to do it. I believe that the low, domed building SilkHorn sees on top of the great mountain on Green is such a spaceship, and that the Neighbor he meets there is a Neighbor-naut, the source of his information about the inhumu infestation of the Whorl etc. The Neighbors select inhumu for transportation to the Whorl and their new world by choosing from those who manage to fly to the top of the mountain - the strongest-willed, the ones who care about having sentient children and so on.

Jahlee was once one of these. She never flew from Green to Blue; no inhumu does - that's a lie they tell themselves. Any inhumu on Blue came there from Green on Auk's captured lander, or on a lander from the Whorl (as with Fava, I think), or was transported there by the Neighbors. I don't know which of these methods Jahlee used.

Eric Ortlund — 22 Oct 2008, 16:20 · in reply to Mr Thalassocrat

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Mr. Thalassocrat: Thanks for the very thoughtful response. There is indeed something very deep going on here. I'm reminded of when SilkHorn's son asks him why he doesn't just flat out tell him what's going on - and SilkHorn replies that he trying to get his son to think for himself, to draw important conclusions from scant evidence - and isn't that what Wolfe is pushing us to do as readers, not just with his texts but our own lives?

Anyway, I'm thankful for your thoughts, especially the Neighbor-Naut, which, while not knowing if it is correct, would certainly explain things. But about inhumu flying from Green to Blue - I wonder if that's a lie, because as I remember, inhumu come in waves to Green every three years or so when the two planets are close together. So I *think* that checks out. But obviously the whole issue is a huge one.

I'm delightfully stunned by the massive invention of the BSS series - the massive machinations which Horn gets caught up in.

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Mr Thalassocrat — 23 Oct 2008, 05:23 · in reply to Eric Ortlund

On Thu, Oct 23, 2008 at 2:50 AM, Eric Ortlund <eortlund at briercrest.ca>wrote: wrote:
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I wonder if that's a lie, because as I remember, inhumu come in waves to Green every three years or so when the two planets are close together.
So I *think* that checks out. But obviously the whole issue is a huge one.

Realistically, landers could only travel between Green and Blue at around conjunction, also. They seem to be rocket powered craft subject to the standard orbital mechanics & not capable

of pulling more than a few gee, for limited periods.

So I think a journey between Green and Blue would require a Hohmann transfer or whatever, at some point around conjunction. And I think Wolfe intended that to be the case.

But obviously it's possible to read things differently - I just find this explanation satisfying and consistent. One reason: it means that the inhumi problem on Blue is pretty much under control by the end of RTTW. Their ranks have been decimated, and there won't be any more coming from Green.