

# An Evil Guest: gold hunting

The Urth list — 10 messages, 3 voices, 05 Jan 2010

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Gwern Branwen — 05 Jan 2010, 02:20

Another thing that bothers me about AEG is the initial premise. Why does the USG want to hunt down Reis? Gold, it's insinuated, is the reason.

Why is creating gold a problem? I suspect we are meant to simply assume it's counterfeiting and bad, no more questions needed.

But the federal government has many reasons to be glad about a cheap method of producing gold!

- it massively blunts the danger of people switching to a gold-backed currency
- induces a kind of 'gold inflation', with similar stimulant effects as people are forced to use their gold or lose value
- helps out industry (gold has scads of uses)
- is a major physics advance, and likely implies being able to create arbitrary other radioisotopes (great for weapons, and medicine in general)
- properly controlled, is a major weapon against any country or entity holding large reserves of gold
- and so on.

In fact, I'm having a hard time thinking why the government would dislike it at all.

- because Reis can make gold, you dummy

And the President can print as much money as he wants. You can spend greenbacks at your local Baskin-Robbins too.

- then maybe the President wants a personal fortune

Ex-presidents name their salaries and speaking fees. The Clintons left the White House like \$10 million in debt; but they cleared that up awfully quick, and are now shall we say, well-to-do. (Of course, other presidents already had fortunes upon election.)

- they are being good doobies and protecting the world from radioactive gold!

Makes no sense. Reis or Chase (I forget which) says that the level is so low it would have taken months to kill Cassie, and exposures of minutes to the bracelet - pounds of radioactive gold - isn't a big deal. Even if the radiation level were extremely high, so what? When was the last time you handed over a groaning suitcase with thousands of Benjamins in it when you wanted to buy a car or house?

The reserve banks, among other institutions, hold hundreds and thousands of tons of nonradioactive gold. Synthesize an equivalent amount of radioactive gold, and swap it all. Now

you have hundreds and thousands of tons of perfectly good gold. Or you could smelt it all together, cutting the radiation level of each pound in half; alloy it for 20 karat gold and the level goes down another 16% or whatever.

And so on.

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So what's the *\*real\** reason for hunting Reis and his gold?

Here's another question: why do they consider Reis so very very evil? The worst thing we've heard of him doing or seen him done is the battles between the mercenaries and the Squid cultists for the islands. It would be a tad hypocritical for an American president and his Rove to be all 'most EEEVVILL man in the world!' And why do they not say who the other 2 evil men are, apparently because of Gideon Chase's presence?

Another point: Reis says Cthulhu fears *\*his\** mercenaries' depth-bombing - not any government's depth-bombing. If you were an extremely wealthy, well-connected American businessman fighting an extraterrestrial menace, and your best weapon is sophisticated naval explosives, isn't it the most natural thing in the world to use the United States Navy as your *\*first\** resort? Especially if you're High King and can sign any treaty you wish. Why does Reis need to resort to rather intricate shenanigans to get the USN to depth-bomb Cthulhu without realizing whom it is fighting? (Presumably once the charges starting rolling and the storm called, the engagement will sustain itself.)

Why, for that matter, is the USN out in that kind of strength? You don't send carrier groups or even a cruiser or destroyer out on lengthy wild-goose chases - and Reis implies the search flights have been going on for a long time. Reconnaissance helicopters or submersibles don't carry many depth-charges, last I heard, nor would they have authorization to use them.

Another point: keep in mind that even if they found Reis's postulated master-stash, they can't expect more than millions or low billions from it, else they would've found it long ago from leakage if nothing else. So why do they keep looking? Military operations are *\*expensive\**. And it's not like the federal government needs to grab all the gold it can find: it has a multi-trillion dollar budget. If you want a spare billion or 3, just take it from the black budget.

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What are we to make of all these odd points - the pointless persecution of Reis, the peculiarly persistent search of the islands in massive military strength, and the rest?

Here's my take. The USN is there in force because someone in command *\*expected\** to find Cthulhu or something comparable. That's why they could depth-charge at all, and so quickly.

They expected to find Cthulhu by finding Reis's gold not because they thought Cthulhu was manufacturing it - they knew Reis was manufacturing it - but they thought Reis was storing it there. And they thought Reis could store it there because he had an arrangement with Cthulhu: he was a cultist.

Not just any cultist either. Besides his socioeconomic status, he was also the high king of the islands directly ruled by Cthulhu. Pretty reasonable to characterize him as one of Cthulhu's

most powerful, honored, and thus presumably loyal, servitors.

Given all that, the President's characterization is not hyperbole, nor is the focus on gold inexplicable - it's the spoor that they will hunt back. Even the reticence to name the other 2 evil men becomes clearer: Chase has worked for Reis, advocates suspiciously Cthulhu-amenable ethics, is in a Squiddy-favored position in academia (remember the boasts of their power extending through world governments and institutions), and is eldritch in general (even omitting possible contamination at Miskatonic). Perhaps Chase is #2 on the list! Using him against Reis would be delicious irony, and explains the government reaction to Chase's refusal/escape.

Further, Reis playing a dangerous game in Cthulhu's sphere of influence - appearing but not really being his - explains how Reis could be trapped at the end. If the true loyalties of all the islanders & warriors came as a surprise, that would be one heck of a screwup by Reis! (The original invasion now becomes infighting among Cthulhu cultists for status.)

But who is #3? That's still a mystery to me. It could be King Kanoa. He is immediately subordinate to King Reis, and would make a natural third.

gvern

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James Wynn — 05 Jan 2010, 18:17 · in reply to Gvern Branwen

Another thing that bothers me about AEG is the initial premise. Why does the USG want to hunt down Reis? Gold, it's insinuated, is the reason.

Why is creating gold a problem? I suspect we are meant to simply assume it's counterfeiting and bad, no more questions needed.

I thought the point was that the US government wanted his \*method\* of producing gold. For all the reasons you named, it would be a valuable technology. But you bring up the possibility that the US government is waging war against the Storm King rather than working within the status quo.

Here's another question: why do they consider Reis so very very evil?

Now that's a good question. Hearing Wolfe talk about Ries you can tell he's very please with him, and pleased with him \*as a villain\*. He said that a really good villain needs to be almost a hero but falls short. I'm sure Wolfe knows more about Ries' agenda than is in the text but I don't. From what I read, I can't see too much either heroic or villainous about him. He just wants to be the next Storm King. But Earth already has a Storm King and has for a million years, so I don't see that it is that \*bad\* or good. Just more of the same.

I'm no more sure of Wolfe's feelings about the characters in this story than I am of Gideon Chase's.

And why do they not say who the other 2 evil men are, apparently because of Gideon Chase's presence?

Because they are Reis too, or so I am convinced.

Why does Reis need to resort to rather intricate shenanigans to get the USN to depth-bomb Cthulhu without realizing whom it is fighting?

Based on "The Tree Is My Hat", I think the US government \*must\* know that the Storm King is there.

Why, for that matter, is the USN out in that kind of strength? You don't send carrier groups or even a cruiser or destroyer out on lengthy wild-goose chases - and Reis implies the search flights have been going on for a long time. Reconnaissance helicopters or submersibles don't carry many depth-charges, last I heard, nor would they have authorization to use them.

Another point: keep in mind that even if they found Reis's postulated master-stash, they can't expect more than millions or low billions from it,

Yeah, I'm not sure about this one. Unless they think he has trillions in gold.

What are we to make of all these odd points - the pointless persecution of Reis, the peculiarly persistent search of the islands in massive military strength, and the rest?

The relationship between the US government and the Storm King has always been perplexing. It is in *The Tree Is My Hat* as well.

They expected to find Cthulhu by finding Reis's gold not because they thought Cthulhu was manufacturing it - they knew Reis was manufacturing it - but they thought Reis was storing it there. And they thought Reis could store it there because he had an arrangement with Cthulhu: he was a cultist.

In *The Tree Is My Hat* the protagonist is a kind of ambassador or hostage sent by the US government. They know the Storm King is there.

Perhaps Chase is #2 on the list! Using him against Reis would be delicious irony, and explains the government reaction to Chase's refusal/escape.

I thought of that, but if Chase is in league with Reis, why does he need the pictures of him? He suspects the photos are bugged but rather than just throw them away, he makes copies first.

But who is #3? That's still a mystery to me. It could be King Kanoa. He is immediately subordinate to King Reis, and would make a natural third.

I believe that \*somehow\* King Kanoa is one of the Rieves. I can't prove it though. There is an extra Reis running around and it is fixating that he goes by two identities and Cassie treats those identities almost separately. This reminds me of Garsecg/Setr in *The Wizard Knight*.

J.

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Gwern Branwen — 06 Jan 2010, 01:00 · in reply to James Wynn

On Tue, Jan 5, 2010 at 1:17 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:  
I thought the point was that the US government wanted his \*method\* of producing gold. For all the reasons you named, it would be a valuable technology.

I thought that too, but that suggests a different sequence, in which the president offers to legalize it and split the proceeds with Reis. Given all the uses of gold transmutation and general atomic transmutation, even if Reis got 1% of the profits, he still would be fantastically more wealthy than he is synthesizing a small brick every month or two for the occasional order.

Kanoa says that no more than 5 or 7 bricks are together at any time. We are not talking about an operation on a large-scale here. It almost sounds as if Reis personally oversees each brick. I can't come up with any figures of public gold sales, profit sharing, and Reis's current gold sales

which are both plausible and which make Reis better off keeping the secret. Public sale involves such gargantuan figures.

The only way it works is if the deal offers Reis nothing, and we don't get that kind of extortionate tyrannical feel from the president. And it still doesn't explain the evil personal nature of their war on Reis.

Here's another question: why do they consider Reis so very very evil?

Now that's a good question. Hearing Wolfe talk about Ries you can tell he's very please with him, and pleased with him \*as a villain\*. He said that a really good villain needs to be almost a hero but falls short. I'm sure Wolfe knows more about Ries' agenda than is in the text but I don't. From what I read, I can't see too much either heroic or villainous about him. He just wants to be the next Storm King. But Earth already has a Storm King and has for a million years, so I don't see that it is that \*bad\* or good. Just more of the same.

Reis is a far superior Storm King.

He's human, for one.

Why does Reis need to resort to rather intricate shenanigans to get the USN to depth-bomb Cthulhu without realizing whom it is fighting?

One of my previous theories was the the President & John were Squiddies and that they considered Reis evil because he opposed Cthulhu. However, those 2 do not fit the cultist psychological profile and though it explained why Reis had to trick the Navy into it, it couldn't explain why the Navy was hunting Reis's gold or why it had authorization to depth-bomb at all.

Based on "The Tree Is My Hat", I think the US government \*must\* know that the Storm King is there.

Fortunately for me, there's a copy of that story online in 2 Google Books and

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/Innocents-Aboard/Gene-Wolfe/e/9780765307903#CHP>

Having read it and a bit of the list discussion, even assuming that it is the same exact universe and not an early draft as it were or a relation like BOTNS and "A Solar Labyrinth", I'm not sure we can infer that.

Baden is the member of an agency, but aside from calling it 'the Agency', we aren't given any reason to identify it with the intelligence community. Baden has no particular fighting or computer or jungle expertise, or evinces any kind of special skills one might expect of an overseas operative. Further, his previous assignment was Uganda, which back then was a humanitarian interest - not a national security concern in the least. And note his equipment: "31 Jan. Setting up my new Mac. Who would think this place would have phones? But there are wires to Kololahi, and a dish. I can chat with people all over the world, for which the agency pays. (Talk about soft!) Nothing like this in Africa. Just the radio, and good luck with that."

If he were CIA, would he just have a crappy radio? If he were using milspec government equipment, why can he talk all around the world? If the military-industrial establishment were probing the islands, why zero mention of reports back? Why a female boss, and one so concerned she'll squeeze his hand?

It all makes sense if it were a government charity thingy, though.

(Also note the utter lack of Squiddies in "The Tree is my Hat". Cthulhu should be perfectly active at this point; it feels like the 1990s, after all, and so Reis still hasn't battled the cultists. In AEG, even when Hanga was puissant, there were still plenty of cultists around, so why would it be any different in the '90s?)

Even if Baden reported to an intelligence agency, and they believed him completely (yeah right), that still wouldn't point to Cthulhu in the sea, but towards a Mountains of Madness scenario, or just Hanga himself.

Another point: keep in mind that even if they found Reis's postulated master-stash, they can't expect more than millions or low billions from it,

Yeah, I'm not sure about this one. Unless they think he has trillions in gold.

And if they want his process, why bother hunting small amounts of gold? They know he isn't going to be there in the stash, after all, since he's such a globe-trotter.

They expected to find Cthulhu by finding Reis's gold not because they thought Cthulhu was manufacturing it - they knew Reis was manufacturing it - but they thought Reis was storing it there. And they thought Reis could store it there because he had an arrangement with Cthulhu: he was a cultist.

In The Tree Is My Hat the protagonist is a kind of ambassador or hostage sent by the US government. They know the Storm King is there.

How did you get that?

Perhaps Chase is #2 on the list! Using him against Reis would be delicious irony, and explains the government reaction to Chase's refusal/escape.

I thought of that, but if Chase is in league with Ries, why does he need the pictures of him? He suspects the photos are bugged but rather than just throw them away, he makes copies first.

Well, remember, I suggested they are rivals in the cult. Cults often run on a cellular structure. Chase may know full well of Reis but never have met him or seen photos of him. (Many billionaires are extremely reclusive. Have you ever seen any photos of the 6 or 7 Waltons who control >\$80 billion?) So the photos would be valuable.

Note also that Chase supposedly worked for Reis once, which is a relationship one would expect to obviate the need for photos to a degree much more than merely being in the same cult.

I believe that \*somehow\* King Kanoa is one of the Rieses. I can't prove it though.

There is an extra Reis running around and it is fixating that he goes by two identities and Cassie treats those identities almost separately.

This reminds me of Garsegc/Setr in The Wizard Knight.

J.

Mm. How do you explain the mass discrepancy? We're told King Kanoa is absolutely massive; Reis is big & powerful, but not that much.

gwern

Fortunately for me, there's a copy of [The Tree Is My Hat] online in 2

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Having read it and a bit of the list discussion, even assuming that it is the same exact universe and not an early draft as it were or a relation like BOTNS and "A Solar Labyrinth", I'm not sure we can infer that.

When I spoke with Gene about it in Atlanta, he confirmed that it is the same island.

Incidentally, I strongly recommend "Innocents Aboard" (in which TTIMH is collected) . It is probably my favorite collection of short stories by Wolfe. What is interesting about it, is that the stories aren't really SF per se. Or they just barely are. IA and Strange Travellers are companion volumes in my mind ("Counting Cats in Zanzibar" is a story I routinely offer as an introduction to Wolfe) . Also, IA has the short story The Night Chough so that's two extra extra-textual references to Wolfe novels in one collection.

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Baden's whole assignment is screwy for all the reasons you give and more. But it no more works as a charity operation than anything else. He is given no mission to speak of at all. He's given no funds to disburse nor people to manage. And no information beforehand about what he will experience there. All he is told is that he must go there alone. We find out why that is within hours of his family arriving. But we don't know *\*why\** anyone who comes with Baden is automatically an offering to the aliens (and --it is clear-- that is Hanga's understanding). The only thing that seems likely is that Baden is sent there because he is considered expendable: a broken tool. That, and he's in no position to turn down the assignment. And not all CIA agents have 007 skills many of them are merely bureaucrats with a knack for languages and some prior experience abroad. It makes sense that The Agency is the CIA, but it is not necessary.

I didn't say he was a *\*spy\** for the government. He's sent there as a government's representative of some sort at a post that is hardly a plum offering for anyone who understands its purpose. The government is posting him there for reasons unstated but evidently important. The only official role I know of that doesn't require the assignee to know anything or do anything is hostage or sacrifice. And he wasn't sacrificed.

(Also note the utter lack of Squiddies in "The Tree is my Hat".  
Cthulhu should be perfectly active at this point;

Well, the only reason Cassie encounters Squiddies is because of her association with Reis (or Chase or the bat-people or because she's a 'star', who knows?). Hanga is the only alien we know of who seeks human company for pleasure.

Note also that Chase supposedly worked for Reis once, which is a relationship one would expect to obviate the need for photos to a degree much more than merely being in the same cult.

Do you mean about healing Rian? Isn't that assuming a bit? (We think) we know that Chase worked for Pavlatos. But we don't know Ries had any involvement at all.

I believe that \*somehow\* King Kanoa is one of the Rieses. I can't prove it though.

There is an extra Reis running around and it is fixating that he goes by two

identities and Cassie treats those identities almost separately.

This reminds me of Garsegc/Setr in The Wizard Knight.

Mm. How do you explain the mass discrepancy? We're told King Kanoa is absolutely massive; Reis is big & powerful, but not that much.

Maybe he's just fatter than Wally. Maybe it's a disguise combined with a glamour. Maybe he's pulling a Baldanders/Jolenta with plans to live in the Storm King's palace. Whether you explain it via cloning or temporal plotting or whatever, they are the same person (in a sense) but different people inhabiting different space...one whom Cassie loves and aids and the other whom she loathes and undermines. The Garsegc/Setr parallel is key to understanding what I mean.

That cave scene is a classic Wolfean climax dutifully repeated in Peace, BoTNS, Long Sun, Soldier of the Mist, There Are Doors, and The Knight (I haven't read Pirate Freedom yet). As such, the protagonist has to take up a hidden weapon in an enclosed space and kill or overthrow the antagonist with it in the cave. Wolfe has identified the antagonist as Ries. That is the whole foundation of my belief that Kanoa is Ries. If you don't see the parallel, I don't expect you to see the necessity of Kanoa being Ries. Take it for what it is. Ignore it if you don't see the parallel. I certainly can't prove it otherwise.

J.

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nate jarvis — 06 Jan 2010, 11:33 · in reply to James Wynn

i had this thought while reading AEG (months ago) that reis was paving the way for a woldercanian invasion of earth. basically, that the woldercanians were "mice" who couldn't directly fight the storm king, but for whatever reason humans could (maybe SK's vulnerable to technology but not to magic or magic-based technology), hence requiring reis to get the USN to fight SK and making reis the evilest man on earth (as he's effectively selling out both the planet and the species). if the us president suspects chase is at least part wolder, he'd have a motive to keep reis's motive (per above) a secret from chase and focus on the gold. the USN might have thought reis was stockpiling his gold with an alien other than SK, specifically an alien with designs on conquest.

needless to say i have nothing to back the above theory up.

nate.

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Gwern Branwen — 06 Jan 2010, 13:39 · in reply to James Wynn

On Tue, Jan 5, 2010 at 9:46 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:  
When I spoke with Gene about it in Atlanta, he confirmed that it is the same island.

OK then.

Baden's whole assignment is screwy for all the reasons you give and more. But it no more works as a charity operation than anything else. He is given no mission to speak of at all. He's given no funds to disburse nor people to manage. And no information beforehand about what he will experience there.

All he is told is that he must go there alone. We find out why that is within hours of his family arriving. But we don't know *\*why\** anyone who comes with Baden is automatically an offering to the aliens (and --it is clear-- that is Hanga's understanding). The only thing that seems likely is that Baden is sent there because he is considered expendable: a broken tool. That, and he's in no position to turn down the assignment. And not all CIA agents have 007 skills many of them are merely bureaucrats with a knack for languages and some prior experience abroad. It makes sense that The Agency is the CIA, but it is not necessary.

But we're not given any feeling like 'go there, stay, and shut up'. We really are given the feeling of a not-so-efficient aid agency pensioning off a worker in a cheap island paradise until he finally kicks the bucket:

"It's a remote Pacific island chain." She cleared her throat and seemed to have swallowed a bone. "It's not going to be like Africa, Bad. You'll be on your own out there."

Me: "I thought you were going to fire me."

P.D.: "No, no! We wouldn't do that."

"Permanent sick leave."

"No, no, no! But, Bad." She leaned across her desk and for a minute I was afraid she was going to squeeze my hand. "This will be rough. I'm not going to try to fool you."

Hah!

Note that Baden's room is essentially free, his board minimal, and he otherwise isn't a drain on the agency; probably one or two hospital stays in the US would exceed the cost of sending and supporting Baden there. Retirees go to tropical 3rd World countries for reasons beyond the weather, y'know.

I didn't say he was a *\*spy\** for the government. He's sent there as a government's representative of some sort at a post that is hardly a plum offering for anyone who understands its purpose. The government is posting him there for reasons unstated but evidently important. The only official role I know of that doesn't require the assignee to know anything or do anything is hostage or sacrifice. And he wasn't sacrificed.

But hostage or sacrifice don't make sense to me. As you say, the latter doesn't occur, and the 'sacrifice' of his family could be down to Hanga's xenophobia or protecting his blood-brother (nobody else seems to have remarked that Baden's wife has come apparently with the intention of lassoing him - perhaps due to getting pregnant - and bringing him back to civilization, and thus away from Hanga and the island). And if hostage, hostage against what?

(Also note the utter lack of Squiddies in "The Tree is my Hat". Cthulhu should be perfectly active at this point;

Well, the only reason Cassie encounters Squiddies is because of her association with Reis (or Chase or the bat-people or because she's a 'star', who knows?). Hanga is the only alien we know of who seeks human company for pleasure.

That's true, but remember that Hanga grows in power. He is first a small dwarf. Only later is he a gigantic flying man-eating shark. And he's a dwarf *\*before\** the ceremony. And the chief's palace ceremony binds him.

In all of this, the space is open for there to be Cthulhu: it could be Cthulhu powering the chief (much like Kanoa is a cultist). While Hanga is weak, there could be hints of Cthulhu as the islanders' main propitiative. When Rob is discussing the origins, he could throw in allusions to Cthulhu - why South America\*, then?

The simplest explanation is that Cthulhu is never mentioned or hinted at because he isn't in this story's world; since AEG clearly tells us that Cthulhu is there, has been there for millenia, and will be there for a while (presumably), the simplest way to reconcile the 2 is to assume Wolfe is simply retconning The Tree Is My Hat into the later AEG universe. It's not unsurprising to me that a 1999 short story would not have the same fully fleshed out universe

\* I've changed my mind; Rob's description of pyramids & human sacrifice is clearly an allusion to Mesoamerica. Antarctica only works if you insist on seeing The Tree Is My Hat in the Cthulhu mythos and then because the Antarctic cities are the only possibility.

Note also that Chase supposedly worked for Reis once, which is a relationship one would expect to obviate the need for photos to a degree much more than merely being in the same cult.

Do you mean about healing Rian? Isn't that assuming a bit? (We think) we know that Chase worked for Pavlatos. But we don't know Ries had any involvement at all.

IIRC, doesn't Reis specifically say he hired Chase a few years ago and ever since Chase has been greedy and sought to extort more money out of him? I don't see any reason to disbelieve him. And if Chase executed a job for Reis, that's a good reason for Reis to want to make him an ally, otherwise he would just be going on reputation.

Whether you explain it via cloning or temporal plotting or whatever, they are the same person (in a sense) but different people inhabiting different space...one whom Cassie loves and aids and the other whom she loathes and undermines. The Garsegc/Setr parallel is key to understanding what I mean.

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J.

I never understood Wizard-Knight, so I didn't see that as much of a parallel. Cassie's pistol, silver-tipped though its bullets be, isn't much of a Terminus Est. And where's the sacrifice of Reis in Peace or TBOTNS? A lover killing the sacrificer of the loved doesn't match up AFAIK.

gwern

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James Wynn — 06 Jan 2010, 16:27 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

But we're not given any feeling like 'go there, stay, and shut up'. We really are given the feeling of a not-so-efficient aid agency pensioning off a worker in a cheap island paradise until he finally kicks the bucket:

Neither. Baden is given idea that he is being sent on a particularly unpleasant assignment. An assignment he would only take because the other choice is firing. The tone of his boss while giving him the assignment is pity. And I don't mean pity because he's an alcoholic or had a breakdown, whatever it was. I'm mean pity because he's being given the assignment and she knows he'll take it.

Note that Baden's room is essentially free, his board minimal, and he otherwise isn't a drain on the agency; probably one or two hospital stays in the US would exceed the cost of sending and supporting Baden there. Retirees go to tropical 3rd World countries for reasons beyond the weather, y'know.

But he's almost certainly not of retirement age, and even Baden thought the most reasonable course for dealing with him was termination. Assigning him to the island means they still have to pay his salary. Even charity aid workers don't live on adjusted per diem. They get full yearly salaries. Probably with a bonus for out-of-country service. The idea that an NGO would or could maroon an employee to a remote island to avoid medical expenses strikes me itself as a plot for a speculative fiction story. So I would have expected some exposition to justify it.

But hostage or sacrifice don't make sense to me. As you say, the latter doesn't occur, and the 'sacrifice' of his family could be down to Hanga's xenophobia or protecting his blood-brother (nobody else seems to have remarked that Baden's wife has come apparently with the intention of lassoing him - perhaps due to getting pregnant - and bringing him back to civilization, and thus away from Hanga and the island).

He's told that he is to be on the island alone, and within a couple hours of his family arriving on the island, Hanga singles out Baden's wife as a future meal. It's hard to ignore the coincidence.

And Baden is hardly being lassoed by his wife. There really nothing in the story to imply that Baden is a great catch. He doesn't see it that way. The picture we get from Baden is that his wife is a forgiving person who is staying with him \*in spite\* of their history. As you pointed out, Baden was told that he was to be stationed at the island \*totally on his own\*. If he's being retired, there's no point in that. It's presented to him as a tough, perhaps hazardous assignment. That's hardly a way to sell a plan to "pension him off". If the island was such a cheap alternative to paying medical expenses, why would he be the only one the Agency would station there? He can't be the only employee who has ever had chronic medical expenses. If The Agency had even pro forma duties there, why isn't Baden at least going through the motions of doing them, or mentioning them.

And why would his family want to take him back to civilization when that would mean he would have to quit his job? That is, if the job benefits with the Agency were so ideal.

And if hostage, hostage against what?

That's the million dollar question. What exactly is the Agency getting out of Baden being there? What are the rules that require he be there alone on the island? The Tree Is My Hat and An Evil Guest are both interesting introductions to this world. I wish Wolfe had deigned to actually explain it.

The simplest explanation is that Cthulhu is never mentioned or hinted at because he isn't in [TTIMH]'s world [snip] to assume Wolfe is simply retconning The Tree Is My Hat into the later AEG universe. It's not unsurprising to me that a 1999 short story would not have the same fully fleshed out universe

Sure. But when he retconned the story he had already established that The Agency had a direct presence on the island relating to the aliens there. Maybe he had the Storm King in mind, and maybe he didn't. But if he added the Storm King later, then he added Him off an island where he had established a bizarre \*official\* relationship between the aliens and humanity. So it's unlikely that The Agency doesn't know about the Storm King when we are introduced to him in AEG.

IIRC, doesn't Reis specifically say he hired Chase a few years ago and ever since Chase has been greedy and sought to extort more money out of him? I don't see any reason to disbelieve him.

I forgot he said he'd hired him at that dinner with Cassie. There's no more reason to believe Reis more than Chase. Cassie doesn't take his words at face-value or she would have abandoned Chase. But you're right. It does make one wonder why he kept those pictures. It's entirely possible that while Reis ended up paying for Chase's services, the two never met. Which definitely would suggest that Reis is not above \*shading\* a story. I do agree that Chase is a prostitute who will do anything for money (ala Sherry Gold and Hyacinth).

where's the sacrifice of Reis in Peace or  
TBOTNS? [snip]  
A lover killing the sacrificer of the loved  
doesn't match up

I don't expect you to be persuaded but:

Peace: While digging in a pit for the treasure, Weer's shovel it's a rock and gives off a spark. Lois thinks it's the treasure and pulls her little (hidden) pistol. The next thing we learn from Weer is that Lois has left town. Do you believe that? I don't. He buried her in that pit. TBOTNS: Severian takes Dr. Talos's sword from him (til now concealed in his cane) and strides into Baldander's ruined tower to kill him. But the antagonist is only over thrown. Cassie shooting Kanoa matches up perfectly with these and other instances IF you re-assess Kanoa as a more important figure than is immediately apparent. Otherwise, the scene has all the elements of the others but is carried out "wrong".

J.

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Gwern Branwen — 07 Jan 2010, 00:13 · in reply to James Wynn

On Wed, Jan 6, 2010 at 11:27 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:  
But we're not given any feeling like 'go there, stay, and shut up'. We really are given the feeling of a not-so-efficient aid agency pensioning off a worker in a cheap island paradise until he finally kicks the bucket:

Neither. Baden is given idea that he is being sent on a particularly unpleasant assignment. An assignment he would only take because the other choice is firing. The tone of his boss while giving him the assignment is pity. And I don't mean pity because he's an alcoholic or had a breakdown, whatever it was. I'm mean pity because he's being given the assignment and she knows he'll take it.

It's pity because she knows he doesn't deserve the job but he's getting it for old time's sake. Like nepotism. It's not pity like sending a man off to die. When one does that, one is more serious & somber - one doesn't solicitously lean forward and make as if to squeeze or hold hands.

Note that Baden's room is essentially free, his board minimal, and he otherwise isn't a drain on the agency; probably one or two hospital stays in the US would exceed the cost of sending and supporting Baden there. Retirees go to tropical 3rd World countries for reasons beyond the weather, y'know.

But he's almost certainly not of retirement age, and even Baden thought the most reasonable course for dealing with him was termination. Assigning him to the island means they still have to pay his salary. Even charity aid workers don't live on adjusted per diem. They get full yearly salaries. Probably with a bonus for out-of-country service. The idea that an NGO would or could maroon an employee to a remote island to avoid medical expenses

strikes me itself as a plot for a speculative fiction story. So I would have expected some exposition to justify it.

They'd still have to pay him unless they fired him: "Permanent sick leave." Sick leaves usually are compensated in some way\*, although I don't know how much they'd have to pay him. If you won't countenance outright firing, and he's not bedridden enough to justify sick leave, then you need to find a sinecure for him. A remote island with nothing for him to do is perfect.

\* one person tells me they understand in the UK it's something like 6 months at full salary, then half-pay afterwards

He's told that he is to be on the island alone, and within a couple hours of his family arriving on the island, Hanga singles out Baden's wife as a future meal. It's hard to ignore the coincidence.

Hold on. This is the second you've said he is ordered to be alone. What is this based on?

His boss says 'you will be on your own', but this is a prediction about other agency people, not white people or people in general - obviously Rob and the islanders are already there. Nor does he ever think 'The agency won't like Mary coming here, but I sure hope she does anyway!'

And Baden is hardly being lassoed by his wife. ?There really nothing in the story to imply that Baden is a great catch. He doesn't see it that way. The picture we get from Baden is that his wife is a forgiving person who is staying with him \*in spite\* of their history.

She pressures him with the jeep rental, and then there's the 'Mary wanted children, so she stopped the pill and did not tell me. That was what she told me when I drove Rob's jeep out to North Point.' line; isn't this one of the stereotypical gambits attributed to women?

Both examples point to a woman trying to get him to leave with her; as a civilized Christian woman, no doubt she doesn't want to raise a family on the pimply backend of nowhere.

As you pointed out, Baden was told that he was to be stationed at the island \*totally on his own\*. If he's being retired, there's no point in that. It's presented to him as a tough, perhaps hazardous assignment. That's hardly a way to sell a plan to "pension him off". If the island was such a cheap alternative to paying medical expenses, why would he be the only one the Agency would station there? He can't be the only employee who has ever had chronic medical expenses. If The Agency had even pro forma duties there, why isn't Baden at least going through the motions of doing them, or mentioning them.

He does complain about their lack: "All right, I'll keep my eyes open, and maybe someday the Agency will send me someplace where I'm needed."

And why would his family want to take him back to civilization when that would mean he would have to quit his job? That is, if the job benefits with the Agency were so ideal.

Because the benefits may be fine for Baden alone, but to raise a family with? I recently read a history of the British Raj, and the Civilians, even though paid very well, with money that went \*very\* far in India, still had financial hardships putting their kids through school and supporting them and often their entire family way off in England. The USG doesn't pay as well as John Company did. And then there's the location and populace.

And if hostage, hostage against what?

That's the million dollar question. What exactly is the Agency getting out of Baden being there? What are the rules that require he be there alone on the island? The Tree Is My Hat and An Evil Guest are both interesting

introductions to this world. I wish Wolfe had deigned to actually explain it.

They seem to get nothing out of it beyond shuffling off a burden. What is he hostage against? If Hanga saw Baden as a hostage against the USG attacking Hanga, or something, then \*why on earth\* would he make a blood oath with Baden? That defeats the entire point! What is a hostage you have sworn to never hurt or kill? Not a very useful one. Similar for a sacrifice.

On the other hand, Baden going there for non-Hanga reasons and Hanga taking a shine to this naive foreigner who is pasty-shark-white makes perfect sense with the blood oath.

IIRC, doesn't Reis specifically say he hired Chase a few years ago and ever since Chase has been greedy and sought to extort more money out of him? I don't see any reason to disbelieve him.

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Reis is probably lying about the extortion part, I agree. That's calculated for sympathy, and we have no evidence that Chase actually tried to extort Reis, do we? But Wolfe's lies usually contain truth.

where's the sacrifice of Reis in Peace or TBOTNS? [snip]  
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I don't expect you to be persuaded but:

Peace: While digging in a pit for the treasure, Weer's shovel it's a rock and gives off a spark. Lois thinks it's the treasure and pulls her little (hidden) pistol. The next thing we learn from Weer is that Lois has left town. Do you believe that? I don't. He buried her in that pit.

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Cassie shooting Kanoa matches up perfectly with these and other instances IF you re-assess Kanoa as a more important figure than is immediately apparent. Otherwise, the scene has all the elements of the others but is carried out "wrong".

J.

But again, in Peace and TBOTNS it's a duel. Severian against Baldanders, Weer against Lois. There is no third sacrificed party. If a major piece of the analogy is missing, you can't make any inferences.

gwern

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James Wynn — 08 Jan 2010, 01:25 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

He's told that he is to be on the island alone, and within a couple hours of his family arriving on the island, Hanga singles out Baden's wife as a future meal. It's hard to ignore the coincidence.

Hold on. This is the second you've said he is ordered to be alone.

What is this based on?

His boss says 'you will be on your own', but this is a prediction about other agency people, not white people or people in general obviously Rob and the islanders are already there.

It did *\*look\** like merely a prediction, until his family arrived and they were immediately treated as an offering. I didn't say there would be no other white people, but there seems to be some limitations on who can safely come and go there. And family members seems to be part of the limitation.

Nor does he ever

think 'The agency won't like Mary coming here, but I sure hope she does anyway!'

No, he doesn't say that. Obviously Baden doesn't know the rules about being there anymore than we do. When he shouted at Hanga to stop killing his family, the Shark alien just looked at him without comprehension. Clearly Hanga has an understanding of the rules than Baden doesn't.

That's the million dollar question.

They seem to get nothing out of it beyond shuffling off a burden.

Once again, I don't see that they have escaped a burden. They still have to pay him. If they had fired him...okay, let's pretend he has some kind of union rule that says they have to pay him 6 months or even a year after they fire him. Big deal. He's clearly just as useless to them on the island as he would be in a Chicago living room. Except that they have extended the time they have to pay a totally unproductive employee. I just don't see it. If there is a job like this for anyone except the children of royalty, I'd really like to apply for it.

What is he hostage against? If Hanga saw Baden as a hostage against the USG attacking Hanga, or something, then *\*why on earth\** would he make a blood oath with Baden? That defeats the entire point! What is a hostage you have sworn to never hurt or kill? Not a very useful one. Similar for a sacrifice.

He wasn't sacrificed, so that's not it. I don't *\*know\** what he's doing there. Neither does he. That's the point, right? That's what's so frustrating about this story. But I assume the Agency sent him there for

*\*some\** reason. Contacting Hanga is the only thing he does there. When he comes, Hanga approaches him. He doesn't approach everyone. Why him? When Baden's wife comes, he approaches her -- immediately. Then he attacks her. That's the story. It's clear the plot is developing according to some logic. But it is a logic that is as invisible to me as Hanga is invisible to everyone but Baden and his wife.

On the other hand, Baden going there for non-Hanga reasons and Hanga taking a shine to this naive foreigner who is pasty-shark-white makes perfect sense with the blood oath.

I'm sorry, but I just don't see it. Way too random.

Reis is probably lying about the extortion part, I agree. That's calculated for sympathy, and we have no evidence that Chase actually tried to extort Reis, do we? But Wolfe's lies usually contain truth.

I agree. Reis is shading the truth. Chase is not telling the whole story, and the whole story about Chase never made it into this novel. That's frustrating.

But again, in *Peace* and *TBOTNS* it's a duel. Severian against Baldanders, Weer against Lois. There is no third sacrificed party. If a major piece of the analogy is missing, you can't make any inferences.

Well, there actually *is* a sacrifice occurring in The Knight, when Able draws the sword (hidden under the water in the cave) and slays Grengarm. In There Are Doors, Green kills North (in the boxing ring with North's hidden handgun) to protect Lora. In The Book of the Long Sun, Silk kills Blood (in the sitting room with the hidden cane sword) to protect Marble/Rose. Cassie kills Kanoa because he is trying to kill Reis (we suppose). And we can't really know if the sacrifice went off as planned, can we? It doesn't have to be a duel every time. There doesn't have to be a sacrifice every time. Wolfe is not writing the same novel over and over again. I didn't mean to imply that he was. But, based on every previous time this little play has been carried out, the antagonist killed is more than a bit player.

J.

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Gwern Branwen — 08 Jan 2010, 19:22 · in reply to James Wynn

On Thu, Jan 7, 2010 at 8:25 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:  
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This is my interpretation.

1. Baden gets sick in Uganda, and becomes an impediment and danger to all the other Agency workers doing good useful work there.
2. The agency doesn't want to fire him because as a government bureaucrat/union/whatever, he's protected by all sorts of rules\*, and being fired for being sick plays poorly in Peoria, but indefinite sick leave also plays badly because he could be made to look like a welfare queen.
3. The only solution is dispatching him to a distant sinecure where none of its other workers want to go (because of the lack of glory or promotion to be had), where there's no real work his incompetence might endanger, where there are no other Agency workers to infect or obstruct, and where any reporters or outsiders would have to work \*really\* hard to get to him or otherwise notice that it's a sinecure.
4. Baden is pasty white, shark-white, because he's new. And he spends a lot of time on beaches and in the water. Hanga is being opposed by the village chief, and is interested in humans in general, and Baden is the one that looks most like him and spends the most time near him\*\* and has lots of free time to randomly encounter him. Hanga befriends him and being a primitive god, this friendship takes the form of the blood oath to not be in a predator-prey relationship.
5. Baden's wife comes looking for him. He's no prize, but nevertheless, he is the father of her children. Love can be quite blind. She makes it very clear she wants to bring him back - that's practically all we see of her character, trying to manipulate Baden.
6. AEG mentions the analogue case of the gaffer who makes such an oath but his family is eaten. Nothing about any Agency sending the gaffer's family as a sacrifice - they were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Hanga gets hungry.
7. Either because Hanga is hungry, or because he is aware Baden might leave and wants him to stay, Hanga attacks and attempts to eat Baden's family.

Note how this explains things beautifully.

- We don't need to warp the boss's statement into something it is not.
- We don't need to say 'but it's kindersortalittlelikeifyousquint some scenes in some other works'.
- We don't need to explain how Baden or the Agency hide all their equipment and plans and knowledge or 'real' work.
- We don't need to insist 'but Baden \*must\* be a sacrifice or something because though I can't tell you what on earth he's doing there, I'm sure it's not what it seems!'
- We don't need to say, 'Well, in TTIMH, Hanga understands human families and relationships and his incomprehension is actually incomprehension about why Baden is not playing by the rules, but decades/centuries later in AEG, Hanga has simply forgotten and doesn't understand why the gaffer is upset about his family.'
- we don't need to make extra-textual assumptions like 'TTIMH is not, as one would naturally assume from the 8 or 9 years between TTIMH & AEG, merely an early version of the AEG

universe, but rather it is the full and complete setting and must be interpreted as such, though it appears to omit things and be said early version.'

And we leave room open for the buried-corpse theories, the theological accounts (that the story is about a fall into damnation and demon-worshiping), and even to an extent the "it's all a mental illness" theories.

\* You may not think this rules are excessive. But Wolfe is conservative, and thus likely believes that government jobs are uncompetitive, very highly compensated relative to duties, and in general nepotistic & corrupt.

\*\* Either because Baden lives near his buried corpse, if you like that interpretation of the 'tree is my hat' comment, or because Baden spends a lot of time near the water

gwern