

The Sorcerer's House Questions (*Major Spoilers*)

The Urth list — 147 messages, 20 voices, 19 Mar 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5563>

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Matthew Keeley — 19 Mar 2010, 21:42

Just finished reading the new book; it seems a lot clearer than AEG, but, being Wolfe, there are quite a few unasked questions raised by my first reading. But first I should insert spoiler space, as I will be discussing the ending, etc.

(spoilers commence)

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8. What's with the dwarf?

9. The "compiler" states that the letters may be out of order.... Are there any that are clearly in the wrong place in the narrative?

-Matt

Matthew Keeley — 19 Mar 2010, 22:14 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

Another thought, one that gives away major plot points.

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On Fri, Mar 19, 2010 at 5:42 PM, Matthew Keeley

<matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com>wrote:

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Gwern Branwen — 20 Mar 2010, 03:46 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

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Here's another off-the-wall suggestion: Ambrosius is Ted. Enough of the mundane characters turn out to be special that we should be suspicious of the others. The numen of Ambrosius was hidden in a ring hidden in a fish (a la Koschei the Deathless hiding his heart inside a duck inside a rabbit inside...), and came to Bax as a fellow sorcerer through the operation of the tri-thingy. This explains the ring. The shared sorcerous similarity is why Doris thinks they're unspeakably alike, and may also explain why Ted's ghost wants them together.

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8. What's with the dwarf?

I haven't the slightest idea. He appears gratuitous, Dickens aside. Maybe he's meant to illustrate the avaricious amoral nature of Faerie?

I've been pondering a theory that perhaps we have the good twin/bad twin reversed, and that Bax really is evil, and likewise his corresponding twin bother, and that the dwarf is so depraved & evil that his capture & confinement is meant to be a signal that the capturing & confining brother is actually good. But this doesn't seem to work at all.

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I'm inclined to think that he's not literally a devil: Wolfe makes fun of that during dinner. And Black seems ambivalent, and somewhat evil (doesn't intervene to prevent multiple murders, creates and unleashes a vampire, etc.), but not as malevolent as a real devil.

That's not to say he may not be a Faust-like figure - Lupine sold her soul, so there must be souls and entities to sell souls to.

One thing I didn't quite follow was the finances: when Bax explains that the legacy was exhausted entirely, forcing him to seek a job, doesn't that imply that it's all gone? Then why does he so prominently depend on checks coming in the first couple letters?

gwern

James Crossley — 20 Mar 2010, 05:44 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Glad to see people taking on the interpretive task already. I finished the book a couple days ago, and as with all Wolfe's books, there are obviously layers below the surface. I feel like I have a handle on the second-order mysteries of the plot, but haven't yet given thought to the third- (or fourth?) level. Eager to hear more notions, half-baked or otherwise.

James

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(Open questions: what happened to Zwart's twin? Is he Ted? How did Zwart know that Bax would be fighting werewolves years in advance?)

gwern

Gwern Branwen — 23 Mar 2010, 13:21 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

John C. Wright: <http://johncwright.livejournal.com/322189.html>

"Between the time I wrote the original post at 4.00 AM and now at 10.00, I have reached page 33. Thoughts so far: Mistrust whatever the letter-writer says when he writes to his brother, whom he is asking for money. When the ex-con is reading Thucydides, suspect a change of personality or identity, as often happens in a Wolfe book. When the ex-con finds a ring inside a fish, he takes it as a sign of good fortune, but the Polycrates myth (if I remember it correctly) is that a king throws a ring into the sea to avert the jealousy of the gods; and finding the ring inside a fisherman's catch meant that the god rejected the sacrifice: in other words, it is an prodigy among ill omens. "

Side note; this is a hilarious D&D story: <http://johncwright.livejournal.com/323619.html> Also funny; how Wright seems to bring politics into everything, eg. <http://johncwright.livejournal.com/324494.html> (I didn't sympathize with the Mars preservers in Robinson's _Blue Mars_, but that didn't stop me from enjoying it.)

gwern

Jonathan Goodwin — 23 Mar 2010, 16:00 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

The Women's Studies professor at Mt. Holyoke who gave Millie a good grade if she would let her hold her hand was fairly offensive, I thought.

The book itself I liked, and I intend to write a review of it soon.

On Tue, Mar 23, 2010 at 8:21 AM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:
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Gwern Branwen — 23 Mar 2010, 16:10 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

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<joncgoodwin at gmail.com> wrote:

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Stuart Hamm — 23 Mar 2010, 17:16 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

I read as " I slept with professor and I'd sleep with you if you were here"...

???????? ? ?

?Mobile — (415) 786-3624

STUHAMM.COM

FACEBOOK/STUARTHAMM

myspace.com/stuhamm

Skype? stuart.hamm

? ??

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From: Jonathan Goodwin <joncgoodwin at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Sorcerer's House Questions (*Major Spoilers*) To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Date: Tuesday, March 23, 2010, 10:05 AM

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Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

<thalassocrat08 at gmail.com> wrote:

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But it's Bax who makes a will in favour of George, and Bax who "disappears". Everything about the replacement is under Bax's control, really, if he can get George to come to him, set George up to be killed, dispose of the body & get Millie to accept him (Bax) as "George". Faerie isn't an essential element for this scheme.

Jonathan Goodwin — 23 Mar 2010, 20:53 · in reply to Mr Thalassocrat

I predict that it won't be long before someone claims that the last letter purportedly from George but heavily hinted to be from Bax is in fact from George. Then someone will claim that it was Bax pretending to be George pretending to be Bax pretending to be George. Then why not keep going.

On Tue, Mar 23, 2010 at 3:31 PM, Mr Thalassocrat <thalassocrat08 at gmail.com> wrote:

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imprisoned. Now Bax is aiming for bigger payback.

In his first letter to his con-buddy he presents George as a possible
source
of funds - that's what he sees in George; money. Bax is very interested
in
money. He cultivates George's bubble-headed wife to ensure a smooth
transition. For 7 years he enjoys George's assets and wife (while still
having access to the face-fox's charms).

After 7 years, "Bax" is legally dead & he can reclaim the house and bank
accounts via "Bax's" will. Perhaps George's wife's charms are fading.
Time
to disappear, go back to the house and start a life in Faery ...

Re-reading it, the last letter becomes ever more obvious: the style is
like Bax, the few hours in faerie he mentions is like Bax, the signoff
is like Bax, the sudden turn-around in affections is like Bax, the
proposed trip to just Greece is like Bax (and in the vein of his
second PhD, like the readings at the library are in the vein of the
first). Wolfe has really made this replacement easy to identify.

However, I don't think Bax planned the duel from the start. He
originally just wants money from George, with no mention of George
coming over and doing something bizarre like signing his will over to
Bax. George is not yet angry enough, until the butler and trial, to
want to kill Bax - suffering as a poor ex-con is enough for him.
Without Faerie, Bax has no plausible explanation for Millie of where
George went. And so on. The replacement only works after a great deal
has happened.

But it's Bax who makes a will in favour of George, and Bax who "disappears".
Everything about the replacement is under Bax's control, really, if he can
get George to come to him, set George up to be killed, dispose of the body? &
get Millie to accept him (Bax) as "George". Faerie isn't an essential
element for this scheme.

On Tue, Mar 23, 2010 at 4:31 PM, Mr Thalassocrat

<thalassocrat08 at gmail.com> wrote:

But it's Bax who makes a will in favour of George, and Bax who "disappears".

According to the message from George, they both make a will in favor of each other. Bax has a good reason to want to replace George and not just kill him: there will be zero questions asked this way (notice that the final letter's lame explanation of Bax just going off into faerie for no stated reason, forever, apparently is completely successful - the endnote presents 'George' as having no trouble whatsoever managing Bax's estate, George's estate, or having Bax declared dead).

Everything about the replacement is under Bax's control, really, if he can get George to come to him, set George up to be killed, dispose of the body? & get Millie to accept him (Bax) as "George". Faerie isn't an essential element for this scheme.

Neither twin seems to be especially in control. Both need to kill each other. Bax *might* be able to forge George's signature, but he still needs George dead, and vice versa. I don't really follow what you're saying here - if there's any advantage accruing to Bax, isn't that just further evidence that Bax did kill & replace George?

gwern

Mr Thalassocrat — 23 Mar 2010, 21:37 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On Wed, Mar 24, 2010 at 7:51 AM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

On Tue, Mar 23, 2010 at 4:31 PM, Mr Thalassocrat

<thalassocrat08 at gmail.com> wrote:

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Sure - we're agreed that Bax killed & replaced George. The discussion (I thought) was about whether Bax planned it all along. I think he might have.

Gwern Branwen — 23 Mar 2010, 22:53 · in reply to Mr Thalassocrat

On Tue, Mar 23, 2010 at 5:37 PM, Mr Thalassocrat

<thalassocrat08 at gmail.com> wrote:

On Wed, Mar 24, 2010 at 7:51 AM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

On Tue, Mar 23, 2010 at 4:31 PM, Mr Thalassocrat
<thalassocrat08 at gmail.com> wrote:

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just kill him: there will be zero questions asked this way (notice
that the final letter's lame explanation of Bax just going off into
faerie for no stated reason, forever, apparently is completely
successful - the endnote presents 'George' as having no trouble
whatsoever managing Bax's estate, George's estate, or having Bax
declared dead).

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get George to come to him, set George up to be killed, dispose of the
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saying here - if there's any advantage accruing to Bax, isn't that
just further evidence that Bax did kill & replace George?

Sure - we're agreed that Bax killed & replaced George. The discussion (I
thought) was about whether Bax planned it all along. I think he might have.

OK; I'll reiterate - how could Bax have planned the inheritance, the various events that made
George willing to come, George's offer, the two pistols, Faerie, and the independent
corroboration that makes the final replacement at all possible (the psychic's letters, the letters
from his prison friends, the end note's asseveration that Bax really did come into the wealth he
claimed to've in his letters), all from the very getgo as a starving ex-con who was breaking into
houses and construction sites?

gwern

Thomas Bitterman — 27 Mar 2010, 01:25 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On Tue, Mar 23, 2010 at 6:53 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

OK; I'll reiterate - how could Bax have planned the inheritance, the
various events that made George willing to come, George's offer, the
two pistols, Faerie, and the independent corroboration that makes the
final replacement at all possible (the psychic's letters, the letters
from his prison friends, the end note's asseveration that Bax really
did come into the wealth he claimed to've in his letters), all from
the very getgo as a starving ex-con who was breaking into houses and
construction sites?

Nothing in the letters actually happened. Bax knew Millie had a thing for him before he went to
prison. So did George - it accounts for his anger toward Bax, his meanness to Millie, and his
desire to throw Bax in jail.

While in jail, Bax decides to kill and replace his brother. He befriends a forger (Lou) and a killer
("shotgun" Shel, which I just got) and learns some skills.

When he gets out he starts writing these flowery letters, full of fairy tale monsters. He sends
them to George, knowing that George will read them, and then Millie. Bax knows the effect this

will have on George, and baits him to come to Medicine Man. Bax kills him, forges a will, and gets the money and the girl.

When it comes right down to it, we are presented with no evidence that any of the events described actually happened. The Compiler makes no effort to check out title records, police logs or other documentation that would corroborate the story. His removal of dates makes it that much harder for anybody interested to check, also. Why would he do this? Because Bax is the Compiler, and this book is him gloating over his big scam.

Jonathan Goodwin — 27 Mar 2010, 01:44 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

Identifying the compiler and Bax makes everything too easy. If you can reconcile this with an implied author compiler and the psychic, then it might work better. (I had somewhat similar thoughts.)

On Fri, Mar 26, 2010 at 8:25 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:
On Tue, Mar 23, 2010 at 6:53 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

OK; I'll reiterate - how could Bax have planned the inheritance, the various events that made George willing to come, George's offer, the two pistols, Faerie, and the independent corroboration that makes the final replacement at all possible (the psychic's letters, the letters from his prison friends, the end note's asseveration that Bax really did come into the wealth he claimed to've in his letters), all from the very getgo as a starving ex-con who was breaking into houses and construction sites?

Nothing in the letters actually happened. Bax knew Millie had a thing for him before he went to prison. So did George - it accounts for his anger toward Bax, his meanness to Millie, and his desire to throw Bax in jail.

While in jail, Bax decides to kill and replace his brother. He befriends a forger (Lou) and a killer ("shotgun" Shel, which I just got) and learns some skills.

When he gets out he starts writing these flowery letters, full of fairy tale monsters.
He sends them to George, knowing that George will read them, and then Millie.
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Gwern Branwen — 27 Mar 2010, 13:48 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

On Fri, Mar 26, 2010 at 9:25 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:
On Tue, Mar 23, 2010 at 6:53 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

OK; I'll reiterate - how could Bax have planned the inheritance, the various events that made George willing to come, George's offer, the two pistols, Faerie, and the independent corroboration that makes the final replacement at all possible (the psychic's letters, the letters from his prison friends, the end note's asseveration that Bax really did come into the wealth he claimed to've in his letters), all from the very getgo as a starving ex-con who was breaking into houses and construction sites?

Nothing in the letters actually happened. Bax knew Millie had a thing for him before he went to prison. So did George - it accounts for his anger toward Bax, his meanness to Millie, and his desire to throw Bax in jail.

While in jail, Bax decides to kill and replace his brother. He befriends a forger (Lou) and a killer ("shotgun" Shel, which I just got) and learns some skills.

When he gets out he starts writing these flowery letters, full of fairy tale monsters. He sends them to George, knowing that George will read them, and then Millie. Bax knows the effect this will have on George, and baits him to come to Medicine Man. Bax kills him, forges a will, and gets the money and the girl.

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The hound of horror would be very checkable, especially if the archives really do bristle with stories.

gwern

Thomas Bitterman — 27 Mar 2010, 14:34 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On Sat, Mar 27, 2010 at 9:48 AM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:
The hound of horror would be very checkable, especially if the archives really do bristle with stories.

And it's the only thing the Compiler sources. All small towns have ghost stories. Bax wove this one into his story. It's always handy to have a few true things in even the biggest hoax.

If we assume the Compiler is not Wolfe that leaves the question of what kind of book this is supposed to be. The Compiler is trying to pass it off as non-fiction in the sense that the people, places, letters and many of the events actually existed/happened. The Compiler does not

indicate that he thinks Bax killed George. That makes this a colorful missing person story, with some questions about how it came to be written.

First, how did the Compiler find out about the story in the first place? There is no indication that the story, even while it was happening, made much news in Medicine Man, much less the outside world.

Second, how did the Compiler get all the letters he did? He credits Millie, Shell's daughter, and Mrs. Pogach for providing the letters they had. However, there are letters in the book that that group can't account for:

- the letters to and from Doris
- letters that were sent to Bax (assuming the senders did not keep copies)

Bax knew about the story because he was there. And he got all the letters because he either wrote them or received them. He kept copies to help keep his story straight.

Thomas Bitterman — 27 Mar 2010, 14:51 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

On Fri, Mar 26, 2010 at 9:44 PM, Jonathan Goodwin <joncgoodwin at gmail.com> wrote:
Identifying the compiler and Bax makes everything too easy. If you can reconcile this with an implied author compiler and the psychic, then it might work better. (I had somewhat similar thoughts.)

The psychic is a confederate. She is paid for her help in getting Millie to buy in to the whole Faerie thing. Having a psychic as a fraud would fit Wolfe.

A little terminology before handling the Compiler. Let's use "author" to indicate the writer of the story, in the world of the story. For example, Severian or Watson. We can then use "Author" to identify the real-life writer, for example Wolfe or Doyle.

Wolfe has used the author/Author distinction before, in Urth. In Urth, Wolfe explicitly identifies when the Author is speaking. If we take it as a rule that Wolfe always identifies when the Author is speaking, then the lack of identification of the Compiler as the Author would make the Compiler the author. That is, the Compiler is a fictional character who wrote the story, in the world of the story.

Gwern Branwen — 27 Mar 2010, 14:57 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

On Sat, Mar 27, 2010 at 10:34 AM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:
On Sat, Mar 27, 2010 at 9:48 AM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

The hound of horror would be very checkable, especially if the archives really do bristle with stories.

And it's the only thing the Compiler sources. All small towns have ghost stories.

Bax wove this one into his story. It's always handy to have a few true things in even the biggest hoax.

If we assume the Compiler is not Wolfe that leaves the question of what kind of book this is supposed to be. The Compiler is trying to pass it off as non-fiction in the sense that the people, places, letters and many of the events actually existed/happened. The Compiler does not indicate that he thinks Bax killed

George. That makes this a colorful missing person story, with some questions about how it came to be written.

First, how did the Compiler find out about the story in the first place? There is no indication that the story, even while it was happening, made much news in Medicine Man, much less the outside world.

Second, how did the Compiler get all the letters he did? He credits Millie, Shell's daughter, and Mrs. Pogach for providing the letters they had. However, there are letters in the book that that group can't account for:

- the letters to and from Doris
- letters that were sent to Bax (assuming the senders did not keep copies)

Bax knew about the story because he was there. And he got all the letters because he either wrote them or received them. He kept copies to help keep his story straight.

If the compiler is Bax, then why does he drop in quite explicit hints that the letters' dates have been tampered with and that Bax may be lying about how he obtained the house etc. Wouldn't Bax just omit those points or say 'I removed dates for brevity, like I edited the language'?

If the answer is that Bax is performing a triple-fake, adding those in to defuse suspicion that the events are fake - then I think you've gone a little far down the rabbit hole.

gwern

Jonathan Goodwin — 27 Mar 2010, 15:21 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

You see, the issue here is that the "Compiler's Note" is a paratext, to use Genette's term, in the same way that the little blurbs about finding Latro and Severian's manuscripts are. They are an agreed-upon fiction, because we understand that some justification is expected for how this particular narrative structure came to be. Such devices are very common in older novels, and I agree with you that it is not appropriate to identify the author of them with Gene Wolfe exactly, particularly when there is a direct statement that this arranger has made certain influential choices in the presentation of the material. Assuming, however, that the arranger and Bax are one makes the entire structure either incoherent or pointless. The fiction of the "compiler's note" is that comes from a putative arranger/editor of these letters prior, not to their discovery, but their publication. This is a different level or frame in the narrative structure and having Bax jump it does not fit. Having made that point, I agree that Bax is the exact type who would want to defraud/murder his brother and then brag about it in an obscure form. I just don't think we need the compiler identification to make this work.

Also, re Wolfe' attitude toward the psychic, he is fond of pointing out that witches and such can be found in the yellowpages and seems to like the rather timeworn concept of having them both be frauds and gifted/cursed with the real thing.

On Sat, Mar 27, 2010 at 9:51 AM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:
On Fri, Mar 26, 2010 at 9:44 PM, Jonathan Goodwin <joncgoodwin at gmail.com> wrote:

Identifying the compiler and Bax makes everything too easy. If you can reconcile this with an implied author compiler and the psychic, then

it might work better. (I had somewhat similar thoughts.)

The psychic is a confederate. She is paid for her help in getting Millie to buy in to the whole Faerie thing. Having a psychic as a fraud would fit Wolfe.

A little terminology before handling the Compiler. Let's use "author" to indicate the writer of the story, in the world of the story. For example, Severian or Watson. We can then use "Author" to identify the real-life writer, for example Wolfe or Doyle.

Wolfe has used the author/Author distinction before, in Urth. In Urth, Wolfe explicitly identifies when the Author is speaking. If we take it as a rule that Wolfe always identifies when the Author is speaking, then the lack of identification of the Compiler as the Author would make the Compiler the author. That is, the Compiler is a fictional character who wrote the story, in the world of the story.

Dave Tallman — 29 Mar 2010, 13:35 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

...I agree that

Bax is the exact type who would want to defraud/murder his brother and then brag about it in an obscure form. I just don't think we need the compiler identification to make this work.

I agree that making the compiler Bax, so that all the supporting evidence can be lies (the storage cabinet and the description of the Japanese sword by Mrs. Dunn that is good enough for an expert, for example) is cheating, taking away the suspension of disbelief to an extreme extent. Push this too far, and you arrive at the true but uninteresting conclusion that this is a work of fiction and none of the characters are real.

The independent evidence of the letters from others, especially the challenge letter by George on pp. 261-262, shows that what Bax says about the supernatural world is essentially true. Is that letter supposedly forged by Bax?

One question for me is the identity of the "wonderful girl who really knows her way around that place." I suspect it is Doris, who might have thought George was the winning side. She does know more of the supernatural than first appears, given her connection to her ghost-husband Ted. It could possibly be Lupine, but it's doubtful because she's all about Emlyn.

Thomas Bitterman — 29 Mar 2010, 21:01 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

On Sat, Mar 27, 2010 at 11:21 AM, Jonathan Goodwin <joncgoodwin at gmail.com> wrote:

You see, the issue here is that the "Compiler's Note" is a paratext, to use Genette's term, in the same way that the little blurbs about finding Latro and Severian's manuscripts are. They are an agreed-upon

Maybe not that agreed-upon :-)

fiction, because we understand that some justification is expected for how this particular narrative structure came to be. Such devices are very common in older novels, and I agree with you that it is not appropriate to identify the author of them with Gene Wolfe exactly,

particularly when there is a direct statement that this arranger has made certain influential choices in the presentation of the material. Assuming, however, that the arranger and Bax are one makes the entire structure either incoherent or pointless.

I don't see why this is the case.

The fiction of the "compiler's note" is that comes from a putative arranger/editor of these letters prior, not to their discovery, but their publication.

I do not see why such an assumption must be made. It is easy to imagine an epistolary novel containing an appendix to the effect of "What a wild adventure I had" where the "I" was the author of some of the letters.

This is a different level or frame in the narrative structure and having Bax jump it does not fit.

Nothing else fits the notes.

- if Wolfe is the Compiler, why would he have to pay one of his own characters for some letters? why/how would he search out the sword and perform other in-world actions?
- if it is some other, unknown, in-world character, how did they hear about this obscure, small-town missing-persons case? how did they know the letters were out of order? how did they get letters sent to Doris, whom they never spoke to? or the letters from George to Bax, both dead?

Gwern Branwen — 29 Mar 2010, 21:19 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

On Mon, Mar 29, 2010 at 5:01 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:
Nothing else fits the notes.

- if Wolfe is the Compiler, why would he have to pay one of his own ? characters for some letters? why/how would he search out the sword ? and perform other in-world actions?
- if it is some other, unknown, in-world character, how did they hear about ? this obscure, small-town missing-persons case? how did they know the ? letters were out of order? how did they get letters sent to Doris, whom ? they never spoke to? or the letters from George to Bax, both dead?

None of these are insurmountable, and all are far more likely than the framestory in TBOTNS. (Oh, in the incredible vastness of space, the translator found a tiny object floating around from a previous universe? Whatever.)

There's somebody interested in anything. The long tail. Maybe the compiler is a historian from that town. Maybe they are a relative. Maybe they are a researcher who heard about the Hound of Horror and investigated. (Remember the backfiles bristling comment; that's the comment of someone who has went into the stacks.) There are millions of books published each year; they can't *all* be about major interesting topics. And the letters are intrinsically interesting. (Look at us!)

How did they know the letters were out of order? Do you have some reason to distrust the given explanation?

How do you know the compiler never spoke to Doris? He doesn't mention her. Not all thanks are exhaustive.

Why couldn't Millie (whom the compiler thanks first and foremost for access to letters, including

letters belonging to George) have George's letters? If 'George' inherited the mansion, then he also inherits those letters, which would have been left in the mansion. Why would 'George' have kept them? Trophies, or just scholarly ratpacking.

None of these answers are particularly odd, none throw any particular light on anything (and so Wolfe can't be expected to have supplied them), and importantly, don't force us to doubt each and everything we are told. Total skepticism is not a good exegetical starting point with fiction.

gvern

Thomas Bitterman — 29 Mar 2010, 23:08 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Mon, Mar 29, 2010 at 9:35 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

I agree that making the compiler Bax, so that all the supporting evidence can be lies (the storage cabinet and the description of the Japanese sword by Mrs. Dunn that is good enough for an expert, for example) is cheating, taking away the suspension of disbelief to an extreme extent. Push this too far, and you arrive at the true but uninteresting conclusion that this is a work of fiction and none of the characters are real.

Then it should not be pushed too far.

The independent evidence of the letters from others, especially the challenge letter by George on pp. 261-262, shows that what Bax says about the supernatural world is essentially true. Is that letter supposedly forged by Bax?

It is a strange letter. At the time it was written (which is a bit hazy), George is apparently lost in the house. Why would he write a letter from inside the house? How would it get delivered? Why not just talk to Bax directly, especially when George is planning a duel (certainly illegal, and likely to void any will)? Why duel instead of just killing Bax and, as the sole surviving relative, inherit the place outright?

So either George is wandering lost in the house and writing letters that go against his own interests, or is wandering around town frantically looking for Bax when he knows exactly where Bax lives. Or Bax wrote it to make George look bad.

One question for me is the identity of the "wonderful girl who really knows

her way around that place." I suspect it is Doris, who might have thought George was the winning side. She does know more of the supernatural than first appears, given her connection to her ghost-husband Ted. It could possibly be Lupine, but it's doubtful because she's all about Emlyn.

I'll admit to liking this theory, even if it is (somewhat) inconsistent with my own.

Thomas Bitterman — 30 Mar 2010, 00:12 · in reply to Gvern Branwen

On Mon, Mar 29, 2010 at 5:19 PM, Gvern Branwen <gvern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

On Mon, Mar 29, 2010 at 5:01 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

Nothing else fits the notes.

- if Wolfe is the Compiler, why would he have to pay one of his own characters for some letters? why/how would he search out the sword and perform other in-world actions?

- if it is some other, unknown, in-world character, how did they hear about

this obscure, small-town missing-persons case? how did they know the letters were out of order? how did they get letters sent to Doris,

whom
they never spoke to? or the letters from George to Bax, both dead?

None of these are insurmountable, and all are far more likely than the
framestory in TBOTNS. (Oh, in the incredible vastness of space, the
translator found a tiny object floating around from a previous
universe? Whatever.)

Given the universe of the New Sun the framestory is not the most far-fetched thing that
happened. Explanations should fit within the universe of the work, or at least within the same
realism-ballpark.

There's somebody interested in anything. The long tail. Maybe the
compiler is a historian from that town. Maybe they are a relative.
Maybe they are a researcher who heard about the Hound of Horror and
investigated. (Remember the backfiles bristling comment; that's the
comment of someone who has went into the stacks.) There are millions
of books published each year; they can't *all* be about major
interesting topics. And the letters are intrinsically interesting.
(Look at us!)

Most books are written to turn a profit, or are at least published to do so. Small-town
missing-persons stories generally don't. So that leaves a local historian or a relative. One might
expect a historian to be a little more curious about things like dates, title transfers, police
records and the like. None of the major characters are exactly crawling with relatives. Bax is at
least as likely.

It just occurred to me that his next-door neighbor is named Mrs. Naber. The whole book is
littered with clumsy lies and inconsistencies.

How did they know the letters were out of order? Do you have some
reason to distrust the given explanation?

The explanation is "half the dates he provided were clearly incorrect". So yeah. How would the
Compiler know that?

How do you know the compiler never spoke to Doris? He doesn't mention
her. Not all thanks are exhaustive.

No, but they do tend to include the most important sources. Doris wrote or is the subject of
more letters than Mrs. Pogach, who is thanked. I may be wrong; it may be that Doris is just
mentioned a lot but not written to much. Still an omission from such a small list bears
examination.

Why couldn't Millie (whom the compiler thanks first and foremost for
access to letters, including letters belonging to George) have
George's letters? If 'George' inherited the mansion, then he also
inherits those letters, which would have been left in the mansion. Why
would 'George' have kept them? Trophies, or just scholarly ratpacking.

In other words, no good reason if 'George' is not Bax. Who keeps letters where their wife hits on
their brother? This is a good reason to believe that Bax killed George. If 'George' is Bax, then
Millie would have all the letters sent to Bax (and, we can assume, she kept the ones sent to the
original George). I can buy that. It is a little weird that she would keep the mash notes from his
girlfriends, but ok.

None of these answers are particularly odd, none throw any particular
light on anything (and so Wolfe can't be expected to have supplied
them), and importantly, don't force us to doubt each and everything we

are told. Total skepticism is not a good exegetical starting point with fiction.

There is no need for total skepticism. Just follow the rule: Anything having to do with Faerie is made up. Bax is using Faerie-stories to either mess with Millie, or provide an explanation for something he'd really rather not explain, or both. The real-world events: Bax being in Medicine Man, killing George, paying Mrs. Pogach, and so on, really happened. Or more or less did - the Compiler says he changed names in some instances, so maybe those things happened to people whose names we don't know.

--

gwern

Dave Tallman — 30 Mar 2010, 01:55 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

Thomas Bitterman wrote:

It is a strange letter. At the time it was written (which is a bit hazy), George is apparently lost in the house. Why would he write a letter from inside the house? How would it get delivered? Why not just talk to Bax directly, especially when George is planning a duel (certainly illegal, and likely to void any will)? Why duel instead of just killing Bax and, as the sole surviving relative, inherit the place outright?

So either George is wandering lost in the house and writing letters that go against his own interests, or is wandering around town frantically looking for Bax when he knows exactly where Bax lives. Or Bax wrote it to make George look bad.

It's not really a letter at all. It's a challenge note. All George had to do was leave it someplace in the house where he thought Bax would find it. Why not talk to Bax directly? He can't find him. Why not just kill Bax? He can't find him. George may think he'll never find Bax unless Bax lets himself be found. Hence the challenge.

I'm willing to consider the possibility of forgery, too. On p. 12 Bax writes "I am tempted to post this to myself." Bax is ambidextrous, so he can produce two different handwritings, and he has forged his brother's signature before.

Still there almost has to be at least the threat of a duel, or Bax wouldn't have written to Shell for advice about it. I tend to think the note is genuine, or else a revised one with fantastic elements added by Bax,

There are no letters to Doris in the whole book. There are two letters from her, that Bax/George kept (probably like he kept all letters mailed to him, somewhere in the house).

Is Doris more than she seems? Her "Dear John" letter makes her sound completely ignorant, but:

- 1) The last name of a mythical monster. In mythology, Doris is the mother of the Nereides.
- 2) Doris means "gift" in Greek, Theodore (Ted) is "gift of God". Is Ted really a familiar of some kind? Maybe Ted's ring gave her some power over him (or allows Ted to come to his aid in times of danger), and she wanted it back when she thought George would be the easier one to control

(no magical talent, no facefox mistress, etc.).

3) When George fails/is killed she tries to get back with Bax, but too late. Now she speaks confidently of ghostly messages and werewolves.

Dave Tallman — 30 Mar 2010, 14:53 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

I'm willing to consider the possibility of forgery, too. On p. 12 Bax writes "I am tempted to post this to myself." Bax is ambidextrous, so he can produce two different handwritings, and he has forged his brother's signature before.

One more detail: who is Henry Parkhill (p. 156)?

/I have founded my own little firm, you see. I call it A Plus Tutors. Our president is Henry Parkhill. (I know you would like him, Shell. You might recognize him as well./

This is the only reference to the man, apparently an ex-con that Shell would know. Nothing is said about him in other letters. Does he play a bigger role? If, for example, he is the butler that other people see (Doris letter, p. 290) then it casts a lot of doubt on the Zwart/leuen/Emlyn story.

On the other hand, both Madame Orizia and Doris validate the story of locking the vampire Nicholas in the trunk. Doris also validates the first werewolf attack, the awful basement, and the rapist dwarf. The greatest magic of all is that a penniless ex-con suddenly comes into wealth and property: "Riverscene, the Black House, and the house that had once been Mrs. Martha Murrey's" (p. 300). So I must agree with the anonymous Collator: "all that he tells us cannot be false."

Matthew Keeley — 30 Mar 2010, 16:39 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Tue, Mar 30, 2010 at 10:53 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

Dave Tallman wrote:

I'm willing to consider the possibility of forgery, too. On p. 12 Bax writes "I am tempted to post this to myself." Bax is ambidextrous, so he can produce two different handwritings, and he has forged his brother's signature before.

One more detail: who is Henry Parkhill (p. 156)?

I have founded my own little firm, you see. I call it A Plus Tutors. Our president is Henry Parkhill. (I know you would like him, Shell. You might recognize him as well.

This is the only reference to the man, apparently an ex-con that Shell would know. Nothing is said about him in other letters. Does he play a bigger role? If, for example, he is the butler that other people see (Doris letter, p. 290) then it casts a lot of doubt on the Zwart/leuen/Emlyn story.

I assumed "Parkhill" was a false name for Bax, who forges and signs stuff in the Parkhill name.

-Matt

Thomas Bitterman — 30 Mar 2010, 22:36 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Mon, Mar 29, 2010 at 9:55 PM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
Thomas Bitterman wrote:

It is a strange letter. At the time it was written (which is a bit hazy), George is apparently lost in the house. Why would he write a letter from inside the house?
How would it get delivered? Why not just talk to Bax directly, especially when George is planning a duel (certainly illegal, and likely to void any will)?
Why duel instead of just killing Bax and, as the sole surviving relative, inherit the place outright?

So either George is wandering lost in the house and writing letters that go against his own interests, or is wandering around town frantically looking for Bax when he knows exactly where Bax lives. Or Bax wrote it to make George look bad.
It's not really a letter at all. It's a challenge note.

potaytoe, potahto.

All George had to do was leave it someplace in the house where he thought Bax would find it. Why not talk to Bax directly? He can't find him. Why not just kill Bax? He can't find him. George may think he'll never find Bax unless Bax lets himself be found. Hence the challenge.

If George can have a piece of paper somewhere Bax can find it, he could just leave himself there. Either Nicholas is helping George (as seems likely) and could lead George to the kitchen where they could just wait, or George is hopelessly lost in the house (it seems to happen to everybody) and is in no position to be leaving notes to be found.

Still there almost has to be at least the threat of a duel, or Bax wouldn't have written to Shell for advice about it. I tend to think the note is genuine, or else a revised one with fantastic elements added by Bax,

I took it that Bax was really more interested in how to fire a gun, rather than the duel per se.

There are no letters to Doris in the whole book. There are two letters from her, that Bax/George kept (probably like he kept all letters mailed to him, somewhere in the house).

Darn. Of course, you are right.

Thomas Bitterman — 30 Mar 2010, 22:44 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Tue, Mar 30, 2010 at 10:53 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
On the other hand, both Madame Orizia and Doris validate the story of locking the vampire Nicholas in the trunk. Doris also validates the first werewolf attack, the awful basement, and the rapist dwarf.

This just begs the question. The only record we have of them seeing any of this is from the letters that Bax has. These are the very letters that are being called into doubt, at least the supernatural parts.

The greatest magic of all is that a penniless ex-con suddenly comes into wealth and property: "Riverscene, the Black House, and the house that had

once been Mrs. Martha Murrey's" (p. 300). So I must agree with the anonymous Collator: "all that he tells us cannot be false."

Windows into Faerie, werewolves, vampires, visions of the future, astral projection, triannuluses (triannuli?), houses that grow and rearrange - these are all harder to swallow than lucking into money. Not everything he says is false, just the stuff about Faerie.

James Crossley — 30 Mar 2010, 23:02 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

On 3/30/10 3:44 PM, "Thomas Bitterman" <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

Windows into Faerie, werewolves, vampires, visions of the future, astral projection, triannuluses (triannuli?), houses that grow and rearrange - these are all harder to swallow than lucking into money. Not everything he says is false, just the stuff about Faerie.

Just so I have this straight you're arguing that all the supernatural elements in the book are the product of Bax's imagination, part of a scheme to eliminate his brother, capture Millie's affections and explain his new-found wealth?

If so, why all the coy hints the reader puts together along the way (fox = Winker, Zwart = Black, etc.)? Why couldn't the fantastic part of the story be told more explicitly? It would be an equally (un)convincing tale whether laid out straightforwardly or in Wolfean fashion. And who's the reading audience who has to be convinced, just Millie?

James

Gwern Branwen — 30 Mar 2010, 23:08 · in reply to James Crossley

On Tue, Mar 30, 2010 at 7:02 PM, James Crossley <ishmael at drizzle.com> wrote:
On 3/30/10 3:44 PM, "Thomas Bitterman" <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

Windows into Faerie, werewolves, vampires, visions of the future, astral projection, triannuluses (triannuli?), houses that grow and rearrange - these are all harder to swallow than lucking into money. Not everything he says is false, just the stuff about Faerie.

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James

Given Millie's intellectual prowess (or lack thereof), I think a story targeted solely at Millie would read much simpler than the actual story.

gwern

Dave Tallman — 31 Mar 2010, 00:01 · follows Gwern Branwen

Thomas Bitterman

This just begs the question. The only record we have of them seeing any of this is from the letters that Bax has. These are the very letters that are being called into doubt, at least the supernatural parts.

No, I am bringing in all the independent witnesses against your theory. To support it, you have to say that the challenge note from George, the letters from Madame Orizia, and the second letter from Doris are all forged or edited by Bax. And I say that oversteps the bounds of the suspension of disbelief. About the only letters admitted as factual at this point are those to and from Shell, and letters from Millie.

Windows into Faerie, werewolves, vampires, visions of the future, astral projection, triannuluses (triannuli?), houses that grow and rearrange - these are all harder to swallow than lucking into money. Not everything he says is false, just the stuff about Faerie.

All right then, what is your rational explanation for him "lucking into money"? Was a deed to a house just handed to him? If so, why? And then he just happens to inherit a valuable chunk of real estate? Please show in-story clues to what really happened.

Gwern Branwen — 31 Mar 2010, 00:55 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Tue, Mar 30, 2010 at 8:01 PM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
Thomas Bitterman

This just begs the question. The only record we have of them seeing any of

this is from the letters that Bax has. These are the very letters that are being called into doubt, at least the supernatural parts.

No, I am bringing in all the independent witnesses against your theory. To support it, you have to say that the challenge note from George, the letters from Madame Orizia, and the second letter from Doris are all forged or edited by Bax. And I say that oversteps the bounds of the suspension of disbelief. About the only letters admitted as factual at this point are those to and from Shell, and letters from Millie.

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these are all harder to swallow than lucking into money. Not everything he says is false, just the stuff about Faerie.

All right then, what is your rational explanation for him "lucking into money"? Was a deed to a house just handed to him? If so, why? And then he just happens to inherit a valuable chunk of real estate? Please show in-story clues to what really happened.

If I had to construct a 'real' story along those lines, I'd go with something like this:

1. Bax moves into the mansion
2. when he tries to regularize his squatting, he goes to Martha and using his smooth wiles on a lonely old woman, cons her into letting him stay under the perfectly normal custodial arrangement
3. He thoroughly searches the house, and discovers the eccentric previous owners had had valuable collections. Bax didn't lie about the gold coins, but he found many more. Gold is very valuable, after all, especially collectibles. Bax has modest needs. Alternate scheme: he takes

out a mortgage.

4. He embarks on his elaborate con/murder scheme of George.

5. Mischief managed.

6. He forges Murrey's will - she also had the Skotos Strip. (Why not? She seems to have tons of real estate in general.) Alternate scheme: he gets her to sign that over as well / forges her signature.

7. Murrey vanishes like George.

Note how much violence to the narrative we have to do.

gwern

Thomas Bitterman — 31 Mar 2010, 01:55 · in reply to James Crossley

On Tue, Mar 30, 2010 at 7:02 PM, James Crossley <ishmael at drizzle.com> wrote:

On 3/30/10 3:44 PM, "Thomas Bitterman" <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

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Just so I have this straight you're arguing that all the supernatural elements in the book are the product of Bax's imagination, part of a scheme to eliminate his brother, capture Millie's affections and explain his new-found wealth?

Exactly. The only exceptions being:

- the Hound stories, which Bax picked up from local legends
- Doris seeing Ted, when she was not terribly emotionally stable

This theory is similar to the one where Severian was just a stooge for some aliens, and was mistaken/lied to/lied about the Increate all along.

If so, why all the coy hints the reader puts together along the way (fox =

Winker, Zwart = Black, etc.)? Why couldn't the fantastic part of the story be told more explicitly? It would be an equally (un)convincing tale whether laid out straightforwardly or in Wolfean fashion. And who's the reading audience who has to be convinced, just Millie?

Bax is clever, smart, and well-read. He likes his little jokes. But there are limits. The story he weaves is already full of loose threads and problems. Making the story more explicit makes it more complex and harder to keep straight.

Bax has two audiences: Millie and the general public. Millie is the most important - he needs to woo her (and anger George) and uses her fondness for fantastic stories to do it. The general public will be dissuaded from looking too closely at the dodgy transactions involved due to the fantastic stories surrounding them. And last, Bax wants to brag.

Thomas Bitterman — 31 Mar 2010, 02:36 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Tue, Mar 30, 2010 at 8:01 PM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
Thomas Bitterman

This just begs the question. The only record we have of them seeing any of

this is from the letters that Bax has. These are the very letters that are

being called into doubt, at least the supernatural parts.

No, I am bringing in all the independent witnesses against your theory. To support it, you have to say that the challenge note from George, the letters from Madame Orizia, and the second letter from Doris are all forged or edited by Bax. And I say that oversteps the bounds of the suspension of disbelief. About the only letters admitted as factual at this point are those to and from Shell, and letters from Millie.

As mentioned in another post, the circumstances of George's note and its contents make forgery probable, IMHO. Madame Orizia is an accomplice (and somewhat out of the loop - how could she cover his home "quite thoroughly", given the warping it's always doing?). Doris was not emotionally stable when she wrote the second letter and should not be considered a reliable witness. FWIW, the Compiler (whom I maintain is Bax) is upfront about "extensive" editing.

So:

- the note from George is a forgery
- Orizia's letters are genuine, but she is mixing truth and fantasy
- Doris's letters are genuine, but she is emotionally distraught and hence unreliable

Windows into Faerie, werewolves, vampires, visions of the future, astral

projection, triannuluses (triannuli?), houses that grow and rearrange -

these are all harder to swallow than lucking into money. Not everything he says is false, just the stuff about Faerie.

All right then, what is your rational explanation for him "lucking into money"? Was a deed to a house just handed to him? If so, why? And then he just happens to inherit a valuable chunk of real estate? Please show in-story clues to what really happened.

Fraud and forgery. I mean, a felon fraudster, truly gifted in forgery, "inherits"/forges wills for properties from a couple of people who died out of town with no heirs? Really? This is less believable than windows into Faerie, werewolves, vampires, etc.

Thomas Bitterman — 31 Mar 2010, 03:21 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On Tue, Mar 30, 2010 at 8:55 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:
If I had to construct a 'real' story along those lines, I'd go with something like this:

1. Bax moves into the mansion
2. when he tries to regularize his squatting, he goes to Martha and using his smooth wiles on a lonely old woman, cons her into letting him stay under the perfectly normal custodial arrangement

These seem reasonable, and Bax says they happened (although he gets the house before he squats long).

3. He thoroughly searches the house, and discovers the eccentric

previous owners had had valuable collections. Bax didn't lie about the gold coins, but he found many more. Gold is very valuable, after all, especially collectibles. Bax has modest needs. Alternate scheme: he takes out a mortgage.

Exactly what Bax says happened (sans mortgage).

4. He embarks on his elaborate con/murder scheme of George.
5. Mischief managed.

Basically,

- Bax meets girls (girls dig Bax)
- Bax forges Skotos's will and gets property
- George shows up, Bax kills him and disposes of the body (probably by throwing it in the river)
- Bax replaces George, dumps girls, and runs off with Millie

6. He forges Murrey's will - she also had the Skotos Strip. (Why not?

She seems to have tons of real estate in general.) Alternate scheme:
he gets her to sign that over as well / forges her signature.

The Skotos Strip was owned by Alexander Skotos, aka Zwart Black, not Murrey. Luckily for Bax, Skotos "died" out of town also without any normal heirs.

Is it just me, or is it weird that Faerie-sorcerers own prime investment property? Is buying riverside plots in Reality something immortal Faerie-people do a lot? When he registered the deed, did he put "that castle over there that Ambrosius used to own" as his home address? Or perhaps he provided a copy of his driver's license. He owns a car with a vampire locked in the trunk, so why not?

7. Murrey vanishes like George.

I don't remember her vanishing. It is mentioned that Bax owned the house that used to be hers, but it is not stated that she is dead. Other characters that are dead or missing are noted as such. The Compiler is so lax about checking details it is hard to say what really happened.

Note how much violence to the narrative we have to do.

I don't see a lot of violence to anything but Faerie. It reads like "murder in a small town" with a thick layer of fantasy thrown on top.

Dave Tallman — 31 Mar 2010, 04:14 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

Thomas Bitterman wrote:

As mentioned in another post, the circumstances of George's note and its contents make forgery probable, IMHO. Madame Orizia is an accomplice (and somewhat out of the loop - how could she cover his home "quite thoroughly", given the warping it's always doing?). Doris was not emotionally stable when she wrote the second letter and should not be considered a reliable witness. FWIW, the Compiler (whom I maintain is Bax) is upfront about "extensive" editing.

I don't allow Bax as the Compiler in any theories because it makes complete fraud much too easy. But temporal rearrangement of letters is allowed. For example, if the second Doris letter was written when she was drunk and/or crazy, then Bax is allowed to spin a story around the crazy things she said (and maybe even forge the postscript).

Moving the Skotos inquiry letter (155-157) earlier would help, because it helps eliminate the coincidence of Bax moving to Medicine Man and moving into the Black House. Suppose eccentric millionaire Skotos decided to leave property to Bax for whatever reason (he admired his Phd research?) Per the Shell letter of 197-198, Skotos was making inquiries about Bax while he was in prison, and probably got in touch with Lou (p.

9). Deeding the Black House to him, and making a will leaving the river-front property would give Bax a reason to move there.

Unfortunately, that doesn't quite work. The inquiry letter mentions George being held at

gunpoint, which wouldn't happen unless George came there after receiving other strange letters. Early letters from Bax to Shell (9-10, 23-24) indicate him moving to Medicine Man for other reasons and having no great expectations at all.

So we are left with Bax coincidentally moving to Medicine Man, and coincidentally moving into a house that would be his. Such a coincidence amounts to him being unconsciously being drawn there by his magical heritage. So it's magic, and the whole story stems from that.

Why the complete rejection of the fantastic, anyway. You wouldn't read "Pirate Freedom" with the attitude: "Time travel is impossible, so whatever the narrator says about going to the past must be lies." This is a Wolfe story, and he often writes of the fantastic. So why not accept it?

Dave Tallman — 31 Mar 2010, 04:40 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

Thomas Bitterman wrote:

Basically,

- Bax meets girls (girls dig Bax)
- Bax forges Skotos's will and gets property
- George shows up, Bax kills him and disposes of the body (probably by throwing it in the river)
- Bax replaces George, dumps girls, and runs off with Millie

"Girls dig Bax" -- not Doris, not without an expectation of money (per. "Dear John" letter, which needs to be genuine because it doesn't really mention the fantastic).

"Bax forges Skotos's will and gets property" -- I find that /very/ hard to believe, especially since Bax knows nothing of Skotos at the beginning and has to ask his cellmate for information.

James Crossley — 31 Mar 2010, 06:18 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

On 3/30/10 6:55 PM, "Thomas Bitterman" <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

Bax has two audiences: Millie and the general public. Millie is the most important - he needs to woo her (and anger George) and uses her fondness for fantastic stories to do it. The general public will be dissuaded from looking too closely at the dodgy transactions involved due to the fantastic stories surrounding them. And last, Bax wants to brag.

It's just possible that Bax (or someone) might construct a bizarre fantasy to pull the wool over Millie's eyes, but frankly, she seems too simple-minded to appreciate the convoluted way the fantasy is laid out, so that part of the argument isn't very convincing to me.

As for the general public being less inclined to examine dodgy financial transactions because of a barely-coherent cover story involving facefoxes, silver bullets, vampires and sorcerers, I'm afraid that's completely implausible.

James

Craig Brewer — 17 Apr 2010, 15:11 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Why the complete rejection of the fantastic, anyway. You wouldn't read "Pirate Freedom" with the attitude: "Time travel is impossible, so whatever the narrator says about going to the past must be lies." This is a Wolfe story,

and he often writes of the fantastic. So why not accept it?

Just on this point, and, although I'm not yet totally convinced that TSH is actually just a big con, I think there are a number of reasons why it would fit perfectly with Wolfe's attitude towards the fantastic.

From early on, Wolfe has recognized the two sides of the fantastic, both the actual pure wonder of it AND the potential for deception, both in worlds where it's real and worlds where it's all fabrication. The entire puzzle/mystery form of his writing is constantly playing with the idea that everything could have some other explanation. Sometimes the explanation is magical, often when we or characters expect our own "realistic" assumptions to be obvious and certain. But, at the same time, his magical characters are, even when "really" magical, also often full of illusion and deception: is the Claw **really** a magical trinket, or is it Severian's higher nature that does the "magic," for example?

I mean, there are other examples, of course, but thematically, it seems to fit perfectly well with Wolfe's attitude toward the fantastic and the way it calls on us decide what is true or false, which is something his characters are always having to face (Silk and the Outsider, Able and his role in the world, Horn and his identity/duty, etc.). So maybe the question with Bax is whether or not his ability to tell a wonderful, compelling, puzzling story (which is, of course, also Wolfe's talent) is innocent or dangerous? From that angle, it seems like one of the "big issues" with TSH is the relationship between fantasy and dishonesty. That seems like a perfectly appropriate theme for a writer who has always maintained that fantasy is one of the best ways to deal with the "really real" -- why shouldn't he write a story that explicitly explores the other side of that coin?

Craig

brunians at brunians.org — 17 Apr 2010, 15:28 · in reply to Craig Brewer

I get the impression that the faery stuff is all real.

Dave Tallman wrote:

Why the complete rejection of the fantastic, anyway. You wouldn't read "Pirate Freedom" with the attitude: "Time travel is impossible, so whatever the narrator says about going to the past must be lies." This is a Wolfe story, and he often writes of the fantastic. So why not accept it?

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characters are always having to face (Silk and the Outsider, Able and his role in the world, Horn and his identity/duty, etc.). So maybe the question with Bax is whether or not his ability to tell a wonderful, compelling, puzzling story (which is, of course, also Wolfe's talent) is innocent or dangerous? From that angle, it seems like one of the "big issues" with TSH is the relationship between fantasy and dishonesty. That seems like a perfectly appropriate theme for a writer who has always maintained that fantasy is one of the best ways to deal with the "really real" -- why shouldn't he write a story that explicitly explores the other side of that coin?

Craig

James Wynn — 17 Apr 2010, 23:42 · in reply to Craig Brewer

So maybe the question with Bax is whether or not his ability to tell a wonderful, compelling, puzzling story (which is, of course, also Wolfe's talent) is innocent or dangerous? From that angle, it seems like one of the "big issues" with TSH is the relationship between fantasy and dishonesty. That seems like a perfectly appropriate theme for a writer who has always maintained that fantasy is one of the best ways to deal with the "really real" -- why shouldn't he write a story that explicitly explores the other side of that coin?

I just think the story is lame if the whole thing is a fabrication of Bax's, because --after all-- it already IS a fabrication by Wolfe. It would be like saying everything in the Latro novels was a product of Latro's deranged state due to his wound. It makes trying to understand the "contrived" story to be moot, because any inconsistencies can be marked up to shoddy story-telling. We're already facing the problems of possible plot-holes anyway. If we treat the story as a work by Bax instead of Wolfe, what is the value of that? Shall we investigate the quality of Bax's novel instead? I certainly hope this is not true. I'm not re-reading it as though this is the case, because I don't think I'm up to analyzing two novels at once.

J.

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Apr 2010, 00:03 · in reply to James Wynn

As I say, I get the impression that Bax lies a lot, but not about the supernatural stuff.

.
So maybe the question with Bax is whether or not his ability to tell a wonderful, compelling, puzzling story (which is, of course, also Wolfe's talent) is innocent or dangerous? From that angle, it seems like one of the "big issues" with TSH is the relationship between fantasy and dishonesty. That seems like a perfectly appropriate theme for a writer who has always maintained that fantasy is one of the best ways to deal with the "really real" -- why shouldn't he write a story that explicitly explores the

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J.

Craig Brewer — 18 Apr 2010, 04:12 · in reply to James Wynn

I just think the story is lame if the whole thing is a fabrication of Bax's, because --after all-- it already IS a fabrication by Wolfe.

Perhaps. But I'm intrigued by the idea that this one might not just be Wolfe-as-usual. After all, there's a lot in this one that makes me think there might be other dimensions to work out. Maybe the game this time isn't "figure out the puzzle" but instead "see how the lies illuminate the reality."

Say, for the sake of argument, that nothing supernatural actually happened. Then we can ask why Bax would bother to create this whole farce? On the one hand, it freaks out his brother, gets Bax his wife, and is a full-on revenge and con scheme -- that's the plot level. But, in the story itself, we might also see Bax working out his failed relationship with his brother -- a bit of psychological allegory, perhaps. The whole "good twin/bad twin" thing with Emlyn and Ieuan is like him trying to decide if either he or George is the "good" or "bad" twin. There's the issue of absent/mysterious fathers from two brothers who have fought their whole lives and competed with each other over how to define success in terms of money, women, and careers. In other words, all of the "fantasy" elements could well be Bax coming up with little allegories about his relationship to George. It's myth-making in a perfectly Wolfean sense: using one myth to illuminate another story, but this time it's "Faerie" illuminating a broken relationship rather than, say, Norse/chivalric motifs illuminating a Christian story (TWK).

Again, I'm not convinced that this is right, but I'll hold out the possibility. One thing that keeps coming up is how the whole issue of the nature of trust and betrayal appears over and over.

Take the "Silver Bullets" chapters (22 and 23) alone, it's almost pervasive: Bax and Emlyn go back and forth about "promising" and whether they're telling each other the truth about werewolves/facefoxes (160-1), Bax having the policeman ride with him for directions even though he doesn't have a license (a tiny but successful "con," 164), the way Bax describes Trelawny as someone who trusted once and decided never to again (164), the entire scene about how to determine the truth of Bax's identity and whether or not to trust someone (and how difficult it is for Bax/Doris to trust the lawyer) (164-8), the wonderful image of Bax being able to write two different things with two different hands (167-8), the rigmarole about spoken versus written ways that Skotos gave identifying markers about Bax (166), whether or not the police could trust George's story or everyone else's (170), whether or not Bax wanted to lie about George hitting him (170), lying about the

gun being loaded (171, 174), whether Skotos was a "daredevil" or a "scoundrel" (175), Bax explaining in the most detail so far about how he defrauded George and his friends (177-8), Bax lecturing Ieuan about trying to deceive a deceiver, again in the context of brothers deceiving each other (181), meeting Cathy Ruth, who claims proficiency at writing very public lies (187-88), the note in the box that could mean different things either magical or mundane (i.e., kill a werewolf or discover who the son/mother is) (190, 192).

And this, at the very end of chapter 23: "I don't say it often, because anyone can say anything. Words really mean very little. Men can be defrauded with words and women can be seduced with words, and it really comes to about the same thing." (195)

And the name of the next chapter: "Never Trust."

And why "Silver Bullets" twice? Dull material that can easily rust its shiny, fantastic surface away...and kills magical, two-faced creatures? heh...

Granted, a lot of that is thematic rather than plot-level details. But I guess I just have a hard time believing that such a careful writer as Wolfe would create a narrator whose primary biographical signifier from the beginning of the story is "released prisoner convicted of fraud" and then have us listen to him describe an utterly outrageous story of magic and luck with total credulity when he's also cramming the narrative full of overtones about how everyone could potentially be conning everyone else, from the newspaper people to the real estate agents to the jeweler trying to lowball Bax on the coin to the psychic with fake crystal balls.

If we treat the story as a work by Bax instead of Wolfe, what is the value of that? Shall we investigate the quality of Bax's novel instead?

If some of the stuff I've just said is right, then that's PRECISELY what we're supposed to be doing. If...

Craig

Craig Brewer — 18 Apr 2010, 04:15 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

As I say, I get the impression that Bax lies a lot, but not about the supernatural stuff.

So, forget for the moment the obvious fact that Wolfe writes sf/fantasy...why would you trust a convicted con artist who starts writing letters to a brother he hates about a magical house?

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Apr 2010, 04:29 · in reply to Craig Brewer

There are several Wolfes in several Worlds.

I think three or four.

They pass stories around and collaborate.

.

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Apr 2010, 04:31 · in reply to Craig Brewer

I don't have a problem with the idea that he is running a number on his brother.

I don't have a problem with that idea at all.

But the supernatural stuff is real.

I've known con men. Con men are OK as long as they are convinced that you will seriously hurt them if they fuck with you.

I've run cons, in fact, though I am not a con man by profession.

.

Craig Brewer — 18 Apr 2010, 04:34 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

That's nice, but it doesn't really explain why anyone should trust Bax.

Come on, nothing in the text?

Maybe this wolf(e) is just too conning/cunning and your disbelief was suspended before even opening the book?

----- Original Message -----

From: "brunians at brunians.org" <brunians at brunians.org>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Sat, April 17, 2010 11:31:56 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Sorcerer's House Questions (*Major Spoilers*)

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I've run cons, in fact, though I am not a con man by profession.

.

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Apr 2010, 04:36 · in reply to Craig Brewer

You don't have to trust Bax.

What you do is up to you, the way it always is or should be.

.

Craig Brewer — 18 Apr 2010, 04:42 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Well, since "Bax" is the source of information about the supernatural in the book, I take it that while *I* don't have to trust Bax, *you* do if you think it happened.

But I get the feeling you're playing a different game than I am, so we'll leave it be.

In other news, anyone else read a book where every other event was organized by who was taking whom to which meal and who was paying for it? I can't decide whether that's important or whether Wolfe just always wrote this while hungry. My mental map of Medicine Man is dominated by restaurants.

----- Original Message -----

From: "brunians at brunians.org" <brunians at brunians.org>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Sat, April 17, 2010 11:36:49 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Sorcerer's House Questions (*Major Spoilers*)

You don't have to trust Bax.

What you do is up to you, the way it always is or should be.

.

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Apr 2010, 04:58 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Certain kinds of people act certain kinds of ways.

Bax is a fictional character.

I believe in lots of supernatural stuff and Wolfe does too.

I don't ask you to use my reading of the book.

I don't think that there are canonical readings to Wolfe's later books.

I have no idea what to think about your feeling that I am playing a different game than you are, and wonder if you might not expand upon this intriguing remark?

.

Gwern Branwen — 18 Apr 2010, 13:13 · in reply to Craig Brewer

On Sun, Apr 18, 2010 at 12:42 AM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

Well, since "Bax" is the source of information about the supernatural in the book, I take it that while *I* don't have to trust Bax, *you* do if you think it happened.

But I get the feeling you're playing a different game than I am, so we'll leave it be.

In other news, anyone else read a book where every other event was organized by who was taking whom to which meal and who was paying for it? I can't decide whether that's important or whether Wolfe just always wrote this while hungry. My mental map of Medicine Man is dominated by restaurants.

The latter, I think. Food pervaded AEG too - I think someone on this list quoted Wolfe as saying that the Green Goddess salad dressing wasn't important but a joke and part of a personal challenge to see how often he could work food in?

gwern

Craig Brewer — 18 Apr 2010, 16:59 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Just a note that if Bax was the compiler, his degree in 19th century lit might make it perfectly appropriate for him to write an epistolary novel. More were certainly written in the 18th century, but a rather prominent one about a vampire was written in 1897.

But a question: he mentions that he was working on a 3rd Ph.D. when his aunt's money ran out. Do we know what he was studying or have any hints? Folklore? The occult?

Dave Tallman — 18 Apr 2010, 20:09 · follows Gwern Branwen

Craig Brewer wrote:

That's nice, but it doesn't really explain why anyone should trust Bax.

Come on, nothing in the text?

Maybe this wolf(e) is just too conning/cunning and your disbelief was suspended before even opening the book?

Everyone who doubts Bax has to reckon with all the independent corroborations in the story:

- 1) The second letter of Doris, particularly the postscript confirms: the werewolf attack, the strange basement, the rapist dwarf, and locking up the vampire. Not to mention the appearance of ghost Ted in the main body of the letter.
- 2) The challenge note from George, confirming the existence of Faerie.
- 3) The letter from the psychic confirming and charging for the vampire lock-up incident.
- 4) Evidence found by the Collator that Bax had an ancient samurai sword.
- 5) The fact that a ex-con swindler somehow obtained valuable real estate in Medicine Man.

The more I hear that all of this was forged by Bax somehow, and he was the Collator so he could change all the letters as much as he wished, the weaker the case appears to me. There has to be a core of events that "actually happened" that is confirmed by independent evidence.

Thomas Bitterman — 18 Apr 2010, 21:41 · in reply to Craig Brewer

On Sun, Apr 18, 2010 at 12:12 AM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

Granted, a lot of that is thematic rather than plot-level details. But I guess I just have a hard time believing that such a careful writer as Wolfe would create a narrator whose primary biographical signifier from the beginning of the story is "released prisoner convicted of fraud" and then have us listen to him describe an utterly outrageous story of magic and luck with total credulity when he's also cramming the narrative full of overtones about how everyone could potentially be conning everyone else, from the newspaper people to the real estate agents to the jeweler trying to lowball Bax on the coin to the psychic with fake crystal balls.

Mr. Brewer is better at explaining than I am, certainly. Severian tortures, Latro forgets. Why wouldn't a liar lie?

Thomas Bitterman — 18 Apr 2010, 22:05 · in reply to James Wynn

On Sat, Apr 17, 2010 at 7:42 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

So maybe the question with Bax is whether or not his ability to tell a wonderful, compelling, puzzling story (which is, of course, also Wolfe's talent) is innocent or

dangerous? From that angle, it seems like one of the "big issues" with TSH is the relationship between fantasy and dishonesty. That seems like a perfectly appropriate theme for a writer who has always maintained that fantasy is one of the best ways to deal with the "really real" -- why shouldn't he write a story that explicitly explores the other side of that coin?

I just think the story is lame if the whole thing is a fabrication of Bax's, because --after all-- it already IS a fabrication by Wolfe. It would be like saying everything in the Latro novels was a product of Latro's deranged state due to his wound.

I don't know that anyone believes that everything Severian says is truthful, yet the New Sun series is not adjudged "lame".

It makes trying to understand the "contrived" story to be moot, because any inconsistencies can be marked up to shoddy story-telling.

The inconsistencies are the clues that Bax is making it up. He's a second-rate fraudster spinning a tall tale on the fly. Of course he's making mistakes.

We're already facing the problems of possible plot-holes anyway. If we treat the story as a work by Bax instead of Wolfe, what is the value of that?

Either Bax is a bad writer, Wolfe is, or we're bad readers. At some point in the interpretation of the work, in order to smooth out inconsistencies and patch holes, it is very easy to start writing fan fiction instead of interpreting. This is the worst of two worlds - bad readers covering up for a bad writer. If the mistakes are Bax's, instead, then Wolfe has pulled off a Borgesian feat - a wizard who has created a fictional world but left little inconsistencies in it so we can find our way back out.

brunians at brunians.org — 18 Apr 2010, 22:34 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

Con men normally behave like con men.

I've known con men.

It's obvious to me that Wolfe has also.

Con men are not all the time on the con.

.

On Sun, Apr 18, 2010 at 12:12 AM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

Granted, a lot of that is thematic rather than plot-level details. But I guess I just have a hard time believing that such a careful writer as Wolfe would create a narrator whose primary biographical signifier from the beginning of the story is "released prisoner convicted of fraud" and then have us listen to him describe an utterly outrageous story of magic and luck with total credulity when he's also cramming the narrative full of overtones

about how everyone could potentially be conning everyone else, from the newspaper people to the real estate agents to the jeweler trying to lowball

Bax on the coin to the psychic with fake crystal balls.

Mr. Brewer is better at explaining than I am, certainly. Severian tortures,

Latro forgets. Why wouldn't a liar lie?

Craig Brewer — 19 Apr 2010, 03:23 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

(I'm stepping away from my disbelief in magic here, so back to the world of the fiction...)

How many different types of "magic" are there in THS? I mean, what in the book does a sorcerer actually do?

- 1) We have the discussion of "numen" early on and its association with the triannulus.
- 2) We've got familiars. (Winkle/Winker)
- 3) We've got soul-swapping to become a werewolf (and so becoming a shape-changer is something a human can apparently decide to do by a "spell" of some sort). [And why the literal nature of the wolf's skin? Earlier, Emlyn says that "A werewolf is a man or a woman who puts on a wolf's skin." (69), and I took that to be metaphorical/magical. But when they face Lupine at the end, they literally cut off the wolf-skin.]
- 4) We've got some vague power hidden in birth names discussed by old Nick.
- 5) We've got travel through magic portals with the windows and Ieuan's breaking windows to keep Bax from going into faerie. (At least I assume that's what was going on.)
- 6) Martha talks about distinctions between sorcerers, witches, and warlocks: "There's almost no one there [in faerie]. ... Sorcerers who war with sorcerers. Sorcerers who war with witches. Warlocks who war with everyone." At the very least, the sorcerer/warlock distinction seems important, so just who the frak IS Goldwurm?
- 7) We've got Martha's talk about magic language: "Magic...is diplomacy. It isn't just saying the words. It's who says them, how he says them, and when he says them." (283)

So is there some way to tie all this together? I might have an easier time just going with "magic is magic, so let it be vague," except that, early on, the whole discussion of the triannulus and numen is given in such detail and then sort of casually forgotten that it just seems to beg for some kind of more systematic approach. Then Martha's sudden mini-lecture on how to cast a spell comes back to something like instructing Bax how to be a sorcerer, which is what I thought the early numen talk was setting us up for.

(I have to say that #7 really struck me as resonating with what Bax says about language and lying earlier: "I don't say it often, because anyone can say anything. Words really mean very little. Men can be defrauded with words and women can be seduced with words, and it really comes to about the same thing." (195) What Martha says is very similar to how Bax talks about fraud: words mean little; it's how they're used, with whom and in what circumstances, that matters. If anything is a flag that we should at the very least question how much we should believe of magic in this

story-told-through-people-talking-to-other-people, isn't this it?)

Oh, and his neighbor Mrs. Nabor/neighbor...a tiny thing that I just noticed, but with old Nick's talk about birth names being so powerful, does every character, major or minor, have this kind of (Dickensian, even) meaningful name? (Although "Nabor" wouldn't have been her birth name...Murrey was.)

Roy C. Lackey — 19 Apr 2010, 05:27 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Everyone who doubts Bax has to reckon with all the independent corroborations in the story:

- 1) The second letter of Doris, particularly the postscript confirms: the werewolf attack, the strange basement, the rapist dwarf, and locking up the vampire. Not to mention the appearance of ghost Ted in the main body of the letter.
- 2) The challenge note from George, confirming the existence of Faerie.
- 3) The letter from the psychic confirming and charging for the vampire lock-up incident.
- 4) Evidence found by the Collator that Bax had an ancient samurai sword.
- 5) The fact that an ex-con swindler somehow obtained valuable real estate in Medicine Man.

The more I hear that all of this was forged by Bax somehow, and he was the Collator so he could change all the letters as much as he wished, the weaker the case appears to me. There has to be a core of events that "actually happened" that is confirmed by independent evidence.

What Dave said, and James, too.

The beauty of doubting all that is supernatural and having Bax as the compiler is that anything the doubter cannot explain can be written off as a lie. That is very convenient for the doubter, but a line has to be drawn somewhere. If some or all of the letters are lies or forgeries perpetrated by Bax, what are we left with? What, if anything, really happened?

Adding to Dave's list: Did the house of the book's title even exist? If so, did it in fact grow from nine rooms to more than forty? If not, how could people keep getting lost in it? If there were no supernatural characters, who were Lupine, Winker, Nicholas, Emlyn, Ieuan, old Nick and a telephone-using dog named Toby? Who raped Cathy? If a boy from Faerie didn't beat the hell out of Bax, who did?

Where did a failed con less than six months out of prison really get all that money he was spending all over town? Where did he get ancient gold coins? Who or what killed and dismembered at least three people?

-Roy

Craig Brewer — 19 Apr 2010, 05:35 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

If some or all of the letters are lies or forgeries perpetrated

by Bax, what are we left with? What, if anything, really happened?

Isn't that a strangely beautiful question?

If there were no supernatural characters,

who were Lupine, Winker, Nicholas, Emlyn, Ieuan, old Nick and a telephone-using dog named Toby? Who raped Cathy? If a boy from Faerie didn't beat the hell out of Bax, who did?

Again, strangely beautiful...

Craig Brewer — 19 Apr 2010, 05:42 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Who or what killed and dismembered at least three people?

That, I think, is the crux of it. It appeals to Neil Gaiman's idea about wolf(e)s being key to GW books. But it's also the hinge between whatever fiction Bax could create and anything that could be substantiated by other sources.

Who actually died and why?

Craig Brewer — 19 Apr 2010, 05:43 · in reply to Craig Brewer

And who is Kiki, really?

Dave Tallman — 19 Apr 2010, 13:42 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Craig Brewer

And who is Kiki, really?

The name "Kiki" might be an homage to "Kiki's Delivery Service," a Japanese anime by Miyazaki. That would indicate that Kiki is a witch. She demonstrates supernatural insight when she tells Bax and Doris that there is a third person in the car, "settin' in the dark." This must be Nicholas in the trunk.

"Twice in a cart's all I ever rode," suggests she is not of the modern world. She must be of Faerie.

Thomas Bitterman — 19 Apr 2010, 14:24 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Sun, Apr 18, 2010 at 4:09 PM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
Craig Brewer wrote:

That's nice, but it doesn't really explain why anyone should trust Bax.

Come on, nothing in the text?

Maybe this wolf(e) is just too conning/cunning and your disbelief was suspended before even opening the book?

Everyone who doubts Bax has to reckon with all the independent corroborations in the story:

I mentioned some of these before, but to recap.

1) The second letter of Doris, particularly the postscript confirms: the werewolf attack, the strange basement, the rapist dwarf, and locking up the vampire. Not to mention the appearance of ghost Ted in the main body of the

letter.

The postscript would be the easiest part of the latter to forge. The rest of the letter does not mention Faerie. Doris is not terribly stable at that point in the narrative in any case.

2) The challenge note from George, confirming the existence of Faerie.

A letter that basically screams out "Hey, police! I want to kill my brother and am taking active steps to do so!". Out of character, written at a point when George is missing. IMHO, obviously Bax's doing. And now George is dead with no way to contest it.

3) The letter from the psychic confirming and charging for the vampire lock-up incident.

A psychic who is in on the con, at least part way.

4) Evidence found by the Collator that Bax had an ancient samurai sword.

IIRC, the Collator never could find the sword.

5) The fact that a ex-con swindler somehow obtained valuable real estate in Medicine Man.

Bax is a con man. It's what they do.

The more I hear that all of this was forged by Bax somehow, and he was the Collator so he could change all the letters as much as he wished, the weaker the case appears to me. There has to be a core of events that "actually happened" that is confirmed by independent evidence.

Where do you plan on obtaining this independent evidence? The Collator is amazingly negligent when it comes to gathering evidence. There should be all sorts of records of things that went on - deeds, newspaper articles, police reports, other witnesses - yet the Collator examines none of them. It's like he doesn't want to know.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 Apr 2010, 14:26 · in reply to Dave Tallman

That is what I thought.

.

Craig Brewer

And who is Kiki, really?

The name "Kiki" might be an homage to "Kiki's Delivery Service," a Japanese anime by Miyazaki. That would indicate that Kiki is a witch. She demonstrates supernatural insight when she tells Bax and Doris that there is a third person in the car, "settin' in the dark." This must be Nicholas in the trunk.

"Twice in a cart's all I ever rode," suggests she is not of the modern world. She must be of Faerie.

Craig Brewer — 19 Apr 2010, 14:40 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

3) The letter from the psychic confirming and charging for the vampire lock-up incident.

A psychic who is in on the con, at least part way.

I do wonder about her "fee." It's over \$4k, right, which she says is just for "travel reimbursement" since she mentions elsewhere that she decided to do her other services for free. But that seems pretty steep just for a plane ticket and a few nights in a Hilton.

4) Evidence found by the Collator that Bax had an ancient samurai sword.

IIRC, the Collator never could find the sword.

He couldn't, but he did find a safe that could have housed it. And the sword was also supposed to be "George's," right?

Where do you plan on obtaining this independent evidence? The Collator is amazingly negligent when it comes to gathering evidence. There should be all sorts of records of things that went on - deeds, newspaper articles, police reports, other witnesses - yet the Collator examines none of them. It's like he doesn't want to know.

If Shell's letters are legitimate, then Skotos and the "skinny man" (Nicholas-the-vampire, I assume) were in fact looking for information on Bax, at least according to the guy Shell talked to. Is it possible that Skotos really was Bax/George's father, but that Bax was trying to still create a huge fiction to dupe George after he'd learned all about it? It'd be hard to piece that together, and it would be quite a fragile con.

In the end, I'm not convinced that the entire thing was a total fabrication. But I am convinced that Wolfe means us to think that it's a possibility since, otherwise, I have a hard time understanding why Bax should ever have been a con man at all, unless it was just an easy way to get the character into (and then out of) jail.

Eugene Zaretskiy — 19 Apr 2010, 14:58 · in reply to Craig Brewer

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 10:40 AM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:
In the end, I'm not convinced that the entire thing was a total fabrication.
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This is what I think, too. Craig, earlier you said it made sense for Wolfe to write a novel where the fantasy elements are fabrications. Similarly, maybe his objective is more nuanced than that (Wolfe? Nuanced? Crazy, I know) and he wants to "con" readers into believing whatever they want about Bax's story. If there's a level to this book where Bax is the compiler and made everything up, I don't think it's the ONLY path to understanding the book as a whole, but I agree with you that Bax's being a con man and other such details are placed by Wolfe to add to this particular reading. I'm amazed that the "debate" has gone on for so long, though; you either believe it and toss away any hope of understanding the book as a puzzle box (this approach being understandably labeled "lame" by some) or you don't believe it.

I get this feeling GW would be highly amused by all this. (Does he read this list?) Can't the "Bax made it all up" theory co-exist with the puzzle box version?

John Watkins — 19 Apr 2010, 15:07 · in reply to Eugene Zaretskiy

Maybe the point of the story is narrative desire. In college, a professor asked a class I was in if anyone believed that Trystero was "real" within the world of The Crying of Lot 49. I was one of the ones who did, and when asked to explain why, I sort of blurted "Because it's a better story."

If Bax is a con man who made up all the fantastic elements, then the story is prosaic, dull, and flat. If Bax is utterly honest with us and every word of the letters can be believed, then the story is straightforward. If Bax is artfully mixing truth and lies, and some of the supernatural events do occur, then the story is fascinating and complex. I want the best story to be the "true" story, and maybe that's the point.

One thing that's significant about Wolfe's reliance on unreliable narrators, and I think this is most explicit in *Long Sun* and *Short Sun*, is that he's mirroring an important aspect of Christian religious faith. Believers, for the most part, rely upon the Gospels, accounts that are, by their natural, unreliable. Wolfe seems to think that this is or can be a rational choice, but he's not interested in soft-peddling the complications this entails. But maybe there's a Chestertonian idea at work as well, which is that stories that are *compelling* are more likely to be true--that human beings naturally seek to order things into coherent and interesting narratives because we think that such narratives best help us to make sense of the world.

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 10:58 AM, Eugene Zaretskiy <eugene.zar at gmail.com> wrote:

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 10:40 AM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

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I get this feeling GW would be highly amused by all this. (Does he read this list?) Can't the "Bax made it all up" theory co-exist with the puzzle box version?

Craig Brewer — 19 Apr 2010, 15:14 · in reply to Eugene Zaretskiy

I'm with you on this.

I think a big part of it has to do with how the last few chapters start to talk about the nature of what a sorcerer does. Earlier, I mentioned how similar Martha's description of magic words are to Bax's description of lying. A lot of it comes down to controlling context and influencing how people will receive what gets said. (I.e., Bax has no idea what the magic words mean, but he can "sell" them, and that makes him a powerful sorcerer. Even the triannulus seems to come down to interpretation (the pictures are quite abstract, apparently, and Emlyn and Bax see either a fox or a wolf, depending on what they want...and Emlyn even suggests that sometimes

it's hard to tell when the spell is finished since it often depends on symbols).

But if being a sorcerer is being a powerful story-teller, so powerful that you can make lies (or at least empty words) have real power, then perhaps it is possible that the story could be both true and false at the same time. And that's an idea I really like.

----- Original Message -----

From: Eugene Zaretskiy <eugene.zar at gmail.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Mon, April 19, 2010 9:58:23 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Sorcerer's House Questions (*Major Spoilers*)

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 10:40 AM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

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This is what I think, too. Craig, earlier you said it made sense for Wolfe to write a novel where the fantasy elements are fabrications. Similarly, maybe his objective is more nuanced than that (Wolfe? Nuanced? Crazy, I know) and he wants to "con" readers into believing whatever they want about Bax's story. If there's a level to this book where Bax is the compiler and made everything up, I don't think it's the ONLY path to understanding the book as a whole, but I agree with you that Bax's being a con man and other such details are placed by Wolfe to add to this particular reading. I'm amazed that the "debate" has gone on for so long, though; you either believe it and toss away any hope of understanding the book as a puzzle box (this approach being understandably labeled "lame" by some) or you don't believe it.

I get this feeling GW would be highly amused by all this. (Does he read this list?) Can't the "Bax made it all up" theory co-exist with the puzzle box version?

Urth Mailing List

To post, write urth at urth.net

Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

Eugene Z

<http://blog.eugenez.net>

Craig Brewer — 19 Apr 2010, 15:18 · in reply to John Watkins

One thing that's significant about Wolfe's reliance on unreliable narrators, and I think this is most explicit in Long Sun and Short Sun, is that he's mirroring an >important aspect of Christian religious faith. Believers, for the most part, rely upon the Gospels, accounts that are, by their natural, unreliable. Wolfe seems to think that this is or can be a rational choice, but he's not interested in soft-peddling the complications this entails. But maybe there's a Chestertonian idea at work as well, which is that stories that are compelling are more likely to be true--that human beings naturally seek to order things into coherent and interesting narratives because we think that such narratives best help us to make sense of the world.

I like this a lot.

It also speaks to Severian's dilemma: could he just be a dupe of alien creatures AND an actual messiah figure? Even false things can be true.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 Apr 2010, 15:26 · in reply to John Watkins

I go along with this.

.

Maybe the point of the story is narrative desire. In college, a professor asked a class I was in if anyone believed that Trystero was "real" within the world of *The Crying of Lot 49*. I was one of the ones who did, and when asked to explain why, I sort of blurted "Because it's a better story."

If Bax is a con man who made up all the fantastic elements, then the story is prosaic, dull, and flat. If Bax is utterly honest with us and every word of the letters can be believed, then the story is straightforward. If Bax is artfully mixing truth and lies, and some of the supernatural events do occur, then the story is fascinating and complex. I want the best story to be the "true" story, and maybe that's the point.

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On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 10:58 AM, Eugene Zaretskiy <eugene.zar at gmail.com> wrote:

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 10:40 AM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

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I get this feeling GW would be highly amused by all this. (Does he read this list?) Can't the "Bax made it all up" theory co-exist with the puzzle box version?

David Stockhoff — 19 Apr 2010, 15:27 · follows brunians at brunians.org

And there's also the eery significance of carts in /*Le Morte d'Arthur*/ and elsewhere: The condemned were carried in carts to the gallows, but goddesses were also carried in carts in procession long before that.

So a witch's or fairy's riding "twice in a cart" could mean something very precise, but I couldn't guess what.

Message: 2
Date: Mon, 19 Apr 2010 07:42:30 -0600
From: Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com>
To: urth at lists.urth.net
Subject: Re: (urth) Kiki
Message-ID: <4BCC5DC6.7010105 at gmail.com>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1; format=flowed

Craig Brewer

And who is Kiki, really?

The name "Kiki" might be an homage to "Kiki's Delivery Service," a Japanese anime by Miyazaki. That would indicate that Kiki is a witch. She demonstrates supernatural insight when she tells Bax and Doris that there is a third person in the car, "settin' in the dark." This must be Nicholas in the trunk.

"Twice in a cart's all I ever rode," suggests she is not of the modern world. She must be of Faerie.

Eugene Zaretskiy — 19 Apr 2010, 15:42 · in reply to John Watkins

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 11:07 AM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:
Maybe the point of the story is narrative desire. In college, a professor asked a class I was in if anyone believed that Trystero was "real" within the world of The Crying of Lot 49. I was one of the ones who did, and when asked to explain why, I sort of blurted "Because it's a better story."

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Awesome. Totally on board with John's reply.

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 10:58 AM, Eugene Zaretskiy <eugene.zar at gmail.com> wrote:

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 10:40 AM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

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John Watkins — 19 Apr 2010, 15:44 · in reply to Craig Brewer

My own take on *New Sun* is that the aliens are the dupes of the Increate. I have almost no textual support for this, except for the conversation in *Long Sun* in which someone (Incus?) says that if a demon pretends to be a god the god will convert them into himself. While Incus isn't necessarily the best guide, it's confirmed by the Outsider in *Exodus*:

"As I am claiming Kypris even now because love always proceeds from me, real love, true love. First romance." So if the Hieros are evil aliens duping Severian by pretending to be angels and archangels in the service of the Increate, they'll wind up being angels and archangels in the service of the Increate, at least indirectly and eventually.

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I like this a lot.

It also speaks to Severian's dilemma: could he just be a dupe of alien creatures AND an actual messiah figure? Even false things can be true.

Craig Brewer — 19 Apr 2010, 15:51 · in reply to John Watkins

Yep.

And a torturer can become a savior by acting like one.

And it adds a more meaningful dimension to Horn becoming Silk.

And a con-man can turn from the "evil twin" to the "good twin," etc., etc.

John Watkins — 19 Apr 2010, 15:59 · in reply to Craig Brewer

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From: John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Mon, April 19, 2010 10:44:13 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Sorcerer's House Questions (*Major Spoilers*)

My own take on New Sun is that the aliens are the dupes of the Increate. I have almost no textual support for this, except for the conversation in Long Sun in which someone (Incus?) says that if a demon pretends to be a god the god will convert them into himself. While Incus isn't necessarily the best guide, it's confirmed by the Outsider in Exodus:

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John Watkins — 19 Apr 2010, 16:00 · in reply to John Watkins

Well, that was right in front of me, Craig, and I missed it. We've been focused on the effect of Bax's lies on others, not their effect on himself.

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 11:59 AM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:

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Matthew Keeley — 19 Apr 2010, 16:08 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 11:27 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>wrote:
And there's also the eery significance of carts in /*Le Morte d'Arthur*/ and elsewhere: The condemned were carried in carts to the gallows, but goddesses were also carried in carts in procession long before that.
So a witch's or fairy's riding "twice in a cart" could mean something very precise, but I couldn't guess what.

At one point Lancelot, questing to save Guenivere, loses his horse, swallows his pride, and rides in a cart to save the queen. Indeed, Lancelot was sometimes known as "The Knight of the Cart".

-Matt

David Stockhoff — 19 Apr 2010, 16:24 · follows John Watkins

Can we put this together with John's post and call this "the reification of narrative desire"?

Any story is, naturally, true and false at the same time, in exactly that way. Storytellers are hopeful liars. Readers are hopeful consumers of lies. And so on. Sorcerers take it one step further.

That's fantasy (entertainment).

Message: 1

Date: Mon, 19 Apr 2010 08:14:27 -0700 (PDT)

From: Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Sorcerer's House Questions (*Major Spoilers*)
Message-ID: <106850.13854.qm at web37606.mail.mud.yahoo.com>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii

I'm with you on this.

I think a big part of it has to do with how the last few chapters start to talk about the nature of what a sorcerer does. Earlier, I mentioned how similar Martha's description of magic words are to Bax's description of lying. A lot of it comes down to controlling context and influencing how people will receive what gets said. (I.e., Bax has no idea what the magic words mean, but he can "sell" them, and that makes him a powerful sorcerer. Even the triannulus seems to come down to interpretation (the pictures are quite abstract, apparently, and Emlyn and Bax see either a fox or a wolf, depending on what they want...and Emlyn even suggests that sometimes it's hard to tell when the spell is finished since it often depends on symbols).

But if being a sorcerer is being a powerful story-teller, so powerful that you can make lies (or at least empty words) have real power, then perhaps it is possible that the story could be both true and false at the same time. And that's an idea I really like.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 19 Apr 2010, 16:31 · in reply to David Stockhoff

"All statements are in some sense true, in some sense false, and in some sense meaningless." - the Principia Discordia.

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Can we put this together with John's post and call this "the reification of narrative desire"?

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Thomas Bitterman — 19 Apr 2010, 19:57 · in reply to John Watkins

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 11:07 AM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote: Maybe the point of the story is narrative desire. In college, a professor asked a class I was in if anyone believed that Trystero was "real" within the world of The Crying of Lot 49. I was one of the ones who did, and when asked to explain why, I sort of blurted "Because it's a better story."

I thought Trystero was real, too. It's not even clear what it could mean for a fictional entity to be thinking about something that wasn't real. But this is starting to get real confusing.

If Bax is a con man who made up all the fantastic elements, then the story is prosaic, dull, and flat.

I don't find it such. If lying and sorcery are the same thing, then Bax is truly a powerful sorcerer. He fooled not just a bunch of fictional characters, but readers in the real world, too.

But maybe there's a Chesteronian idea at work as well, which is that stories that are *compelling* are more likely to be true--that human beings naturally seek to order things into coherent and interesting narratives because we think that such narratives best help us to make sense of the world.

Could you explain this further?

Craig Brewer — 20 Apr 2010, 14:30 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

The OED says that "cart" was also often used for "carriage," so it could just be Wolfe using older vocab.

I'm more interested in Kiki's role in the narrative. I mean, is she just there for "we're now in faerie" flavor, or does she have some other identity we don't really know. The character list says that she was befriended by Doris and Bax, but does giving her a ride really go so far as making friends? Since Martha mentions witches and sorcerers fighting witches, I like the possibility that she's a witch, but then I wonder what else might identify her as a witch, apart from just being old, bent, mysterious, and able to tell that there's a vampire in the trunk.

And, for some reason, when they mention that her house is just out of sight in the forest, something about that reminded me of one of the first glimpses of Faerie we get in Crowley's *Little, Big* with the little house. Nothing specific, just one of many flashes of Crowley's book that kept popping into my head while reading. The houses that change shape/size is another obvious similarity, of course.

Stuart Hamm — 20 Apr 2010, 14:37 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Maybe I need to re-read the book look for references to "Spirited Away" and "Princess Mononoke"...

??????? ? ?

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myspace.com/stuhamm

Skype? stuart.hamm

? ??

--- On Tue, 4/20/10, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

From: Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) Kiki

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Date: Tuesday, April 20, 2010, 7:30 AM

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From: Matthew Keeley <matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Mon, April 19, 2010 11:08:02 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) Kiki

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 11:27 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

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-----Inline Attachment Follows-----

James Wynn — 20 Apr 2010, 15:27 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On my second read, I think Bax always intended to replace George from the start. Right from letter #2, he gives George precise directions to the house. I think that at that time, he intended for George to show up there so he could murder him. He definitely implies in the letter that he is capable of murder.

Incidentally, I'm more convinced the supernatural stuff is real. Bax inheriting a house is too coincidental otherwise. And you don't attempt to pull a con with "My house is full of faeries (unless you are dealing with someone inclined to believe it).

J.

On Sat, Apr 17, 2010 at 7:03 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

As I say, I get the impression that Bax lies a lot, but not about the supernatural stuff.

.

So maybe the question with Bax is whether or not his ability to tell a wonderful, compelling, puzzling story (which is, of course, also Wolfe's talent) is innocent or dangerous? From that angle, it seems like one of the "big issues" with TSH is the relationship between fantasy and dishonesty. That seems like a perfectly appropriate theme for a writer who has always maintained that fantasy is one of the best ways to deal with the "really real" -- why shouldn't he write a story that explicitly explores the other side of that coin?

I just think the story is lame if the whole thing is a fabrication of Bax's, because --after all-- it already IS a fabrication by Wolfe. It would be like saying everything in the Latro novels was a product of Latro's deranged state due to his wound. It makes trying to understand the "contrived" story to be moot, because any inconsistencies can be marked up to shoddy story-telling. We're already facing the problems of possible plot-holes anyway. If we treat the story as a work by Bax instead of Wolfe, what is the value of that? Shall we investigate the quality of Bax's novel instead? I certainly hope this is not true. I'm not re-reading it as though this is the case, because I don't think I'm up to analyzing two novels at once.

J.

Eugene Zaretskiy — 20 Apr 2010, 16:06 · in reply to James Wynn

On Tue, Apr 20, 2010 at 11:27 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

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I noticed the same thing on my second read through, but also just reading Bax's syrupy writing with the idea that his aim is to replace George puts those early letters in a completely different light. Why is he writing to George in the first place? His "he's-my-brother-and-I-love-him" shtick stinks of leaun's poor attempts at pretending to be something else. I don't have the book in front of me to quote, but almost every seemingly earnest plea to George/Millie rings false. They rung false even on the first read-through, but I had chalked it up to Bax trying to keep up appearances and just being polite. Reading it now, it seems clear his intent is not only to lure George to him, but also to woo Millie. He's very careful to speak kindly of George at all times, but also making himself sound superior by making himself empathetic, uh, if that makes sense. Calling himself the bad brother with a curled lip and puppy eyes, basically.

Millie's not very bright, and Bax knows that. But I get the impression he also knows that she would detect that it's not George who has returned to her. So he's trying to convince her (successfully, as we see in Millie's letter) that he's the better brother, and that a confrontation between the two of them is inevitable. The last letter is for appearances' sake.

Incidentally, I'm more convinced the supernatural stuff is real. Bax inheriting a house is too coincidental otherwise. And you don't attempt to pull a con with "My house is full of faeries (unless you are dealing with someone inclined to believe it).

Well, some of it. Bax certainly makes a compelling case for the opposite, in light of our observations above. He's a convicted con man, and knowing that he ultimately replaces his brother (if we are to use that interpretation of the last letter) and reading his early letters for what they are, it does seem to lend credence to idea that what follows are Bax's all-inclusive attempts to con a easy-to-anger brother to his death and a gullible Millie to believe the fantastic, romantic tale that unfolds using his knowledge of 19th century literature as sources. I'm not saying I believe that, or don't believe it. As John Watkins said, choose whichever one makes a better story for you.

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So maybe the question with Bax is whether or not his ability to tell a wonderful, compelling, puzzling story (which is, of course, also Wolfe's talent) is innocent or dangerous? From that angle, it seems like one of the "big issues" with TSH is the relationship between fantasy and dishonesty. That seems like a perfectly appropriate theme for a writer who has always maintained that fantasy is one of the best ways to deal with the "really real" -- why shouldn't he write a story that explicitly explores the other side of that coin?

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of possible plot-holes anyway. If we treat the story as a work by Bax instead of Wolfe, what is the value of that? Shall we investigate the quality of Bax's novel instead? I certainly hope this is not true. I'm not re-reading it as though this is the case, because I don't think I'm up to analyzing two novels at once.

J.

Craig Brewer — 20 Apr 2010, 16:12 · in reply to James Wynn

On my second read, I think Bax always intended to replace George from the start.

I tend to agree. And on my second read, Bax really started to seem like an ass to me, at least at the beginning. Toward the end, I get the sense that he's changing quite a bit. But his whole tone often sounds to me like the kind of feigned innocence specifically designed to piss someone off, at least when he's addressing George. That whole "I know you'll think I'm being crazy, but I swear I'm being sincere in my intentions" and "I can imagine you've thrown this away, but I do so hope you're still reading, my beloved brother" seems like the kind of thing designed just to push someone's buttons, especially someone who already hates you. And since he told Shell early on that he at least planned to get a few hundred out of George, he's at least planning something from the beginning, even if it's not murder.

After George shows up and is thrown in jail, though, the tone of the letters seems to change.

And as for the fairy stuff being too crazy for a con, *IF* Bax was making it all up, I assumed it was for Millie's benefit and specifically to outrage George, both because the "poetic" creations would irritate the otherwise "practical" George and because George would probably guess that he was doing it to seduce Millie (or at the very least to seduce her imagination and sympathy for Bax).

Have we entertained the possibility that some of the supernatural is real and some is made up? If anything was made up, I suspect that Emlyn and Ieuan aren't real but are instead a kind of creation Bax makes to tell a little story about how he and George don't get along. (But then that leaves open a lot of questions about Lupine's "gifts" for Emlyn and her reality, etc.)

----- Original Message -----

From: James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Tue, April 20, 2010 10:27:15 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Sorcerer's House Questions (*Major Spoilers*)

On my second read, I think Bax always intended to replace George from the start. Right from letter #2, he gives George precise directions to the house. I think that at that time, he intended for George to show up there so he could murder him. He definitely implies in the letter that he is capable of murder.

Incidentally, I'm more convinced the supernatural stuff is real. Bax inheriting a house is too coincidental otherwise. And you don't attempt to pull a con with "My house is full of faeries (unless you are dealing with someone inclined to believe it).

J.

On Sat, Apr 17, 2010 at 7:03 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

As I say, I get the impression that Bax lies a lot, but not about the supernatural stuff.

.

So maybe the question with Bax is whether or not his ability to tell a wonderful, compelling, puzzling story (which is, of course, also Wolfe's talent) is innocent or dangerous? From that angle, it seems like one of the "big issues" with TSH is the relationship between fantasy and dishonesty. That seems like a perfectly appropriate theme for a writer who has always maintained that fantasy is one of the best ways to deal with the "really real" -- why shouldn't he write a story that explicitly explores the other side of that coin?

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J.

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Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

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Craig Brewer — 20 Apr 2010, 16:48 · in reply to James Wynn

People have put forward the possibility that Ted was Ambrosius, the "murdered Sorcerer." (The initials TAG would also support that: Ted/Theodore Ambrosius Griffin.)

But is it also possible that he was a werewolf who had been beaten during the fight with Lupine? Was the "something wet" a wolf skin that was removed like Lupine's? The fight did happen by the river, of course, so it could well have gotten wet in the fight, or the "Riverman" could have scalped him or some such. Then perhaps the ring was his soul that got traded away, and now Doris wants it back because she (intuitively, at least) expects that it will help him come back all the way?

Also, was Griffin his name or Doris' maiden name? I don't recall her ever saying either way.

Could the "G" in TAG also stand for Goldwurm? After all, isn't a golden worm wind itself into a circle/ring, like the one Doris gives Bax?

And, not to push too far, but could Ted have been Mr. Black as well? Doris never saw Skotos/Mr. Black, and she says that Bax reminds him of her. And her description fits with what we know of

Mr. Black: "He was taller and quite a bit heavier. Your hair's sort of yellow-brown, and his was almost black." (39) (Interestingly, when describing the fish, there are three "shades of black" (37) in the fish...but perhaps there are also three "shades" of Mr. Black: Mr. B/Skotos/Ted? Ted died two years before all of this, and I can't find the part where it says how long ago Skotos or Mr. Black died.

(And only vaguely related, but is the lion-headed man that Winker takes Bax to at all related to Doris? She's Griffin, a lion's body, so that lion head would complete her? Is that just grasping at straws?)

Gwern Branwen — 20 Apr 2010, 16:57 · in reply to Craig Brewer

On Tue, Apr 20, 2010 at 12:48 PM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

(And only vaguely related, but is the lion-headed man that Winker takes Bax to at all related to Doris? She's Griffin, a lion's body, so that lion head would complete her? Is that just grasping at straws?)

My take is that the lion-head is another Orientalism; not precisely accurate (no more than the Musashi depicted), but 'through a mirror darkly'. Lions are an extremely common motif in Buddhism (the Lion's roar drives away ignorance), and in particular, Manjushri, Bodhisattva of wisdom (Bax goes to the lion-man for answers, remember), is frequently paired with lions.*

* quick ref: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manjushri#Iconography>

gwern

Roy C. Lackey — 20 Apr 2010, 18:31 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Craig Brewer wrote:

[snip]

Also, was Griffin his name or Doris' maiden name? I don't recall her ever saying either way. Could the "G" in TAG also stand for Goldwurm? After all, isn't a golden worm wind itself into a circle/ring, like the one Doris gives Bax?<

The list of characters at the end gives his name as Ted Griffin.

And, not to push too far, but could Ted have been Mr. Black as well? Doris never saw Skotos/Mr. Black, and she says that Bax reminds him of her. And her description fits with what we know of Mr. Black: "He was taller and quite a bit heavier. Your hair's sort of yellow-brown, and his was almost black." (39) <

Nope. Doris said that Ted was taller and heavier than Bax (39). Bax also described the apparition of Ted he saw in the Skotos woods as a "big, heavysset man" (129). Biddy described Black as "small, not a whole lot taller than I am" (207). Jake said Skotos (aka Black) was "three or four inches shorter" than Bax and agreed with Bax that he had been "a brisk, energetic little man" (217).

[snip]

Ted died two years before all of this, and I can't find the part where it says how long ago Skotos or Mr. Black died.<

Skotos "died" three years ago (216).

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 20 Apr 2010, 19:07 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Craig Brewer wrote:

[snip]

And, for some reason, when they mention that her house is just out of sight in the forest, something about that reminded me of one of the first glimpses of Faerie we get in Crowley's *Little, Big* with the little house.

Nothing specific, just one of many flashes of Crowley's book that kept popping into my head while reading. The houses that change shape/size is another obvious similarity, of course.<

I, too, was reminded of Crowley's book, particularly that last bit about houses changing size, being bigger on the inside than they could possibly have been as judged from outside, IIRC. That is why I brought up earlier the issue of the Black house changing from nine rooms to more than forty. Martha said, "It grows when people live in it, and shrinks when they don't." (278)

The house, perhaps more than anything else, makes me believe the Faerie bits of the story are true. That house is a doorway into Faerie, and that is why George wanted it. (261)

-Roy

John Watkins — 20 Apr 2010, 19:14 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I haven't read *Little, Big* yet (on my shelf but buried at the moment) but did anyone else get a bit of a *House of Leaves* vibe? *House of Leaves* is, IMHO, a more ambitious book and a better one, but both are stories about weird houses that seemingly increase in size, told by unreliable narrators and involving a pair of twins. There's even an epistolary section of *House of Leaves*.

On Tue, Apr 20, 2010 at 3:07 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Craig Brewer wrote:

[snip]

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Nothing specific, just one of many flashes of Crowley's book that kept popping into my head while reading. The houses that change shape/size is another obvious similarity, of course.<

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-Roy

Fred Kiesche — 20 Apr 2010, 19:15 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Maybe we need to search the text for Sluggy Freelance references! ;)

<http://www.sluggy.com/>

<http://www.sluggy.com/nvg>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Characters_of_Sluggy_Freelance#Kiki

On Mon, Apr 19, 2010 at 9:42 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
Craig Brewer

And who is Kiki, really?

The name "Kiki" might be an homage to "Kiki's Delivery Service," a Japanese anime by Miyazaki. That would indicate that Kiki is a witch. She demonstrates supernatural insight when she tells Bax and Doris that there is a third person in the car, "settin' in the dark." This must be Nicholas in the trunk.

"Twice in a cart's all I ever rode," suggests she is not of the modern world. She must be of Faerie.

Craig Brewer — 20 Apr 2010, 20:49 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy said:

The list of characters at the end gives his name as Ted Griffin.

Doh. Totally forgot to check. And you're right about the different descriptions of Skotos, as well (another oversight).

But what about his connection to the werewolves, if there is one? He appears to Bax in the woods the same time he meets Lupine. And it still seems possible that whatever "wet" thing he had with him when he appeared to Doris could have been a wolf skin...although why was it embroidered with his initials? Obviously, its being wet is supposed to help us identify it, but I feel dense for not quite getting it.

And do we think he's actually dead and what Bax/Doris see is his ghost? Or has he just relocated to faerie like Black seems to have done? The list of characters specifically identifies Ambrosius as a "murdered" sorcerer, so if Ted and Ambrosius are the same, we're seeing his ghost?

But even more than that...why is Ambrosius or Ted even in the story, for that matter? I can't quite figure out their significance, other than as an added bit of strangeness.

James Wynn — 20 Apr 2010, 21:48 · in reply to Craig Brewer

And it still seems possible that whatever "wet" thing he had with him when he appeared to Doris could have been a wolf skin...
although why was it embroidered with his initials?

The most obvious explanation is that it was a handkerchief into which Ted was crying. That explanation seems **too** obvious in light of that Doris would not name it, but a wolfskin does not seem to be a likely embroidered item unless Ted's mom didn't want him to lose it when went to Faeri camp.

J.

On Tue, Apr 20, 2010 at 3:49 PM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:
Roy said:

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Doh. Totally forgot to check. And you're right about the different descriptions of Skotos, as well (another oversight).

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James Wynn — 20 Apr 2010, 22:44 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I, too, was reminded of Crowley's book, particularly that last bit about houses changing size, being bigger on the inside than they could possibly have been as judged from outside, IIRC. That is why I brought up earlier the issue of the Black house changing from nine rooms to more than forty. Martha said, "It grows when people live in it, and shrinks when they don't." (278)

The labyrinthian Black House's reminded me of Weer's large, constantly growing house in Peace which had rooms Weer knew of but had trouble or even no idea how to find them.

J.

Roy C. Lackey — 21 Apr 2010, 00:06 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Craig Brewer wrote:

But what about his connection to the werewolves, if there is one? He appears to Bax in the woods the same time he meets Lupine. <

FWIW, my impression of Ted's ghost (if it was a ghost) in the woods was that he was trying to protect Doris in some way from the werewolf. In the same way, I thought that Winkle was also trying to distract Lupine away from Bax by barking and getting the werewolf to chase her.

Earlier, It was also Ted's ghost(?) who intervened when Ieuan was beating Bax. That was the man he mistook as Ieuan's father.

And it still seems possible that whatever "wet" thing he had with him when he appeared to Doris could have been a wolf skin...although why was it embroidered with his initials? Obviously, its being wet is supposed to help us identify it, but I feel dense for not quite getting it.<

I don't know what it was if it wasn't a handkerchief, but I don't think a wolf skin could be said to have a "corner".

Well, hell! My wife hasn't read the book, knows nothing about it. But I just described the scene to her that Doris described in her letter, and said that a monogrammed handkerchief, the obvious choice, probably wasn't the answer. She came up with stationery. Duh! In a book made up of letters! Who wudda thunk it!

I have to think about this.

-Roy

Adam Thornton — 21 Apr 2010, 01:44 · in reply to Fred Kiesche

Fred Kiesche wrote:

Maybe we need to search the text for Sluggo Freelance references! ;)

Uh, guys?

Maybe there *is* a Geek Comic reference going on.

Does no one else remember Ted Griffin?

Dilbert from, oh, 1995 or so: Dilbert needs approval for some sort of purchase. His boss says "You need to get Griffin's signature." Dilbert asks, "You mean Ted Griffin in finance or Griffin-the-mythological-beast?" Pointy-haired boss answers "Whichever is harder."

Adam

Eugene Zaretskiy — 21 Apr 2010, 04:30 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Tue, Apr 20, 2010 at 9:44 PM, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

Fred Kiesche wrote:

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Uh, guys?

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Or it could be a reference to Ted Griffin, who wrote the screenplay for Matchstick Men. ;)

In all seriousness, it seems to me that Ted is short for Theodore. Some website I found on Google says that comes from the words "Divine Gift" in Greek. And according to Wikipedia, Ambrosius is Latin derived from the Greek word "ambrotos" meaning divine or immortal. That links those two quite nicely for me and explains the name. Google isn't shedding any light on Griffin. Don't mythical griffins guard gold? Isn't Ted's ring gold?

Anyway, I apologize if this sounds flippant. It just seems as though tossing out names from pop culture isn't very useful. I personally prefer trying to understand the etymology of the name, a

habit this list actually got me hooked on. That said, Kiki from _Delivery Service_ is at least slightly more believable to me because she **is** a witch.

Adam

Roy C. Lackey — 21 Apr 2010, 06:25 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Taking up where I left off:

Craig Brewer wrote:

And do we think he's actually dead and what Bax/Doris see is his ghost? Or has he just relocated to faerie like Black seems to have done? The list of characters specifically identifies Ambrosius as a "murdered" sorcerer, so if Ted and Ambrosius are the same, we're seeing his ghost?<

I'm not sure what to think about Ted. Doris claimed to still be paying off his medical bills, which suggests he died, probably in a hospital. Funerals can be faked, like Skotos's.

The best Bax could figure, Skotos showed up about the time Black disappeared. Bax stopped drinking three years and ten months ago, presumably when he went to prison. He spent a little over three years there and had been out for less than six months. Skotos "died" three years ago, just about the time Bax went to prison.

Martha left her younger twins when they were still young boys. (I'm not sure how that works. If no one ages in Faerie, how could they ever grow up There? Bax pegged their age at 13 to 15. How did they get to be that old unless they spent those years Here?)

I'm rambling here. <g>

But even more than that...why is Ambrosius or Ted even in the story, for that matter? I can't quite figure out their significance, other than as an added bit of strangeness.<

The ring with the changeable stone that Bax found in the catfish was apparently the object in which Ambrosius had stored some of his power (270). So Ted's ring probably had nothing to do with Ambrosius. Ambrosius was Black's rival in some sense (ibid.). I suggest that the external object in which Black stored some of his power was the poor wooden crutch old Nick carried but didn't need to walk. At the final river battle, old Nick revealed himself as Zwart Black and his crutch became more like a hiker's staff and had a "gold head" (284).

I showed earlier that Ted is not Black. Black is not dead and has his own "weapon of sorcery" (so called, p-73). If Goldwurm killed Ambrosius, he obviously did not kill Black. **After** Doris gave Bax Ted's ring, when the big man we later learn looked like Ted showed up when Ieuan was beating Bax, Bax saw a ring on the big man's hand (50). (At least I **think** he meant a ring on the man's hand. Maybe not.) That ring, at the time, made Bax think the big man was "something else" than the boy's father, a false conclusion he came to after the event. What the hell? What ring could dead Ted have been wearing that night? According to Doris, he hadn't even been buried with his wedding band, which was then being worn by Bax.

What "something else" could Bax have thought him to be? A ghost, because the ring on the man's hand (if that is intended) looked like one of the two he himself was wearing? Remember, at that point Bax didn't know what Ted or Black looked like. Or Ambrosius.

Whatever the conclusion Bax came to about this ring at the time, why did he later decide the big man must be the boy's father?

-Roy

Craig Brewer — 21 Apr 2010, 12:53 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

These are all good questions and ways to reason this out, I think.

A couple of points: are we sure that the man who appears to Bax by the river before he talks to Lupine was actually Ambrosius? Why not Goldwurm? I've been assuming, like others, that Ted and Ambrosius were probably the same and that his appearing in the forest was somehow to protect Doris. But I suppose I could be mistaken. When the "big, heavysset man" stands frowning in front of them (129), Doris has already turned back and Lupine was holding Bax's hand. Maybe a small detail, but it already seems at that point that Lupine is more interested in Bax than Doris, so does she need protection?

I'm also just curious about Ted's ring. It's gold and has a basket-weave design. All we know about Goldwurm, really, is his name and that he lives in a tower. But a golden wurm just seems too close to a golden ring for me to dismiss the possibility quite yet.

Another question: with so many twins around, is it possible that Zwart Black also has a twin? If so, Ted is out because, as Roy has pointed out, Wolfe specifically makes them different sizes. But could it be Goldwurm since so much is made about good and bad twins fighting? Or Ambrosius if he ISN'T Ted? But who and why? (And if Black was really old Nick the whole time, is Nicholas more than just a created vampire?)

Sorry for the ramble...

----- Original Message -----

From: Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Wed, April 21, 2010 1:25:10 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) TSH: Ted's identity

Taking up where I left off:

Craig Brewer wrote:

And do we think he's actually dead and what Bax/Doris see is his ghost? Or has he just relocated to faerie like Black seems to have done? The list of characters specifically identifies Ambrosius as a "murdered" sorcerer, so if Ted and Ambrosius are the same, we're seeing his ghost?<

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-Roy

James Wynn — 21 Apr 2010, 13:37 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

But what about his connection to the werewolves, if there is one?
He appears to Bax in the woods the same time he meets Lupine.

FWIW, my impression of Ted's ghost (if it was a ghost) in the woods was that he was trying to protect Doris in some way from the werewolf. In the same way, I thought that Winkle was also trying to distract Lupine away from Bax by barking and getting the werewolf to chase her.

If Ted was there to protect anyone, surely it was to protect Bax. He had already protected him from Ieuan.

J.

Roy C. Lackey — 21 Apr 2010, 18:27 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn quoted and wrote:

But what about his connection to the werewolves, if there is one?
He appears to Bax in the woods the same time he meets Lupine.

FWIW, my impression of Ted's ghost (if it was a ghost) in the woods was that he was trying to protect Doris in some way from the werewolf. In the same way, I thought that Winkle was also trying to distract Lupine away from Bax by barking and getting the werewolf to chase her.

If Ted was there to protect anyone, surely it was to protect Bax.

Maybe. But as soon as Lupine muttered boo, he split. Why? What kind of protection is that? What does a dead man have to fear from a werewolf? Remember that when Lupine first took Bax's hand in the dark woods, Bax thought she was Doris. (Shades of the Doris/Lupine confusion later at the car.) When Lupine spoke, Ted may have realized she wasn't Doris, so he left, maybe to look after Doris as she headed back to the car.

He
had already protected him from Ieuan.

Again, maybe. Bax leaves that impression, but I'm not 100% sure that's really what happened, even if that was the practical effect.

But then neither am I convinced that the "other" guy in the back of Bax's car with Doris ("You have t'other one in back there, settin' with you in the dark?" [183]) that Kiki mentioned was Nicholas, then still safely locked up in the trunk. I think it may have been ghostly Ted, hanging around Doris and trying to look after her.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 21 Apr 2010, 18:30 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Craig Brewer wrote:

A couple of points: are we sure that the man who appears to Bax by the river before he talks to Lupine was actually Ambrosius? Why not Goldwurm?

I've been assuming, like others, that Ted and Ambrosius were probably the same and that his appearing in the forest was somehow to protect Doris.<

I don't know if Ted was also Ambrosius, but Bax said that the big man looked like the pictures he later saw of Ted (134). That middle initial "A" is really all I have seen that *may* connect the two.

But, speaking of initials, George has a middle initial "J". If Bax has one, it isn't given in the book, which means we are probably supposed to figure it out. <G> If Martha gave her firstborn sons names, we don't know them. The names Baxter and George are taken from the adoptive parents' families (177). It makes no sense for one child to have been given a middle name but not the other.

But I suppose I could be mistaken. When the "big, heavyset man" stands frowning in front of them (129), Doris has already turned back and Lupine was holding Bax's hand. Maybe a small detail, but it already seems at that point that Lupine is more interested in Bax than Doris, so does she need protection?<

See my reply to James.

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I don't know what to think about Ted's ring. Bax said it was a little worn. He also said Doris was between 30 and 35, so she couldn't have been married to Ted all that long. The greater the gold content, the faster a ring will show wear, but still . . . Normally, the bride provides the groom's wedding ring, doesn't she? How does that complicate matters?

Another question: with so many twins around, is it possible that Zwart Black also has a twin? <

Possible, but I see no good reason to think so. Twins run in families, but we are shown that it is Martha's side that has that proclivity.

If so, Ted is out because, as Roy has pointed out, Wolfe specifically makes them different sizes. But could it be Goldwurm since so much is made about good and bad twins fighting? Or Ambrosius if he ISN'T Ted? <

Bax thought that Ambrosius had been a "friendly rival" of Zwart (270). If so, that doesn't sound like the sort bitter feuding we see within Martha's sets of twins.

But who and why? (And if Black was really old Nick the whole time, is Nicholas more than just a created vampire?)<

Black's role as old Nick clearly riffed on the Nicholas-the-Butler guy that went back at least forty years but, in the story, he doesn't seem to me to be much more than a bogeyman, just thrown in with all the other supernatural characters that have nothing to do with traditional conceptions of Faerie.

-Roy

James Wynn — 21 Apr 2010, 18:55 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

If Ted was there to protect anyone, surely it was to protect Bax.

Maybe. But as soon as Lupine muttered boo, he split. Why? What kind of protection is that? What does a dead man have to fear from a werewolf?

Not basing this on much, but perhaps the wet thing was wet because it came from the river. That assumes of course that Ted is really dead.

J.

James Wynn — 21 Apr 2010, 19:02 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Well, hell! My wife hasn't read the book, knows nothing about it. But I just described the scene to her that Doris described in her letter, and said that a monogrammed handkerchief, the obvious choice, probably wasn't the answer. She came up with stationery. Duh! In a book made up of letters! Who wudda thunk it!

Well, at least stationary has a corner. A shirt doesn't work. But an envelope has a corner and one might put their initials in the return address. It would have to be a letter *he* had written. But any explanation needs a good reason why she wouldn't say what it was. I would think it would be something too disgusting to write or something very incriminating to Ted or Doris. It's needs to be a key to the plot or else why make such a big deal of it? There are really not that many things that are commonly monogrammed, I think, and I'm really befuddled.

J.

John Watkins — 21 Apr 2010, 19:05 · in reply to James Wynn

People (especially married people) also monogram towels. And towels are frequently wet. Especially if they've just been used to dry someone off, after maybe crawling in from the river or after showering off after crawling out of a grave.

Just thought I'd throw my wild speculation out there.

On Wed, Apr 21, 2010 at 3:02 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
Well, hell! My wife hasn't read the book, knows nothing about it. But I just

described the scene to her that Doris described in her letter, and said that a monogrammed handkerchief, the obvious choice, probably wasn't the answer. She came up with stationery. Duh! In a book made up of letters! Who wudda thunk it!

Well, at least stationary has a corner. A shirt doesn't work. But an envelope has a corner and one might put their initials in the return address. It would have to be a letter *he* had written. But any explanation needs a good reason why she wouldn't say what it was. I would think it would be something too disgusting to write or something very incriminating to Ted or Doris. It's needs to be a key to the plot or else why make such a big deal of it? There are really not that many things that are commonly monogrammed, I think, and I'm really befuddled.

J.

Roy C. Lackey — 21 Apr 2010, 20:42 · in reply to John Watkins

John Watkins wrote:

People (especially married people) also monogram towels. And towels are frequently wet. Especially if they've just been used to dry someone off, after maybe crawling in from the river or after showering off after crawling out of a grave.

I thought of towels, also pillow cases and, maybe, sheets. But those items are as innocent as a handkerchief. As James says, any explanation needs a good reason why she wouldn't say what it was.

I don't know why some people want to connect the item's wetness with the river incident. Doris saw Ted in her bedroom days after the river incident; there would have been more than enough time for anything gotten wet at the river to have dried out. And there is no indication that the apparition of Ted in the woods ever even went near the river, anyway.

-Roy

James Wynn — 22 Apr 2010, 15:02 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I don't know why some people want to connect the item's wetness with the river incident. Doris saw Ted in her bedroom days after the river incident; there would have been more than enough time for anything gotten wet at the river to have dried out. And there is no indication that the apparition of Ted in the woods ever even went near the river, anyway.

You mean when Bax met Lupine at the river, right? But there is another important river incident that occurred close to Ted's Apparition. The battle royale. In Letter 42, Doris writes that she has seen Ted. Then after she has returned to the Black House she writes the PS that she, Zwart, Orizia, and George (whom I suspect was Bax) forced Nicholas back into the trunk.

Just before the river battle, Nicholas calls Bax on Doris' cell phone (Letter 41). So Doris did see only a few hours before the river battle. Now, if Ted were the body Lupina was remaking it would tie Ted to The Wet Thing. Of course we would still be left an a quandry (so to speak) as to what the Thing was.

J.

Roy C. Lackey — 22 Apr 2010, 18:12 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn quoted and wrote:

I don't know why some people want to connect the item's wetness with the river incident. Doris saw Ted in her bedroom days after the river incident; there would have been more than enough time for anything gotten wet at the river to have dried out. And there is no indication that the apparition of Ted in the woods ever even went near the river, anyway.

You mean when Bax met Lupine at the river, right?

Right. The first trip Bax and Doris made to the woods, when he saw the brief apparition of the big man.

But there is another important river incident that occurred close to Ted's Apparition. The battle royale. In Letter 42, Doris writes that she has seen Ted. Then after she has returned to the Black House she writes the PS that she, Zwart, Orizia, and George (whom I suspect was Bax) forced Nicholas back into the trunk.

This is the sequence of events:

- 1) She saw Ted crying in her bedroom, as described in the body of her letter.
- 2) In the postscript she wrote: "I went to your house after I finished this letter." She went on to say in the postscript that she helped capture Nicholas, and gave him her cell phone (290).

There is no doubt about it: Doris saw the apparition of Ted in her bedroom *before* the river battle even took place. So whatever the wet thing was that Ted left behind, it did not get wet at the river battle.

Just before the river battle, Nicholas calls Bax on Doris' cell phone (Letter 41). So Doris did see only a few hours before the river battle. Now, if Ted were the body Lupine was remaking it would tie Ted to The Wet Thing. Of course we would still be left in a quandry (so to speak) as to what the Thing was.

The body that Lupine was trying to put together was an assemblage from multiple bodies; one arm came from a woman, one from a man (282). There is no reason to suppose that any of the body parts came from Ted.

BTW, what was the point of Bax taking a phone call from Nicholas in the middle of a battle? Comic relief?

-Roy

James Wynn — 22 Apr 2010, 18:57 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

There is no doubt about it: Doris saw the apparition of Ted in her bedroom *before* the river battle even took place. So whatever the wet thing was that Ted left behind, it did not get wet at the river battle.

Yeah, but (assuming the apparition is a "ghost") that Ted didn't get it from the river battle does not preclude his appearance from having something to do with that battle. The close juxtaposition of a river battle letter (41) with a letter about Ted and a Wet Thing (42) should not pass without reference. Especially since the battle occurs within hours of the apparition.

Mind, I'm not asserting he Ted's body is in the river--it's just that at this point identifying The Wet Thing encourages wild speculation in order arrive at all possible explanations. That Ted's body is in the River is qualifies as just that. But it isn't exactly *wild* speculation to associate The Wet Thing in Letter 42 with the River in Letter 41.

Bax got the onyx ring from the River. Personally, with Ted's ring already in play, I had never bothered to speculate on a previous owner of the ring. But if there were one, then wouldn't he be in the River?

Question: How does a ghost leave something behind? Answer (in the form of a question): How did Pike's ghost leave something behind? Wolfe has already established that there are many variant potential examples of "the essence of one who has died separated from his original corporeal form". So Ted might be dead or he might be alive. There might be more than one.

BTW, what was the point of Bax taking a phone call from Nicholas in the middle of a battle? Comic relief?

Well, it was definitely comic relief. I thought it was funny anyway. It also establishes the timeline of Letters 41 & 42. Otherwise, we would have assumed 42 occurred an undetermined amount of time after 41.

So if it is a clue of anything, there is a good chance it is to help associate Ted's apparition with the battle. If it was supposed to be an especially revealing clue, I've missed it so far, but there you have it.

J.

Roy C. Lackey — 22 Apr 2010, 21:07 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:

Bax got the onyx ring from the River. Personally, with Ted's ring already in play, I had never bothered to speculate on a previous owner of the ring. But if there were one, then wouldn't he be in the River?

I'm not following you. The gold ring with the dark stone that Bax found in the catfish had belonged to Ambrosius (270). It was the "weapon of sorcery" wherein Ambrosius had stored some of his power, the item Goldwurm hadn't been able to find (73). Ambrosius had supposedly been strangled and his body thrown in a river (74), probably the same river we have been talking about.

Ted's body (the list of characters says he was Doris's "late husband") had been placed in a casket and buried (36). So Ted's body was never in the river. The body parts Lupine called up from the river had come from victims of the "Horror Hound", as Martha called it (285).

-Roy

James Wynn — 22 Apr 2010, 22:07 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I'm not following you. The gold ring with the dark stone that Bax found in the catfish had belonged to Ambrosius (270). It was the "weapon of

sorcery" wherein Ambrosius had stored some of his power, the item Goldwurm hadn't been able to find (73). Ambrosius had supposedly been strangled and his body thrown in a river (74), probably the same river we have been talking about.

Well, it's obvious I haven't re-read to page 74 yet. As page 270, why do you think the ring Bax showed Kate was the onyx and not the wedding band (which I had assumed on my first read)? I mean, is it really possible that Goldwurm would throw Ambrosius' body in the river with expensive-looking jewelry still on it?

Ted's body (the list of characters says he was Doris's "late husband") had been placed in a casket and buried (36). So Ted's body was never in the river. The body parts Lupine called up from the river had come from victims of the "Horror Hound", as Martha called it (285).

So you consider the list of characters 100% authoritative? So you don't think it possible that there is any duplication or ellisions? If the list says Ambrosius a "murdered sorcerer" and there are no other murdered sorcerers on the list, that's the way it is. And if the list says Ted is "late" there is no valid reading this as ironic? How do you know that Ambrosius was not actually murdered after Ted faked his death? How do you know he was not killed by Lupine? That would still make him Doris's "late husband" right?

And it's a strange ghost that leaves a tear-stained anything. That is, if it is a gothic ghost. So you've got a mystery there.

It's fine that you don't think Ambrosius was Ted (I mistakenly thought that had become all but accepted fact), but the text is simply not as flatly plain as you seem to be letting on.

J.

Roy C. Lackey — 23 Apr 2010, 00:00 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn quoted and wrote:

I'm not following you. The gold ring with the dark stone that Bax found in the catfish had belonged to Ambrosius (270). It was the "weapon of sorcery" wherein Ambrosius had stored some of his power, the item Goldwurm hadn't been able to find (73). Ambrosius had supposedly been strangled and his body thrown in a river (74), probably the same river we have been talking about.

Well, it's obvious I haven't re-read to page 74 yet. As page 270, why do you think the ring Bax showed Kate was the onyx and not the wedding band (which I had assumed on my first read)?

Because Kate commented on the stone: "That's a nice stone." Ted's ring had no stone.

I mean, is it really possible that Goldwurm would throw Ambrosius' body in the river with expensive-looking jewelry still on it?

Yes. When Bax first showed the ring to a jeweler, he handed it over for examination. He was told it was old but worthless. "Just costume jewelry, sir." (31) When Bax wore it, it looked valuable, the various types of opal later mentioned. That's why Bax didn't want to take it off to show it to Dorcas. It was a magic ring. It could disguise itself, just as old Nick's cheap wooden crutch later had a "gold head" (284). Goldwurm apparently didn't know the ring's worth because he couldn't see the worth.

Ted's body (the list of characters says he was Doris's "late husband")

had

been placed in a casket and buried (36). So Ted's body was never in the river. The body parts Lupine called up from the river had come from victims of the "Horror Hound", as Martha called it (285).

So you consider the list of characters 100% authoritative? So you don't think it possible that there is any duplication or ellisions? If the list says Ambrosius a "murdered sorcerer" and there are no other murdered sorcerers on the list, that's the way it is. And if the list says Ted is "late" there is no valid reading this as ironic? How do you know that Ambrosius was not actually murdered after Ted faked his death?

Teen Emlyn said, "It was before my time, but I've heard that the old sorcerer's name was Ambrosius." (74) Ted died just two years ago (36).

How do you know he was not killed by Lupine? That would still make him Doris's "late husband" right?

I think Doris would have mentioned it if her husband had been killed by a werewolf two years ago. Her co-workers Jake Jacobs and/or Jim Hardaway would probably have mentioned it, too, given all the gossip and newspaper articles about the Horror Hound.

And it's a strange ghost that leaves a tear-stained anything. That is, if it is a gothic ghost. So you've got a mystery there.

It's fine that you don't think Ambrosius was Ted (I mistakenly thought that had become all but accepted fact),

I don't know if they are/were the same person or not, so I haven't said what I believe, one way or the other.

but the text is simply not as flatly plain as you seem to be letting on.

About some things it is.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 23 Apr 2010, 00:07 · in reply to James Wynn

I wrote:
That's why Bax didn't want to take it off to show it to Dorcas.

My mistake. I meant, of course, Doris.

-Roy

Craig Brewer — 23 Apr 2010, 13:36 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I mean, is it really possible that Goldwurm would throw Ambrosius' body in the river with expensive-looking jewelry still on it?

...

Goldwurm apparently didn't know the ring's worth because he couldn't see the worth.

Maybe I'm just remembering incorrectly, but are we ever told specifically that Goldwurm killed Ambrosius and threw his body in the river? I can't seem to find it.

And as long as we're talking about small gold things, what about the coins? The coin collector says they're probably greek with Athena on one side. But he never identifies the other side, although we get a lot of talk about how it is NOT an amazon. Ideas? Significance? I'm a bit at a loss about why the coin stash was specifically Greek rather than generic magic fairy coins or some such.

But the ancient Greek echoes in this have me a bit confused, since that's a different set of myths from faerie that seem to operate in very different ways. Nonetheless, we have Bax's degree in classics, the greek coins, Greek names (and wasn't "Doris" a minor sea god?), didn't they even hit a Mediterranean restaurant once?

Roy C. Lackey — 23 Apr 2010, 19:19 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Craig Brewer wrote:

Maybe I'm just remembering incorrectly, but are we ever told specifically that Goldwurm killed Ambrosius and threw his body in the river? I can't seem to find it.<

Yes. That's the story as given by Emlyn. I cited the page number in the post to which you are responding. Page 74. "I imagine Goldwurm thought he'd find his master's [weapon of sorcery] without much trouble, so he didn't keep him around to question. Just strangled him and threw him in the river. It was before my time, but I've heard that the old sorcerer's name was Ambrosius."

And as long as we're talking about small gold things, what about the coins? The coin collector says they're probably greek with Athena on one side. But he never identifies the other side, although we get a lot of talk about how it is NOT an amazon. Ideas? Significance? I'm a bit at a loss about why the coin stash was specifically Greek rather than generic magic fairy coins or some such.<

I don't know. Being *ancient* Greek would add monetary value to them, but then it soon turned out that Bax didn't need the money for them. It may be that the coins were planted, along with the cash, probably by Zwart. Or they were a side effect of the use by Bax of the unintelligent triannulus to get money.

But the ancient Greek echoes in this have me a bit confused, since that's a different set of myths from faerie that seem to operate in very different ways. Nonetheless, we have Bax's degree in classics, the greek coins, Greek names (and wasn't "Doris" a minor sea god?), didn't they even hit a Mediterranean restaurant once? <

The triannulus obviously responds to what amounts to wish-fulfillment. For Bax, the scholar and lover of things Greek, old Greek coins would represent riches. The other Greek echoes may just reflect Bax's and/or Wolfe's interests.

As for the mixture of mythologies in the book -- all those things that are not a part of traditional Faerie lore -- Wolfe's notion of faerie seems to be a catch-all for many things normally considered to be supernatural, regardless of cultural origin.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 23 Apr 2010, 19:28 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 12:19 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:
Craig Brewer wrote:

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Ummm. This makes it clear that Emlyn does NOT know what happened; for he begins by saying "I imagine..."

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Gwern Branwen — 23 Apr 2010, 20:03 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 3:28 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 12:19 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Craig Brewer wrote:

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Ummm. This makes it clear that Emlyn does NOT know what happened; for he begins by saying "I imagine..."

I read that as the imagine is about Emlyn's speculation about Goldwurm's thoughts and reasons for not keeping Ambrosius around to question. I don't read it as Emlyn imagining the entire scenario, and only actually knowing 'Goldwurm was killed by someone who may've been named Ambrosius.' I suspect I'm not alone in this.

gwern

Eugene Zaretskiy — 23 Apr 2010, 20:29 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 3:19 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

As for the mixture of mythologies in the book -- all those things that are not a part of traditional Faerie lore -- Wolfe's notion of faerie seems to be a catch-all for many things normally considered to be supernatural, regardless of cultural origin.

I think that's true, but I also think this is precisely the sort of thing that lends credence to the idea that Bax made everything up. There are an awful lot references to a variety of sources, ranging from various mythologies to Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop), all things that Bax's PhD's would make him an expert in.

-Roy

brunians at brunians.org — 23 Apr 2010, 20:56 · in reply to Eugene Zaretskiy

Faerie is like that.

.
On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 3:19 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

As for the mixture of mythologies in the book -- all those things that are not a part of traditional Faerie lore -- Wolfe's notion of faerie seems to be a catch-all for many things normally considered to be supernatural, regardless of cultural origin.

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-Roy

brunians at brunians.org — 23 Apr 2010, 20:57 · in reply to Eugene Zaretskiy

I assume that when you visit Faery your body is asleep or in some state or other, but I don't know that.

It seems pretty physical when you are in the middle of it.

.
On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 3:19 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

As for the mixture of mythologies in the book -- all those things that are not a part of traditional Faerie lore -- Wolfe's notion of faerie seems to be a catch-all for many things normally considered to be supernatural, regardless of cultural origin.

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-Roy

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 23 Apr 2010, 20:57 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 1:56 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
Faerie is like that.

...said Tom, gnomically.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

brunians at brunians.org — 23 Apr 2010, 21:00 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Nome?

Alaska.

.

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 1:56 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Faerie is like that.

...said Tom, gnomically.

--

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Craig Brewer — 23 Apr 2010, 21:00 · in reply to Eugene Zaretskiy

If Bax's third, unfinished degree was in East Asian Studies or some such, you'd have even stronger case.

----- Original Message -----

From: Eugene Zaretskiy <eugene.zar at gmail.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Fri, April 23, 2010 3:29:30 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) TSH: Ted's identity

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 3:19 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

As for the mixture of mythologies in the book -- all those things that are not a part of traditional Faerie lore -- Wolfe's notion of faerie seems to be a catch-all for many things normally considered to be supernatural, regardless of cultural origin.

I think that's true, but I also think this is precisely the sort of thing that lends credence to the idea that Bax made everything up. There are an awful lot references to a variety of sources, ranging from various mythologies to Dickens' _The Old Curiosity Shop_, all things that Bax's PhD's would make him an expert in.

-Roy

Urth Mailing List

To post, write urth at urth.net

Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

Eugene Z

<http://blog.eugenez.net>

John Watkins — 23 Apr 2010, 21:17 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Nome?

King.

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 5:00 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Nome?

Alaska.

.

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 1:56 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

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--

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

brunians at brunians.org — 23 Apr 2010, 22:03 · in reply to John Watkins
King?

Salmon!

.

Nome?

King.

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Nome?

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.

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 23 Apr 2010, 22:04 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org
Salmon ought to do something about these silly puns.

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 3:03 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

King?

Salmon!

.

Nome?

King.

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 5:00 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Nome?

Alaska.

.

On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 1:56 PM, ?<brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Faerie is like that.

...said Tom, gnomically.

--

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

brunians at brunians.org — 23 Apr 2010, 22:07 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

It calls for punishment.

.

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On Fri, Apr 23, 2010 at 3:03 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

King?

Salmon!

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Nome?

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Roy C. Lackey — 25 Apr 2010, 19:03 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Gwern Branwen quoted and wrote:

Ummm. This makes it clear that Emlyn does NOT know what happened; for he begins by saying "I imagine..."

I read that as the imagine is about Emlyn's speculation about Goldwurm's thoughts and reasons for not keeping Ambrosius around to question. I don't read it as Emlyn imagining the entire scenario, and only actually knowing 'Goldwurm was killed by someone who may've been named Ambrosius.' I suspect I'm not alone in this.

Quite so. In addition, Emlyn is, in effect, the only source of information we have concerning Ambrosius and Goldwurm, so we are stuck with his testimony.

Let's cut to the chase: Emlyn is supposed to be a boy from Faerie, as are the two sorcerers. If none of the faerie and/or supernatural stuff is real, then nothing about these characters matters. Speculations regarding ghostly Ted's identity and whether or not he was also Ambrosius and what the wet thing he left behind may have been are fools' exercises. There can be no magic rings, werewolves, a talking vixen, a sorcerer's tower in faerie, a house that expands and has windows onto faerie, or eerie forests far larger than any map shows them to be.

-Roy

Jonathan Goodwin — 25 Apr 2010, 19:09 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

As it would reveal things, deliberately or not, about the fabricator's state of mind, the details about those characters would matter. If you were looking for unconscious revelation, then the most apparently insignificant details might be particularly important.

I myself don't quite think this is the best approach, but the fact that it has occurred to several of the book's early readers shouldn't be ignored.

On Sun, Apr 25, 2010 at 2:03 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:
Gwern Branwen quoted and wrote:

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-Roy

O'Donnell, Tim BOSI — 26 Apr 2010, 09:12 · follows Jonathan Goodwin

It's treatable with punicillin, but should the patient fail to respond all the doctors can do is make them as punless as possible.

From: brunians at brunians.org

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Subject: Re: (urth) TSH: Ted's identity

Message-ID: <13223.72.171.0.145.1272060441.squirrel at brunians.org> Content-Type:

text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

It calls for punishment.

.

brunians at brunians.org — 26 Apr 2010, 09:37 · in reply to O'Donnell, Tim BOSI

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<<http://www.bankofscotland.ie>>

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Craig Brewer — 26 Apr 2010, 14:27 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

I agree that, in the end, it just doesn't make much sense if the whole thing was a ruse. Or rather, the first half of the book would make sense. But after George gets arrested, or at least after he gets released and isn't likely to be receiving letters any more, it just gets too weird and difficult to figure out how and why Bax would keep up with the fiction.

But speaking of "halves," I've been wondering about that. The book is 44 chapters long. The middle chapters 22 and 23 have the same name ("Silver Bullets"). Somewhere in a review, Neil Gaiman mentioned that he thought the Tarot was significant and the 22 major arcana cards might have something to do with that. I'm not quite sure where he would go with that, though.

I do wonder if the two halves of the book are at all connected to the ideas of twins. I wouldn't go so far as to say that one half was written by one twin and the second half secretly written by another, but, nonetheless, something is going on there.

----- Original Message -----

From: Jonathan Goodwin <joncgoodwin at gmail.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Sun, April 25, 2010 2:09:47 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) TSH: Ted's identity

As it would reveal things, deliberately or not, about the fabricator's state of mind, the details about those characters would matter. If you were looking for unconscious revelation, then the most apparently insignificant details might be particularly important.

I myself don't quite think this is the best approach, but the fact that it has occurred to several of the book's early readers shouldn't be ignored.

On Sun, Apr 25, 2010 at 2:03 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Gwern Branwen quoted and wrote:

Ummm. This makes it clear that Emlyn does NOT know what happened; for he begins by saying "I imagine..."

I read that as the imagine is about Emlyn's speculation about Goldwurm's thoughts and reasons for not keeping Ambrosius around to question. I don't read it as Emlyn imagining the entire scenario, and only actually knowing 'Goldwurm was killed by someone who may've been named Ambrosius.' I suspect I'm not alone in this.

Quite so. In addition, Emlyn is, in effect, the only source of information we have concerning Ambrosius and Goldwurm, so we are stuck with his testimony.

Let's cut to the chase: Emlyn is supposed to be a boy from Faerie, as are the two sorcerers. If none of the faerie and/or supernatural stuff is real, then nothing about these characters matters. Speculations regarding ghostly Ted's identity and whether or not he was also Ambrosius and what the wet thing he left behind may have been are fools' exercises. There can be no magic rings, werewolves, a talking vixen, a sorcerer's tower in faerie, a house that expands and has windows onto faerie, or eerie forests far larger than any map shows them to be.

-Roy

Urth Mailing List

To post, write urth at urth.net

Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

Gene's started playing with the tarot?

That should be interesting.

I see I do need to reread this soonly.

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than any map shows them to be.

-Roy

David Stockhoff — 26 Apr 2010, 23:55 · follows brunians at brunians.org

I haven't read the book yet myself, but here are the Arcana minus their various interpretations.
Anyone want to take a shot? (no "silver bullet" pun intended, I swear.)

Number Name

None (0 or 22) The Fool <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fool_%28Tarot_card%29> 1 The
Magician / The Juggler <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Magician_%28Tarot_card%29> 2 The
High Priestess / The Popess
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_High_Priestess_%28Tarot_card%29> 3 The Empress
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Empress_%28Tarot_card%29> 4 The Emperor
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emperor_%28Tarot_card%29> 5 The Hierophant / The Pope
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hierophant_%28Tarot_card%29> 6 The Lovers
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lovers_%28Tarot_card%29> 7 The Chariot
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chariot_%28Tarot_card%29> 8 or 11 Justice
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice_%28Tarot_card%29> 9 The Hermit
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hermit_%28Tarot_card%29> 10 Wheel of Fortune
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wheel_of_Fortune_%28Tarot_card%29> 11 or 8 Strength /
Fortitude <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strength_%28Tarot_card%29> 12 The Hanged Man / The
Traitor <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hanged_Man_%28Tarot_card%29> 13 Death
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_%28Tarot_card%29> 14 Temperance
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temperance_%28Tarot_card%29> 15 The Devil
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Devil_%28Tarot_card%29> 16 The Tower / Fire
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tower_%28Tarot_card%29> 17 The Star
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Star_%28Tarot_card%29> 18 The Moon
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Moon_%28Tarot_card%29> 19 The Sun
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sun_%28Tarot_card%29> 20 Judgment / The Angel
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgment_%28Tarot_card%29> 21 The World
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_World_%28Tarot_card%29>

Message: 3

Date: Mon, 26 Apr 2010 07:27:06 -0700 (PDT)

From: Craig Brewer <cnbrewer@yahoo.com>

Dave Tallman — 27 Apr 2010, 14:01 · in reply to Craig Brewer

The middle symmetry suggests arranging the chapters in pairs and looking for common features. There are books where this works, for example "The Scarlet Letter" and "Fearful Symmetry" (one of the comics in the "Watchmen" series).

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Common feature: title, pistols with silver bullets.

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21 to Shell. 24 from Shell.

Common feature: 24 answers the questions in 21 about girls and Skotos.

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Common feature: both are from Shell, offering advice.

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12 is to George. 33 is from Millie.

Common feature: 12 has a date with Doris and an invitation to her home. 33 shows Millie is jealous of Doris and the other women.

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If the arcana theory is right, these chapter pairs may also be associated with the tarot deck. I don't have time to look at that now, but someone else may give it a try.

David Stockhoff — 28 Apr 2010, 02:00 · follows Dave Tallman

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Message: 2

Date: Tue, 27 Apr 2010 08:01:58 -0600

From: Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com>

To: urth at lists.urth.net

Subject: Re: (urth) Fiction, halves, twins

Message-ID: <4BD6EE56.40402 at gmail.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1; format=flowed

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Gwern Branwen — 28 Apr 2010, 02:20 · in reply to David Stockhoff

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Then I remembered Wolfe's poem, 'The Computer Iterates The Greater Trumps'. It's become surprisingly difficult to find, but is in Google

Books:

http://books.google.com/books?id=vy9L08MQKkIC&pg=PA24&lpg=PA24&dq=computer+iterates+the+greater+trumps&source=bl&ots=gicT5e7-jF&sigRkOAz3qvf29tUPMhZaKJvjKQOg&hl=en&ei=cZrXS-PEI4P88AbhZsTmBQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&vedDAQ6AEwCw#v=onepage&q&fúlse

Anyhoo, in that poem, Wolfe enumerates the Trumps backwards from 21 (Universe) to 0 (Fool).

Mo Holkar / UKG — 28 Apr 2010, 07:47 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

At 03:20 28/04/2010, Gwern wrote:

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Another pointer that Wolfe may have had the Tarot in mind when writing this particular book is found on p74 where Emlyn talks about weapons of sorcery:

"Swords, mostly.... A lot are staffs and wands these days. I've heard of cups, too." (And coins feature in that chapter in their own right.)

Mo

~ # ~

WolfeWiki -- a wiki about Gene Wolfe
<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/>

David Stockhoff — 28 Apr 2010, 21:44 · follows Mo Holkar / UKG

Great!

One thing that a correspondence scheme can do here is confirm the primary "meaning" or point of each chapter---to tell us what to look out for, what is important. Since the Tarot is a system for organizing and transmitting esoteric knowledge, I never doubted that Wolfe was very familiar with it indeed. And the version he presents in TCITGT is helpful.

For example: I wondered about how to connect the Star and werewolves.

But Wolfe says Star = "Magna Mater of the Old Cult." As readers of the Soldier novels know, this means lycanthropy. So Dave's elucidation of lycanthropy as the major plot point or introduction of that chapter pair is confirmed.

I didn't know Temperance could be Time. Watch out for that ...

Message: 2

Date: Tue, 27 Apr 2010 22:20:31 -0400

From: Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Subject: Re: (urth) Fiction, halves, twins

Message-ID:

<t2lcbf55b101004271920x351ad5f1ia589d1f149048f02 at mail.gmail.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=UTF-8

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Then I remembered Wolfe's poem, 'The Computer Iterates The Greater Trumps'. It's become surprisingly difficult to find, but is in Google Books:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=vy9L08MQKkIC&pg=PA24&lpg=PA24&dq=computer+iterates+the+greater+trumps&source=bl&ots=gicT5e7-jf&sigRkOAz3qvf29tUPMhZaKJvjkQOg&hl=en&ei=cZrX>

S-PEI4P88AbhzsTmBQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved
DAQ6AEwCw#v=onepage&q&fúlse

Anyhoo, in that poem, Wolf enumerates the Trumps backwards from 21
(Universe) to 0 (Fool).

-- gwern -----

Dave Tallman — 29 Apr 2010, 18:55 · follows David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote:

One thing that a correspondence scheme can do here is confirm the primary
"meaning" or point of each chapter---to tell us what to look out for, what
is important. Since the Tarot is a system for organizing and transmitting
esoteric knowledge, I never doubted that Wolfe was very familiar with it
indeed. And the version he presents in TCITGT is helpful.

For example: I wondered about how to connect the Star and werewolves.

But Wolfe says Star = "Magna Mater of the Old Cult." As readers of the
Soldier novels know, this means lycanthropy. So Dave's elucidation of
lycanthropy as the major plot point or introduction of that chapter pair is
confirmed.

I didn't know Temperance could be Time. Watch out for that ...

Another approach is to associate Tarot symbols with prominent characters and objects and see
how far we can go, and how well the matches align with chapters containing them.

- 0 Fool -- Bax in the beginning
- 1 Magician -- Madame Orizia
- 2 High Priestess -- Doris
- 3 Empress -- Martha Murrey
- 4 Emperor -- Mr. Black
- 5 Hierophant -- the man who gave Bax fish?
- 6 Lovers -- Bax with Doris and Winkle
- 7 Chariot -- the car
- 8 Justice -- the justice system, Finn
- 9 Hermit -- Kiki
- 10 Wheel of Fortune -- the triannulus
- 11 Strength -- George
- 12 Hanged Man -- Bax waiting, hung up at first
- 13 Death -- Nicholas
- 14 Temperance/Time -- chapters with time warping
- 15 Devil -- the dwarf, also "Old Nick"
- 16 Tower -- Goldwurm's tower
- 17 Star -- Lupine
- 18 Moon -- Winkle
- 19 Sun - Bax as detective, getting clarity
- 20 Judgment -- the battle royale
- 21 World -- final chapter with success and a world tour

Mo Holkar / UKG — 03 May 2010, 15:57 · in reply to Dave Tallman

At 19:55 29/04/2010, Dave wrote:

5 Hierophant -- the man who gave Bax fish?

The Hierophant, also known as the Pope, might be Urban Trelawny. The themes usually associated with this trump -- experience, social conservatism, authority structure, etc -- seem to fit him; as well as his forename.

Mo

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WolfeWiki -- a wiki about Gene Wolfe
<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/>