

Sorcerer's House--First Read--Some Thoughts/Questions

The Urth list — 22 messages, 7 voices, 09 Apr 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5579>

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James Wynn — 09 Apr 2010, 18:35

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2) The middle-aged man who brings the fish is merely called a "neighbor". Bax does not record the name he was given. It is reasonable that both he and Mrs. Nabor are citizens of Faeri. "Neighbor" is a word for faeries which Wolfe has employed in both An Evil Guest and The Book of the Short Sun.

3) Question: Bax finds the ring in a catfish. On his finger, Doris sees it as a cats-eye opal. What's the connection to cats? Later, the pawn dealer sees it and identifies it as a fire opal which looks much different. I don't understand the logic of that either.

4) Question: Doris doesn't say what Ted was crying into when she sees him at the end of the novel. I presume it is a handkerchief because it has his initials on it. Why not say so?

5) But Wolfe has Doris spell out those initials, which strikes me as a clue: "T.A.G." Ted is Ambrosius, as others have said. Theodore Ambrosius Griffin--unless the G stands for Goldwurm which complicates the story terribly. The ring that Doris gave Bax is his numen storage that Goldwurm could never find. The reason Doris finds him crying at the end is because he discovers that Doris has given away his ring. For a sorcerer, he has lost his entire fortune.

6) I agree that "Finn" and Griffin are pseudonyms for the same person.

7) At one point, Bax implies that Zwart was the werewolf he killed as he and Doris were fleeing the restaurant. This makes all kinds of sense to me. But then Zwart makes an appearance at the end of the novel. So...hmm.

8) Hypothesis: There's another possiblity as to the identity of the werewolf, but I haven't done anything to investigate it. It could have been George. Martha Murray said she believed that Zwart wanted Bax or George to kill the other. But Bax dismisses this theory because the bullets were clearly intended to kill a werewolf. Sooo...George was the werewolf. The note with the pistols was not meant for Bax but for Trelawney.Trelawney's questions were _not_ intended to prove that Bax was not some other Baxter Dunn but to verify that he was not George (impersonating Bax) who would become the werewolf (or was already). Subsequent letters to Bax from George were invented. It was Bax who, in the company of Doris and the psychic,

forced Nicholas/Nosferatu back into the trunk. While impersonating his dead brother. It was clear from Nicholaus's conversation with Bax that he had already been in the trunk a while; so this is possible. Doris felt confused about her feelings for Bax when she thought she was running around with his brother. This will need a re-read.

J.

James Wynn — 09 Apr 2010, 19:43 · in reply to James Wynn

The note with the pistols was not meant for Bax but for Trelawney. Trelawney's questions were not intended to prove that Bax was not some other Baxter Dunn but to verify that he was not George (impersonating Bax) who would become the werewolf (or was already).

After considering this a bit, I think George must have known about their father before he left for Medicine Man. He comes into the reading of the will accusing Bax of attempting to cheat him. He thinks the House is to be left to **him**. (Why?) If George is already a werewolf, then he is probably well aware of Faeri. Since he already knows about their father, naturally he assumes that the House is to be left to him as well. And because Trelawney knew George was a werewolf, he held him off with the dueling pistol. George might well have known that that type of gun was the type most credible to have silver bullets.

Is there reason to believe that Bax was the **younger** twin? If George is a werewolf, there is certainly a Jacob/(hairy) Esau thing going on here. As you know, Jacob not only cheated Esau out of his elder-son blessing, but he earlier sold Esau a pot of beans for his birthright -- an act in which Esau was hardly innocent, just as Bax implies was the case with George. Yet, I can't think of a scenario in which Bax changed the will and the instructions, or impersonates George.

Side note: Trelawney was the Romantic poet/adventurer who arranged for burials of Shelley and Williams when they drowned (and was present when they died). He wrote a novel entitled "Adventures of a Younger Son", which was seen by the public as somewhat autobiographical.

John Watkins — 09 Apr 2010, 21:20 · in reply to James Wynn

On "Finn," it has also occurred to me that it might be a bit of a joke on "elfin."

On Fri, Apr 9, 2010 at 2:35 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

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Gwern Branwen — 09 Apr 2010, 21:37 · in reply to James Wynn

On Fri, Apr 9, 2010 at 3:43 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
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Debts. Either because Bax stole the legacy from George by the trick (and if we're going to make Jacob & Esau comparisons, though they weren't twins, Bax would be the scheming Jacob), or for

the frauds perpetuated on him and his friends. Bax says that as far as he is concerned, George chose to be repaid by prison time. This strongly implies to me that there is still a debt outstanding. ('He says I still owe him X millions, but as far as *I'm* concerned, it's been paid in full.')

A large mansion with high property taxes (implying high assessment & value) would serve nicely as a down payment.

(Remember also how Bax couches the first requests for money.)

If George is already a werewolf, then he's probably well aware of Faeri. Since he already knows about their father, naturally he assumes that the House is to be left to him as well. And because Trelawney knew George was a werewolf, he held him off with the dueling pistol. George might well have known that that type of gun was the type most credible to have silver bullets.

Eh? So antique gun = silver bullets? If anything, I'd think it'd be easier to use silver bullets with modern guns - one hears about poisoned bullets where the tip is drilled into, or coated. One doesn't hear so much about silver shot which has to be turned on a jeweler's lathe at great cost, I think Doris describes it as.

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We could look at the legacy; which one got their undergraduate first? I don't have my copy here, but I *think* Bax graduated first.

gwern

Lane Haygood — 09 Apr 2010, 21:38 · in reply to John Watkins

It could also be an allusion to Finn MacCool, Irish mythological hero and lover of a woman from Faerie.

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 9, 2010, at 4:20 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 09 Apr 2010, 21:46 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On Fri, Apr 9, 2010 at 2:37 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:
(and if we're going to make Jacob & Esau comparisons, though they weren't twins,

Um. Yes, they were. Check Genesis 25.

James Wynn — 09 Apr 2010, 21:50 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

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They were twins. Fraternal. And when Esau came out first, Jacob was clutching his heel. But Jacob does imposture Esau to steal his blessing. (Oops I see Dan'I already noted this)

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Eh? So antique gun = silver bullets? If anything, I'd think it'd be
easier to use silver bullets with modern guns -

Modern guns require complicated manufactured bullets. You'd have to make a silver shell casing. There are probably people who can do that, but it requires less expertise (I imagine) to make a silver musket ball.

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brunians at brunians.org — 09 Apr 2010, 22:00 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Jacob and Esau weren't twins?

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On Fri, Apr 9, 2010 at 3:43 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

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gwern

brunians at brunians.org — 09 Apr 2010, 22:01 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Pure silver can be melted and cast or even thrown from a shot tower, if you have enough of it.

On Fri, Apr 9, 2010 at 3:43 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

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gwern

brunians at brunians.org — 09 Apr 2010, 22:07 · in reply to James Wynn

Melt silver.

Pour into bullet mold.

Allow to cool and harden.

However, you certainly don't need a dueling pistol, and you certainly don't need a flintlock. Any cap and ball weapon would work, like my 1858 Remington (a six shot revolver).

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J.

brunians at brunians.org — 09 Apr 2010, 22:08 · in reply to James Wynn

Bax says George left school and got a job, he kept going to graduate school until the legacy was gone.

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James Wynn — 09 Apr 2010, 22:09 · in reply to James Wynn

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Still, thinking about this. The house and property are not George's "blessing". Millie is, which George is unable to appreciate. And Bax impersonates George to get it.

As for their father wanting Bax to kill George:

Malachi 1:2-3

"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the LORD says. "Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."

Gwern Branwen — 09 Apr 2010, 22:54 · in reply to James Wynn

On Fri, Apr 9, 2010 at 5:46 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <dando at gmail.com> wrote:

On Fri, Apr 9, 2010 at 2:37 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

(and if we're going to make Jacob & Esau comparisons, though they weren't twins,

Um. Yes, they were. Check Genesis 25.

Mea culpa. I thought for some reason that they were by different mothers, since that makes the story a little less bizarre. (If Rachel is the mother of both, then the story makes even less sense, and I like even more the higher criticism explanation of it as political myth-making from centuries later.)

On Fri, Apr 9, 2010 at 5:53 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

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It's a stretch, but it may be the case that the 'older' twin goes into things first. We're going to have a hard time deciding precedence between George and Bax in the absence of any positive statements unless we make some sort of assumption.

Modern guns require complicated manufactured bullets. You'd have to make a silver shell casing. There are probably people who can do that, but it requires less expertise (I imagine) to make a silver musket ball.

I've never heard that the entire bullet has to be silver. If silver is poisonous to werewolves, and real people all the time add poison or explosive tips to modern bullets...

gwern

Dave Tallman — 10 Apr 2010, 02:01 · follows Gwern Branwen

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Jacob cheated Esau out of both an inheritance (birthright) and a blessing. The house ends up belonging to Bax too, and it's interesting that it was held by A&I Properties, with a Mr. Issacs for the "I", so it could well be "Abraham and Issac's Properties." George as werewolf = hairy Esau is a clever idea.

To get killing that first werewolf to equal killing George we need to transpose some letters (or say that later George letters were fake). It's a reasonable idea, and it maybe goes along with the woman George found who was his guide to the things of Faerie (in this case being Lupine, who possibly made George into a werewolf). Maybe the battle with the werewolves and the River Man toward the end is where George died.

Gwern Branwen — 10 Apr 2010, 02:44 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Fri, Apr 9, 2010 at 10:01 PM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

James Wynn wrote:

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I like that transposition idea. We've been looking for a place where there's some transposition since Wolfe clearly tells us to look for one, and such a transposition wouldn't be a trivial boring one, but quite meaningful.

It troubles me a little because of George's duel note. If the drive to dinner and killing the werewolf in self-defense happen before the duel note, then that raises the question: why would Bax forge such a dangerous and suspicious note, only to lamely dismiss it in the final letter?

Also, I'm not sure that the description of the body works for George/Bax.

Killing George at the final battle makes more sense - then the note is genuine and Bax's lame waving-away more understandable. But one would expect the killing of George to be significant: the left behind body would be striking ('oh no, Bax is dead!' 'wait, but Bax is over there with the fox sword!' 'eh?'), and the killing ought to be major and marked out some way. I don't have the text handy, but I don't remember any werewolf (except Lupin) standing out.

gwern

Dave Tallman — 10 Apr 2010, 17:13 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Gwern Branwen wrote:

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If this really is Jacob and Esau, it's possible there was no killing of George at all, just a reconciliation as in the Bible story. George (aka Emlyn) goes off to Faerie to learn how to save his lover Lupine, leaving Bax (aka Ieuan) in control. In this case, there is only one real set of twins and the timeless nature of Faerie allows us to see them in two different states.

There's a hint of this sort of timelessness when Bax sees himself and the car at a later time.

James Wynn — 11 Apr 2010, 00:42 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Gwern said

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My working hypothesis is that the body Lupine was putting back together during the final battle was George's.

Dave said:

It's a reasonable idea, and it maybe goes along with the woman

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(in this case being Lupine, who possibly made George into a werewolf).

He might have already been a werewolf when he arrived and the note was a fake made by Bax OR the letter note from George might have been out of place.

One thing though, I don't recall right now any indication that you can become a werewolf by being bitten. Lupine traded ("sold") her soul for her wolfskin. It's not an easy, quick process, I presume. But she might have taught George how to do that. It is striking that there is soul-selling in a novel with an Old Nick. I'm not sure I get the connection if there is one. Did she sell her soul to Zwart?

it's interesting that it was held by A&I Properties,
with a Mr. Issacs for the "I", so it could well be
"Abraham and Issac's Properties."

That's a very good catch.

J.

Gwern Branwen — 11 Apr 2010, 03:30 · in reply to James Wynn

On Sat, Apr 10, 2010 at 8:42 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
Gwern said

Killing George at the final battle makes more sense[snip]
But one would expect the killing of George to be significant: the left
behind body would be striking ('oh no, Bax is dead!' 'wait, but Bax is
over there with the fox sword!' 'eh?'), and the killing ought to be
major and marked out some way. [snip]
I don't have the text handy, but I
don't remember any werewolf (except Lupine) standing out.

My working hypothesis is that the body Lupine was putting back together
during the final battle was George's.

Dave said:

It's a reasonable idea, and it maybe goes along with the woman
George found who was his guide to the things of Faerie
(in this case being Lupine, who possibly made George into a werewolf).

He might have already been a werewolf when he arrived and the note was a
fake made by Bax

OR

the letter note from George might have been out of place.

One thing though, I don't recall right now any indication that you can
become a werewolf by being bitten. Lupine traded ("sold") her soul for her
wolfskin. It's not an easy, quick process, I presume. But she might have
taught George how to do that. It is striking that the is soul-selling in a
novel with an Old Nick. I'm not sure I get the connection if there is one.
Did she sell her soul to Zwart?

I think it's implied pretty strongly that whomever Lupin sold her soul to, it wasn't Zwart. Zwart
would hardly be telling his son to learn, team up with his twin, become a great cunning wizard,
travel far away, etc. if the soul-holder were him. Unless of course Zwart isn't Zwart but a distant
wizard of the same name...

gwern

Dave Tallman — 13 Apr 2010, 04:49 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:
/it's interesting that it was held by A&I Properties,
/>/with a Mr. Issacs for the "I", so it could well be
/>/"Abraham and Issac's Properties."

/

That's a very good catch.

Another possible take on A&I Properties is that the 'A' is for Ambrosius. That would make Mr.
Isaacs, the surviving partner, be Goldwurm. Goldwurm is a well-known Jewish surname.

That doesn't exclude Ted being Ambrosius and Hardaway being Goldwurm. Doris has 'been around' and may have been sleeping with her boss (p. 156). Doris may have betrayed her husband to Goldwurm. I don't believe she is ignorant about the ring or she wouldn't have asked for it back when she turned against Bax (p. 274).

The Dennis Quilp/Dick Quist/Quorn connection looks good. Common initials were key in "An Evil Guest," so why not here? Cathy is raped by Quorn, possibly a different form of Quist, her future father-in-law (p. 190). On that same page the gem in the ring has upgraded to a star sapphire. I like the idea that it becomes more valuable as it stores numen.

James Wynn — 13 Apr 2010, 15:30 · in reply to Dave Tallman

That doesn't exclude Ted being Ambrosius and Hardaway being Goldwurm. Doris has 'been around' and may have been sleeping with her boss (p. 156). Doris may have betrayed her husband to Goldwurm. I don't believe she is ignorant about the ring or she wouldn't have asked for it back when she turned against Bax (p. 274).

Well, from the start I expected Doris to be more knowledgeable than she was letting on, but at every turn she seemed genuinely clueless about all things Faeri. I admit I'm troubled that she asked for the ring back at all,. but if she knew it was so valuable, why would she ever leave without it? However, she later declares that she "made a mistake" and wants to come back. So it is possible that at that time she has learned her error.

J.

PS Could Mary King be Lupine's soul? Sure Lupine (pronounced "lupeena" I think), meaning she-wolf, was not her original name.

Dave Tallman — 14 Apr 2010, 00:11 · follows James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:

PS Could Mary King be Lupine's soul? Sure Lupine (pronounced "lupeena" I think), meaning she-wolf, was not her original name.

I keep thinking there has to be a connection between Mary King and the circle-dance, in which we see:

- 1) A king,
- 2) A queen (Mary?),
- 3) A long-legged man (the vampire Nicholas),
- 4) A woman wearing a fur (Lupine),
- 5) A dwarf

Another interesting thing about the ring-gem becoming a star sapphire. Most asterisms are six-pointed stars. The Ring of Solomon was inscribed with a Star of David, a six-pointed star, and supposedly used to control spirits. One legend about the ring is that a demon stole it, taking Solomon's place for a time and making him a pauper. Then the demon discarded the ring in the sea, where it was swallowed by a fish. The fish was caught and given to Solomon. Once he had the ring back he regained his former status and kingdom.