

more questions on Sorcerer's House (spoilers)

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 11 Apr 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5580>

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Stephen Case — 11 Apr 2010, 17:24

I've been following the discussion on The Sorcerer's House here with interest. This is the first Wolfe book I've read through and then immediately re-read. A few things I'm still wondering about after the second time through:

-I think it's pretty clear that Ted is Ambrosius and that the ring Doris gives Bax is Ambrosius' item of sorcery. What's not clear though is Doris's intentions in giving Bax the ring. I don't buy the reasons she gives. Plus, in the conversation in letter 5 in which she gives him the ring and explains why she wants him to wear it, she knows his first name. Then almost immediately she acts like she doesn't yet know it and refers to him again as Mr. Dunn.

-If Ted is Ambrosius, can we figure out from the text who Goldwurm is? For some reason I found myself suspecting Jim Hardaway. There's a lot that doesn't make sense if that's the case (for example, Emlyn says that their father doesn't want Goldwurm to know he's not around, but Hardaway knew the Black House was unoccupied). A couple things that make me suspicious of him though: in letter 41 Martha tells Bax to watch out for Hardaway. Why? Also, the first time Bax wanders out of his house into Faerie (letter 20), he gets a call from Hardaway, who says he must be far from the tower. We can assume he meant cell phone tower, but for some reason this made me think of Goldwurm's tower.

-Who is Mary King? She's mentioned twice (letters 21 and 25).

-In letter 26, when Bax meets Kate Finn's mom, they make a big deal about calling each other Bax and Biddy instead of Mr. Dunn and Mrs. Finn. So much so that it seems to be hinting at something, though I don't know what.

-What's the deal with the dwarf's name in letter 31? He calls himself Quorn but Baxter says he knew him as Quilp. A quick search on Wikipedia reveals that Daniel Quilp was a dwarf in Dickin's The Old Curiosity Shop. I skimmed the plot synopsis, but no immediate parallels jumped out. I'm also curious at the name's similarity to Dick Quist, the jeweler who's so interested in Bax's ring.

-Finally, something still bothers me about the chronology regarding George's activities once he's in Medicine Man. According to Baxter, he arrives, ends up in prison, makes bail, comes to Bax's house and releases Nicholas, and then gets lost in the house. Then he's suddenly "picked up" on the street. Then he's back in the house again and along with his father, Doris, and Madame Orizia gets Nicholas back in the trunk. This just seems weird. What would make George come back to the house and solve the problem of Nicholas being loose?

-Maybe we shouldn't make too much out of this, but are we sure that Bax replacing George means that George is definitely dead? We had Mrs. Naber saying that if one twin died, the other usually died soon after. Sure this isn't necessarily always the case, but it seems like it would be more likely for "magic" twins. Maybe Bax duped me as well, but I figured George had been

taken into Faerie at the end of the book to spend some time with his parents and maybe get straightened out. Something like this is hinted with the partial reconciliation between Emlyn and Ieuan at the end of the battle by the river, maybe.

I'm sure there's much I've missed, but that's what sticks out to me now.

Any thoughts?

-Steve

James Wynn — 12 Apr 2010, 04:03 · in reply to Stephen Case

-I think it's pretty clear that Ted is Ambrosius and that the ring Doris gives Bax is Ambrosius' item of sorcery. What's not clear though is Doris's intentions in giving Bax the ring. I don't buy the reasons she gives.

I think I did. She didn't know that Ted was a sorcerer. She didn't realize the significance of the ring or that Ted would return to claim it. She was under the influence of Bax's numen heightened by Bax wearing an item of sorcery already.

Plus, in the conversation in letter 5 in which she gives him the ring and explains why she wants him to wear it, she knows his first name. Then almost immediately she acts like she doesn't yet know it and refers to him again as Mr. Dunn.

Same thing. Under the influence of numen. She's holding his hand when she momentarily forgets his first name. I can't think of of reason otherwise for her admitting she forgot his first name.

-Who is Mary King? She's mentioned twice (letters 21 and 25).

Good question. During my read I just pegged her as one of the women killed by the werewolf but now I see that's not so. Bax brings up her name out of nowhere to Shell in connection with Skotos/Zwart. Then later she is a phantom hitch-hiker.

-What's the deal with the dwarf's name in letter 31? He calls himself Quorn but Baxter says he knew him as Quilp. A quick search on Wikipedia reveals that Daniel Quilp was a dwarf in Dickin's The Old Curiosity Shop.

You know. One could get hopelessly lost taking this too far, but a name like Quilp for a Literature PhD with an announced fondness for Dickens certainly smells as though the character were fabricated or embellished. Of course The Quorn is a famous club for sponsoring fox hunts FWIW.

-Finally, something still bothers me about the chronology regarding George's activities once he's in Medicine Man. According to Baxter, he arrives, ends up in prison, makes bail, comes to Bax's house and releases Nicholas, and then gets lost in the house. Then he's suddenly "picked up" on the street. Then he's back in the house again and along with his father, Doris, and Madame Orizia gets Nicholas back in the trunk. This just seems weird. What would make George come back to the house and solve the problem of Nicholas being loose?

I found the news that he was searching the house with Doris and Orizia peculiar on it's face. And George just didn't seem to be the kind of person would worry about a Nosferatu on the loose. That's among the reason I like Bax for impersonating George at the time. And why would he do that unless he were hiding that George was dead?

-Maybe we shouldn't make too much out of this, but are we sure that Bax replacing George means that George is definitely dead?

No.

We had Mrs.

Naber saying that if one twin died, the other usually died soon after. Sure this isn't necessarily always the case, but it seems like it would be more likely for "magic" twins. Maybe Bax duped me as well, but I figured George had been taken into Faerie at the end of the book to spend some time with his parents and maybe get straightened out. Something like this is hinted with the partial reconciliation between Emlyn and Ieuan at the end of the battle by the river, maybe.

I agree with Tallman that a reconciliation fits better with the theme of Jacob & Esau, but find it hard to believe that Bax would do it. He HATES George. Nothing in the story seems likely to change those feelings. We don't know that George is definitely dead, but I'm increasingly inclined that he probably has died (which in a Wolfe novel is not the same thing as "is dead"). It certainly makes a better story than the reconciliation ending.

J.

James Wynn — 12 Apr 2010, 04:16 · follows James Wynn

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Good question. During my read I just pegged her as one of the women killed by the werewolf but now I see that's not so. Bax brings up her name out of nowhere to Shell in connection with Skotos/Zwart. Then later she is a phantom hitch-hiker.

I'm going to try reading letter 21 as if it actually belongs after 25.

There is a Mary King's Ghost Fest held in Edinburgh every year (it was last month). I can't determine what is the story behind it. Apparently she something a of a tourist draw in Edinburgh.

J.

Eugene Zaretskiy — 12 Apr 2010, 05:40 · in reply to Stephen Case

On Sun, Apr 11, 2010 at 1:24 PM, Stephen Case <scase at olivet.edu> wrote:
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-If Ted is Ambrosius, can we figure out from the text who Goldwurm is" For some reason I found myself suspecting Jim Hardaway. "There's a lot that doesn't make sense if that's the case (for example, Emlyn says that their father doesn't want Goldwurm to know he's not around, but Hardaway knew the Black House was unoccupied). ?A couple things that make me suspicious of him though: in letter 41 Martha tells Bax to watch out for Hardaway. ?Why" ?Also, the first time Bax wanders out of his house into Faerie (letter 20), he gets a call from Hardaway, who says he must be

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Bax being well-read, I took it as Bax wanting to point out how horrible the dwarf was by comparing him to Quilp the horrible dwarf from _The Old Curiosity Shop_ via metaphor. To back up the theory of Quilp-as-metaphor, if we assume the final letter is really forged by Bax, he mentions _The Old Curiosity Shop_ with familiarity there. In fact, it almost makes me want to re-read it to see if there's anything else of substance to that connection...

As for the connection to Quist, Quilp was a moneylender in Dickens' story. A jeweler is pretty close to that, in my mind -- especially one who buys jewelery (as, typically, this service is used as an alternative to borrowing money). In fact, with so many twins in this book, why not Faerie and Medicine Man? I'm sure it's been mentioned. So, who is Doris' twin? I nominate Lupine. Was the ring a gift, like a limb?

-Finally, something still bothers me about the chronology regarding George's activities once he's in Medicine Man. "According to Baxter, he arrives, ends up in prison, makes bail, comes to Bax's house and releases Nicholas, and then gets lost in the house. ?Then he's suddenly ?picked up" on the street. "Then he's back in the house again and along with his father, Doris, and Madame Orizia gets Nicholas back in the trunk. ?This just seems weird. ?What would make George come back to the house and solve the problem of Nicholas being loose"

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At 05:16 12/04/2010, James Wynn wrote:

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Mary King's Close is an underground street in Edinburgh that's organized as a historical 'experience' museum. Mary King's Ghost Fest is run by the company that operate the Close.

The historical Mary King after whom the street was named is thought to have been the daughter of Alexander King, who owned the land in the 16th century. She is not thought to be a ghost herself (or at least is not marketed as such), although there are several ghosts allegedly associated with the site.

It is possible I suppose that Wolfe might have pulled up the name

Mary King as associated with ghosts in Edinburgh and assumed that she was one, but I would expect him to be more thorough than that. It seems more likely to me that a different, more obscure Mary King is his source; or that the name is constructed for some onomastic purpose.

best wishes,

Mo

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WolfeWiki -- a wiki about Gene Wolfe

<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/>