

The Book of the Long Sun Question

The Urth list — 17 messages, 10 voices, 19 Sep 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6055>

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Antonin Scriabin — 19 Sep 2011, 14:52

Well, I finally finished *The Book of the Long Sun*. I thought it was wonderful, but I do (of course!) have a few questions. The first is, how did Quetzal get on the *Whorl*? The inhumi are natives of Green, so maybe he found some way aboard the *Whorl* while it was in orbit? If so, it would seem that they were in orbit for some time, since Quetzal obviously spent several years on board. Also, why would he try, in his last moments, to get the settlers to go to Green? As food for other inhumi? I haven't read *The Book of the Short Sun* yet, so if these inhumi-related questions are answered there, just tell me to read and find out :-)

Stuart Hamm — 19 Sep 2011, 15:27 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

oh boy! the Eternal Question rears it's head!

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--- On Mon, 9/19/11, Antonin Scriabin <kierkegaurdian at gmail.com> wrote:

From: Antonin Scriabin <kierkegaurdian at gmail.com>

Subject: (urth) The Book of the Long Sun Question

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

Date: Monday, September 19, 2011, 7:52 AM

Well, I finally finished The Book of the Long Sun. I thought it was wonderful, but I do (of course!) have a few questions. The first is, how did Quetzal get on the Whorl? The inhumi are natives of Green, so maybe he found some way aboard the Whorl while it was in orbit? If so, it would seem that they were in orbit for some time, since Quetzal obviously spent several years on board. Also, why would he try, in his last moments, to get the settlers to go to Green? As food for other inhumi? I haven't read The Book of the Short Sun yet, so if these inhumi-related questions are answered there, just tell me to read and find out :-)

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

Antonin Scriabin — 19 Sep 2011, 15:30 · in reply to Stuart Hamm

Uh oh ... I looked at the Urth archives and realized quite a bit of discussion has been put into this already. I don't mean to resurrect a dead / impossible topic. I can read up in the archives!

On Mon, Sep 19, 2011 at 11:27 AM, Stuart Hamm <hammstu at sbcglobal.net> wrote:

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Stuart Hamm — 19 Sep 2011, 15:34 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

I, for one, am always open to new insights...I went to the source on this one...although without the perfect wording to get an exact answer I'm sure...and the response that I got was?"Have you read OBW?"

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?Stuart Hamm??| ?Director-Bass ProgramMusicians Institute?| 6752 Hollywood Blvd.,?Hollywood, CA 90028Email??stuarthamm at mi.edu? | ?Tel??323-860-1128
?Web??mi.edu?? ??

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From: Antonin Scriabin <kierkegaurdian at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Book of the Long Sun Question
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Monday, September 19, 2011, 8:30 AM

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Urth Mailing List

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Marc Aramini — 19 Sep 2011, 18:27 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

Yeah, probably not going to get a definitive answer. Some (who could they be?) think he was there all along, because, according to at least one inhumi in short sun, "we are everywhere."???

Quetzal was there long enough to have an old parent tree in the garden.

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Daniel Petersen — 19 Sep 2011, 20:38 · in reply to Marc Aramini

I think I remember hearing on this list the theory that the inhum (be it just Quetzal or others also in addition to him) boarded the Whorl (presumably by means of the sort of 'space-flight' they're described as performing in Short Sun) for the purpose of reconnoitring a potential food source. That strikes me as fairly straightforward and plausible.

Quetzal, however, is the mystery. I honestly can't decide if he's sinister or sincere in his intentions and actions. Maybe he can't decide either.

Maybe he has lingered there this long, using them as his food source, but also finding himself caught up in their politics and drama with some genuine concern. Indeed, the tensions in his character between exploitation of and empathy with his 'hosts' is perhaps inherent to the form-shifting nature of the inhum. (I use 'form-shifting' rather than 'shape-shifting' to try to denote the more full and complete mimicry that the inhum achieve with their hosts in some respects.) The other inhum we get to know at any length in Short Sun seem to be somewhat mixed in motives and relation to the humans also.

Quetzal certainly made a pleasantly creepy introduction to the final volume of the Long Sun. If I hadn't already read OBW and then decided to go back to the previous series and catch up, I think his character and alien nature would have totally shocked and surprised me in a very good way. I just wouldn't have seen that coming. However, I was still surprised because I didn't know the inhum were first introduced through this one character in the Long Sun. He's very well rendered by Wolfe, who is a true master at characterisation of the non- (or at least not entirely) human.

-DOJP

On Mon, Sep 19, 2011 at 7:27 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:
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--- On *Mon, 9/19/11, Antonin Scriabin <kierkegaardian at gmail.com>* wrote:

From: Antonin Scriabin <kierkegaardian at gmail.com>
Subject: (urth) The Book of the Long Sun Question

Gerry Quinn — 19 Sep 2011, 22:12 · in reply to Daniel Petersen

From: Daniel Petersen

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As I recall matters, we were told that it was the people who later became known as the Neighbours who boarded the Whorl as it approached their system, and infected it with inhum as an experiment.

This works better as it seems unlikely that the inhum could have flown that distance - they could only fly between the twin planets when they were in close conjunction. And also they would probably need some sort of technology to get into the Whorl having landed on it.

Carrying a lot of equipment would have made flight difficult. And how could they have hit it anyway? The Whorl has little gravity to pull them in. The Neighbours, by contrast, had legitimate spacecraft.

Quetzal, however, is the mystery. I honestly can't decide if he's sinister or sincere in his intentions and actions. Maybe he can't decide either. Maybe he has lingered there this long, using them as his food source, but also finding himself caught up in their politics and drama with some genuine concern. Indeed, the tensions in his character between exploitation of and empathy with his 'hosts' is perhaps inherent to the form-shifting nature of the inhum.

It is hardly unique to the inhum. The farmer is sincere in his concern for his cattle. The slave owner may be solicitous regarding the comfort of his slaves.

- Gerry Quinn

António Pedro Marques — 19 Sep 2011, 22:49 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

Antonin Scriabin wrote (19-09-2011 15:52):

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It is.

but I do (of course!) have a few questions. The first is, how did Quetzal get on the /Whorl/?

Nobody knows.

The inhum are natives of Green, so maybe he found some way aboard the /Whorl/ while it was in orbit? If so, it would seem that they were in orbit for some time, since Quetzal obviously spent several years on board. Also, why would he try, in his last moments, to get the settlers to go to Green?

Nobody knows.

As food for other inhum? I haven't read /The Book of the Short Sun /yet, so if these inhum-related questions are answered there, just tell me to read

Read.

and find out :-)

That's another matter.

Daniel Petersen — 20 Sep 2011, 08:08 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Thanks for clearing that up about the Neighbours, Gerry. I do recall that's what it was now. Which is weird and disturbing in a way (from our fellow human perspective) - but I guess they were doing it benevolently - inoculation or something.

You also said: 'It is hardly unique to the inhum. The farmer is sincere in his concern for his cattle. The slave owner may be solicitous regarding the comfort of his slaves.'

Yes, but the Inhum/Human situation is a little more like one human using another, not as a slave, but as *cattle* - to be slaughtered and eaten. To get caught up in the concerns of your food source in this way seems more complex than the examples you cite, and full of the tensions that can only come from sentient-to-sentient interactions in a morally dubious (not to say objectionable) scenario. It's like the slave situation to some degree, but again, more like

one of a tribe of cannibals finding himself concerned with the missionary they're preparing for dinner.

-DOJP

On Mon, Sep 19, 2011 at 11:12 PM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

**

From: Daniel Petersen <danielottojackpetersen at gmail.com>

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- Gerry Quinn

António Pedro Marques — 20 Sep 2011, 11:31 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn wrote (19-09-2011 23:12):

The Neighbours, by contrast, had legitimate spacecraft.

They did?

Daniel Petersen — 20 Sep 2011, 12:06 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

The Neighbours, by contrast, had legitimate spacecraft.

They did?

Yeah, I would've thought they'd do their 'dream-travel' gig.

-DOJP

2011/9/20 Ant?nio Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com>

Gerry Quinn wrote (19-09-2011 23:12):

The Neighbours, by contrast, had legitimate spacecraft.

They did?

Gerry Quinn — 20 Sep 2011, 13:05 · in reply to Daniel Petersen

In the first place, it's by no means certain that the Neighbours can dream travel in the same way as Silkhorn + Inhum, although they may be able to do other things like shift dimensions. But let us accept that dream travel is possible for them. They still could not have reached the Whorl that way, as they were never there before. Nor could they have brought inhum to infect the Whorl, because inhum in dream travel become akin to those whose spirits they have stolen. An inhum who travelled to the Whorl would have been a Neighbour there, just as dream travelling inhum we meet in the books become human.

They appear to have had spacecraft (called 'landers' by Silkhorn). They must have used such a technology to reach Green where they met the inhum. Again, they could not have dream travelled there, and if they could it would have happened earlier, during a pre-technological phase of their history. The Neighbours at the time of the Whorl's advent are technologically aware, detecting the Whorl as it approached their system, and recognising it as a hollowed out asteroid. We could not currently do so well.

And again, irrespective of the technology, we are *told* what happened, are we not? And I have not seen any better explanation proposed.. I know some list members pay little heed to such matters (a similar case is the origin of the Shadow Children and the Abos in _Fifth Head of Cerberus_). My feeling is that one can very easily misinterpret Wolfe by searching too hard for trickery in his books. Wolfe may like to tell the key elements of his stories only once, briefly and obliquely - but tell them he does.

- Gerry Quinn

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

From: Daniel Petersen

To: The Urth Mailing List

Sent: Tuesday, September 20, 2011 1:06 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Book of the Long Sun Question

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2011/9/20 Antonio Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com>

Gerry Quinn wrote (19-09-2011 23:12):

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Tim O'Donnell — 20 Sep 2011, 13:17 · follows Gerry Quinn

How did Quetzal (and the implied other inhumi) get aboard the Whorl is a question that has come up a few times before. If we are meant to answer this question within the context of the Long Sun then the mechanism I prefer is that the humans have been parked in the green/blue system for some time and that some landers have flown down already and returned. This could have happened intentionally as some of the crew flew to Green, discovered "demons" there and fled; or automatically with mainframe launching landers to collect specimens and to ensure that this was a suitable habitat for the cargo. Inhumi then could have stowed away and returned to the Whorl this way.

What happens with Quetzal is a specific instance of the general case in Wolfe, where an entity impersonates another entity they start to become them; never more so than when their impersonation leads them towards God. Like a gravitational field the force of attraction continues to increase until they become full (agents) of God.

Stuart Hamm — 20 Sep 2011, 14:23 · in reply to Tim O'Donnell

Well played Sir! Haven't given this subject much thought I believe that you have nailed it...

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--- On Tue, 9/20/11, Tim O'Donnell <timodonn at gmail.com> wrote:

From: Tim O'Donnell <timodonn at gmail.com>
Subject: (urth) The Book of the Long Sun Question
To: urth at urth.net
Date: Tuesday, September 20, 2011, 6:17 AM

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Sergei SOLOVIEV — 20 Sep 2011, 14:28 · follows Stuart Hamm

Remarks: a) the problem of relations between humans and "cattle" obviously deeply interests GW - all the speaking animals in the "Long Sun", the question of the many-generation prisoners of the Antichamber, whether the animals do plead for life when they are slaughtered, so it doesn't look strange if similar question is put about the relations between humans and inhum.

b) Inhum (at least, those who are on speaking terms with Horn-Silk) often tell that they try not to kill humans they consider as their "cattle", better comparison would be with milking, not slaughtering.

c) Subjectively, Quetzal may think that he will do good for humans (again, from the dialogues between Horn-Silk and inhum it looks like they often sincerely think themselves much superior than ordinary human, and from the point of view of Horn-Silk they all the time try to invent sophisticated lies to justify their deeds).

Best

Sergei Soloviev

Le Mardi 20 Septembre 2011 10:08 CEST, Daniel Petersen
<danielottojackpetersen at gmail.com> a ?crit:

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David Stockhoff — 21 Sep 2011, 15:22 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

Anybody else read *Earth Abides* (1949) by George R Stewart?

The protagonist, Ish, spends about the second half of the book struggling with the moral issues of becoming a god to the other survivors of a global apocalypse. Couldn't help but be reminded of Severian's apotheosis.

James Wynn — 21 Sep 2011, 18:41 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

On 9/19/2011 9:52 AM, Antonin Scriabin wrote:

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Also, why would he try, in his last moments, to get the settlers to go to Green? As food for other inhumis?

Wolfe explained in the Q&A (just prior to the release of *On Blue's Waters*) that Quetzal wanted a thriving colony on Green. Why? You have to read the books.

<http://www.ansible.co.uk/cc/cc77.html#wolfe>

I haven't read /The Book of the Short Sun /yet, so if these inhumani-related questions are answered there, just tell me to read and find out :-)

There are lots of ways for the inhumani to have arrived at the Whorl. It would be a spoiler to detail any of them.

J.