

Short Story 60: Forelesen part 1

The Urth list — 8 messages, 4 voices, 14 Sep 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6667>

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Marc Aramini — 14 Sep 2014, 18:10

FORLESEN

“Forlesen” first appeared in *Orbit 14* in 1974 and is reprinted in *Castle of Days*.

SUMMARY:

Emanuel Forlesen awakens knowing nothing but his name, not even what human beings look like or if he is one himself. “The rest came later and is therefore suspect, colored by rationalization and the expectations of the woman herself and the other people.” His wife is making breakfast and implores him to read the orientation. He says, “I don’t remember a damn thing.” He identifies the oddly deformed hands at the end of his legs as shoes, then realizes he is naked.

Getting dressed, he questions his wife about the layout of the house as she cooks breakfast in the bedroom. She says her name is Edna Forlesen and that the material indicates she is his wife. When he looks into the mirror he thinks, “The man in the mirror was not he. The image was older, fatter, meaner, more cunning, and stupider than he knew himself to be, and he raised his hands (the man in the mirror did likewise) to touch his features; they were what they should have been and he turned away.”

On top of his orientation material is a mimeographed sheet welcoming him to the planet Planet. It indicates his condition is normal and he should not be agitated or fearful — capacities which “are to be regarded as incapacities.” The briefing tells him anything he may have remembered upon awakening is false and warns him not to be late for work. He must go to the house on his right, not left. The packet contains his job assignment and a table of commonly used “waits and measures” which are more important than the books.

His egg and coffee both taste oily. His name is spelled wrong on the job assignment and he learns that there are 240 ours in each day. The blue book is titled *How to Drive*. The rules include never picking up hitchhikers, waving, shouting, or invading the privacy of other drivers. He looks out the window and sees a bald man with a gold tooth and a mole looking at him from the window of a nearby house, and wonders that the man is not him at any age, because he feels it should be. Edna accuses him of reading the red book when he voices this sentiment.

The red book’s cover shows people surrounding a winged being. The left side is printed in scarlet in a language he doesn’t understand, though he does not believe the translations match up very well. The black print describes the twelve natures of Death and the Dead:

Those who become new gods, for whom new universes are born. Second those who praise. Third those who fight as soldiers in the unending war with evil. Fourth those who amuse themselves among flowers and sweet streams with sports. Fifth those who dwell in gardens of bliss, or are tortured. Sixth those who continue as in life. Seventh those who turn the wheel of

the universe. Eighth those who find in their graves their mother's wombs and in one life circle forever. Ninth ghosts. Tenth those born again as men in their grandson's time. Eleventh those who return as beasts or trees. And last those who sleep.

Edna rushes him to work, and when he spies, "Remember that if he does not go, you and your children will starve" in her "Helpful Hints for Homemakers", he leaves readily. The door lock behinds him.

He does not have to do anything to start his yellow car. The car accelerates slowly even when the pedal is pressed entirely to the floor and on his path he sees black and orange signs which read HIDDEN DRIVES. He heads towards Model Pattern Products, speaking with his car for directions. The light at which he must turn emits green and red flashes at quarter second intervals.

The new street lifts beneath him and he stops to wonder what his job might be and if there were not some way he and his wife might be together. He walks to the rail and looks down to see what supports the elevated road, noticing the shadows of broken and twisted shapes under the road. A blue police car painted with a fantastic design ("a mingling of fabulous beasts with plants and what appeared to be wholly abstract symbols") pulls over. The cop prompts him to get back in his car. Forlesen catches a glimpse of the pillar (or something under the road) moving and hesitates, then asks the cop to come look. He feels something at his spine and turns to see that the cop wears no pants and is connected to his car by six or more tubes the color of straw and blood. Forlesen is not scared and gets in his car. He asks the cop if the pillars are falling, and the cop threatens him with his gun unless he continues on his way.

Here the car "sped to the top of the high, white, billowing undulations of the highway — and descended in a way that made him almost believe himself a hawk — or the operator of some fantastic machine that could itself soar like a bird — or even such a winged being as had appeared on the cover of the red book." He sees snowy clouds that could be other highways.

Forlesen picks up a hitchhiker named Abraham Beale dressed in a very old fashioned manner and leaves Forlesen with the impression of a cricket. He says Forlesen is awake while so many of the other drivers are asleep. Abraham is looking for work since he lost his old job — he has worked as a lawyer, soldier, on the railroad, and even as a reaper mechanic. Abraham was the oldest of thirteen children; he lost the farm willed him by his father on the same day he was to receive it when the state took it for a highway. He says he received a check in restitution which he planted, but it didn't grow. He drew the interest from his investment but it came to nothing, then mentions an apple tree on his land that died little by little, and how his brother Avery let a blue slate game cock kill his father's Shanghai Rooster.

They comes upon buildings whose roofs are "jagged saw blades fronted with glass." Abraham shows Forlesen a blank page from his bank book and says those little numbers are all that is left of his father's farm, then tells Forlesen the difference between having only a little money and vast wealth, and that a man with a significant fortune can accomplish what a poor man can never do, such as influence legislature and buy things at bulk prices. Forlesen thinks that the buildings are intentionally ugly and that some seem built to defend against attack. They encounter unbroken mustangs, and Abraham Beale leaves excitedly to see if he can find work. The mustangs are being herded into a building with a dog's head sign above it (later revealed to be a dog food company).

Forlesen arrives at work and parks on a steep gravel slope, beginning his long, pointless day. Even though he arrives on time, a woman with glasses, Miss Fawn, tells him he is late and goes over the schedule for the day. The real go-getters, according to Mr. Frick, show up twenty

minutes early to play cards and have coffee. She reveals Forlesen's overseer Mr. Fields is a "real supervisor". She asks if Forlesen is married and takes him to Mr. Fields' small office. It is decorated with two photos - "a beach with rocks and waves, and a snow-clad mountain) and two realistic landscapes both of rolling green countryside dotted with cows and trees)." Mr. Fields is described as youngish and speaks in vague sports metaphors: "I need men who'll back my play all the way, and maybe even run in front a little. Sharpies. — We're a team." Their function is to make money for the company. He tells him that someday his office will be Forlesen's, which he tells "every guy in the subdivision." (This later comes true when Fields dies during the lunch hour)

Mr. Fields takes Forlesen to his desk, and Forlesen notices that the building is beset by smells (some foul, some sickeningly sweet) and extremes in hot and cold. There is a jackhammer in the background since it is the "new" wing. He is placed in a big room with glass partitions, the windows covered up with splintering boards, the floor suggesting charred wood. Fields says there is prestige in sitting next to a window, and Forlesen suggests using the partition glass for window glass so that they can look outside. "Hell, no," Fields responds, before saying management is an art and a science, telling him there is a list of his responsibilities somewhere.

"As Fields passed behind one of the rippled glass partitions on his way to the door, the distortions in the glass caused his image to change from that of the somewhat dumpy and rumpled man with whom Forlesen was now slightly familiar; behind the glass he was taller, exceedingly neat, and blank faced. And he wore glasses."

The phone rings — it is Mr. Franklin calling for Cappy Dillingham. He tells Forlesen the Creativity Group has been moved to "oh seventy-eight" sharp, outside the drilling and boring shop. Miss Fawn arrives to reveal Cappy died to the caller, then returns the phone to Forlesen. Franklin tells Forlesen that they create "creativity itself — we learn to be creative" and warns him that Mr. Frick is firmly behind the meeting. Through the glass, Miss Fawn appears to become a prettier mannequin.

Here Forlesen says, "I thought we'd just take some clay or something and start in." and suggests Franklin ask Frick for a meeting room, which could "save" the Creativity Group. When he sees the stack of paper Miss Fawn has left for him, Forlesen pushes them away and exclaims, "The hell with you."

In the old, metal desk amongst miscellaneous trash he finds a dead insect and notices the sharp smell of apples, as well as five empty file folders, including one with a column of "twenty-seven figures written on it in pencil, the first and lowest being 8,750 and the last and highest 12,500; they were not totaled."

He sees a memo to management personnel with his tasks (maintaining profit, reducing costs, reporting violations, etc) which he throws away. Forlesen then finds the Leadership Problem quiz, and he confronts problem #105. It details the unsatisfactory work of secretary Enid Fenton, who asked for a transfer and might be considering resignation. The question presents seven options which include firing, fining, reassignment, and even asking other members of the Leadership group. Forlesen calls the extension of Eric Fairchild to inquire about the problem; he is told he can check multiple answers if they aren't mutually exclusive. Fairchild asks his secretary Miss Fenton to fetch the Leadership file so he can take a look at it. Forlesen notices the name and wants to know how her work has been unsatisfactory.

Fairchild insists, "The whole essence of Leadership Training involves presenting the participants with structured problems. — This is a structured problem." Forlesen suggests he take his secretary aside and tell her how her work is unsatisfactory and hear what she had to say.

Explaining how the computer scores, Fairchild says only the machine knows the right answers — but “maybe there isn't any right answer at all.” He also reveals that the grades range from 757 to 49. “There have been these rumors about Mr. Frick coming in and asking the computer questions, but it's not true — frankly, I don't think Mr. Frick even knows how to program.”

After talking about the death of Cappy, Forlesen states he is returning the problem under protest and hangs up. His desk tells him Fairchild will call back and tells him promotions are offered to those who “fit in.” Fairchild does call back to explain how Miss Fenton creates strife in the office by sometimes getting mad and sometimes thinking men are serious when they “kid around with the girls.” The other girls don't like her, either. Forlesen suggests he makes Miss Fenton his permanent secretary to find out “what's wrong with this girl,” though he doubts anything is.

Miss Fawn calls him to meet Mr. Freeling (who only speaks in sailing metaphors and whose plaque is more modern than D'Andreas, but made of plastic rather than brass). Through Freeling's window he can see the highway. He says Forlesen is there because the company feels he can find his own work, and warns, “if you get the unions down on us we're going to throw you overboard quick” (see Historical Resonance and the Importance of Frick and Coal below).

Mr. Freeling ends his spiel by asking what Forlesen wanted to see him about. “I don't — You said you wanted to see me.” Mr. Freeling has nothing further to add, and Forlesen asks Miss Fawn how he should know company policy. “It's in the air — You breathe it.”

He then finds the drilling room for his Creativity Group and meets Mr. Fields outside, who says he is going to make it “come hell or high water.” A man with white hair is filling one of the bores with oil as another signs a parody of a popular song. They sit down to watch a movie titled CREATIVITY MEANS JOBS.

A man near the front objects: “It seems to me ? [this meeting/movie] implies that creativity is automatically going to point you toward some solution you didn't see before, and I feel that anyone who believes that's gong to happen — anyway, in most cases — doesn't know what the hell they're talking about.” The group then discusses how creativity can help make a “nontrivial elaboration” of a problem before talking of synergy and teamwork.

Fields says, “creativity isn't about making new things — like some statue or something nobody wants. What creativity is about is solving company problems —?”. Fields has enlisted Miss Fawn so that he can escape the group, so she interrupts that he is urgently needed on the phone.

When the film finally plays, the sound doesn't work as the actors discuss “promoting creativity in the educational system.” Franklin explains that it was photographed and taped from a real teacher's discussion, then recreated by actors to reproduce the debate.

Forlesen goes home for lunch. The signs with HIDDEN DRIVES on their fronts read SLOW CHILDREN on the reverse. His wife doesn't recognize him and notes how tired he looks. She says he will get promoted after lunch because “a woman knows.” She rushes him to finish lunch and get back to work. The coffee is still oily. He returns her watch and she tells him to leave. Forlesen says, “I don't think there's any purpose in most of it — but there's plenty to do [at work]?”.

She says she has nothing to do at all and Forlesen recriminates her for not preparing a better lunch. As Edna exclaims that lunch is “nothing”, Forlesen realizes he doesn't know her as well as the people at work. She walks with him to see him leave.

On the way back to work in front of the dog-food factory, he sees Abraham Beale's hat floating in the wind. Miss Fawn has become Mrs. Frost and asks him if he is ready for orientation as she leads him to Field's desk, also revealing that Mr. Fields has died and that he was cremated and buried in the vault behind the pictures. Forlesen would prefer to be buried at home.

"At 125 hours Forlesen was notified of his interdepartmental training transfer" [even though this should have been during his lunch our, this is the only point in the text that uses hour rather than our] and the route to his new desk takes him through the lobby, where he sees the face of Abraham Beale on the large medallion in the floor, with the name Adam Bean under it. His new chief, Fleeer, only speaks in skiing metaphors. Here they are supposed to develop an understanding of the "real, realistic business world" and play a lot of "Bet-Your-Life, the management-managing real-life pseudogame."

Forlesen begins to play Bet-Your-Life (holding down a position for Ffoulks) after Fleeer scrawls a note with his bidding and some other instructions before leaving (see Bet-Your-Life Minigame below). It is refereed by a man in a red jacket and another man with a bristling mustache says that the rules in the brown book can be changed if a quorum agrees (which is defined as three quarters of those present but never less than seven). Forlesen owns one hundred percent of the stock in a company called International Toys and Foods and writes "BID 34 ASK 32 FFOULKs" and the man with the mustache indicates Forlesen will never get thirty-two for his holdings.

Forlesen says he has a bid to buy at 34 while he is looking in the brown book. In the book, he sees an earlier conversation about teamwork and a coach upstairs that he had with Fields, but the sports metaphor "good field" is changed to "good Fields." After the man with the bristly mustache buys five hundred shares at the lower price to sell them back to Forlesen, the referee calls a coffee break (with Spam and Churkey [a naked-necked chicken introduced from Transylvania well suited to warm environments]). Outside, the man with the mustache boasts that he is about to "clip" some guy in there, not recognizing Forlesen, but Forlesen leaves before he is forced to buy back his own stock at a higher price.

He meets a woman who looks like Miss Fawn whose voice he recognizes from his car — Miss Fedd used to work in traffic. Forlesen says he is afraid to read the ending of the brown book, and she says it is the red book he should fear: "It's the opposite of a mystery — everyone stops before the revelations."

She sends him to see Mr. Frick, and Forlesen thinks of his most duplicitous actions: cheating the man with the mustache and baiting Fairchild. He enters a room that seems to be made of "bronze and black wood and red wool." Mr. Frick is the man he saw through the window at the start of his day, with a mole and gold tooth. Frick says that they played "prisoner's base" one day and that he envies Forlesen even though Frick was the one who ascended to the top. He says, "You won't believe it, but you've had the best of it." He presents Forlesen with a box as a token of his colleagues' regard and dismisses him from work.

On the way home he sees a young couple arriving and thinks of their fate to separate at the punch in clock and meet uncomfortably for lunch later out of a sense of duty. He sees black and orange machines eating the houses beyond the light, and his path is filed with YIELD signs.

At home, Forlesen parks over the oil spot and sees a man in a dark suit with a black bag at his feet who will not speak to him. Forlesen's grown son greets him with a large box exactly like that of his watch, of red-brown wood and lined with pinkish-white silk. The son picks him up and throws him in the coffin, saying that it will be tight but it has "a hell of a good engine."

Forlesen finds it more comfortable than he thought, and is offered a choice for his Explainer since he has reached the end of his life. He brings in the small man from outside, who asks, "What's it going to be — or is it going to be nothing?"

Forlesen notes that his coat's threads "constituted the universe in themselves, that they were serpents and worms and roots, the black tracks of forgotten rockets across a dark sky, the sine waves of the radiation of the cosmos. The Explainer says that his wife is dead, and asks, "What'll it be" Doctor, priest, philosopher, theologian, actor, warlock, National Hero, aged loremaster, or novelist?

Forlesen doesn't know and says he wants to think of his box as a bed, but it feels like a ship that will set him free.

The Explainer says he may have been oppressed by demons, been revived by aliens, or suffer from a tumor. Forlesen says, "I want to know if it's meant anything — if what I suffered — if it's been worth it."

?No ?. Yes. No. Yes. Yes. No. Yes. Yes. Maybe.

COMMENTARY

A clear satire on the working world, a lifetime of banal middle-management ineffectiveness is compressed into one long day in which nothing much is accomplished. Individual wants and desires are subjugated to a corporate existence and the only expression of uniqueness becomes hackneyed metaphors or hobbies such as sailing or skiing, and these hobbies are all immediately reflected back into describing the business model.

Obviously, Emmanuel Forlesen represents the third generation in this closed system (the E.F.'s), with the first generation being that of Abraham Beale (A.B.'s) and the second Cappy Dillinghams (C.D.'s). The sequential lettering of these generations creates a sameness to them, and in turn Forlesen and others must orient the next generation of G.H's. The plaques on the wall of those who came before are small and inconsequential memorials, and there is every indication they went through much the same nonsense. Emmanuel Forlesen's predecessor, Cappy, asked a question about problem 104 just as Forlesen asked one of 105. The fourth generation has already begun to show up on Emmanuel's day (though there is some indication that minor characters linger over from one day to the next).

THE EASY AND OBVIOUS METAPHOR:

While actually determining which of the many possible scenarios presented fits all the small details of Forlesen's life is difficult (scenarios presented by both by the creature who answers Forlesen's questions and by the book describing the types of dead), the overall metaphor is quite easy to restate: management work in the corporate world is a kind of hell, aimless and purposeless, where there are things to do, but ultimately these things signify nothing, a repetition of empty goals that make an entire lifetime seem lost in the same meaningless and spirit killing tasks day after day, where nothing is ever definitely accomplished and little of value is actually completed. All the days of pointlessness become one life-time consuming day.

The artificial nature of the struggle is highlighted by the mechanical, rote and uninspired presentation of innovation innate in every task Forlesen undertakes, from the quiz which is almost an opinion poll on how a real situation should be handled to the insidious creativity

exercise. Indeed, the word hell and damn appears many times in dialogue in Forlesen. While this is not preponderant, it is an unusual amount of repetition for Wolfe. Clearly, Forlesen descended to a kind of hell on his way to work after the undulating height of the highway. The charred wooden floors and windows covered with splintering boards in his office might even reflect the fate of Abraham Beale's apple tree.

"Forlesen" confronts naturalism head on, one of the dominant trends in the literature of 19th and 20th century America: the idea that man is a part of nature and responds to societal demands is a cornerstone of naturalist novels. In effect, this ideology negates free will and makes man just another animal responding to stimuli. Here, Forlesen is trapped in a system which he cannot understand (because there is no understanding it), and he simply does what is expected, for the most part. While Forlesen fails to escape, Wolfe manages to highlight how unnatural the idea of modern societal naturalism is: real freedom is expressed in the character of Abraham Beale, who probably lives slightly longer than others in their respective generations because of the variety of his life experiences, while Cappy Dillingham, Mr. Fields, and Forlesen only have the lifespan of ephemerals. (However, it is not clear that Abraham survives — he, too, may have become dog food under the modern operating parameters).

Forlesen means "to lose completely" and forlorn is derived from it. When Forlesen looks at his own face in the mirror, he sees a man much cruder, stupider, and less refined than he knows himself to be — but to the touch, it is his face. Everything here is a reflection of what society sees — he knows himself to be different than the exterior reflected back at him. While there may be something more to this "broken mirror" than portraying the difference between external and internal perceptions, it also works to show that people in this world (and the business world as a whole) are nothing more than external perceptions.

TWELVE AND THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The number twelve reoccurs several times throughout — Abraham has 12 siblings, there are 12 types of dead, there are 12-sided dice in the bird cages in the bet your life mini-game, and perhaps this makes some reference to the 12 tribes of Israel or even the 12 apostles. [Of course, Ishmael also had 12 sons]. (Levi did not receive land and Joseph's inheritance was effectively doubled — perhaps Abraham Beale somehow echoes Levi's tribe of priests, though more likely the obvious name of Abraham indicates that he holds that prominent figure of patriarch of the tribes and summons the world of the Old Testament — closer to being cast out of Eden but still engaged in a close relationship with the Creator God.)

Highlighting the possibility that Abraham's covenant with God is referenced, the name Emanuel also has a very prominent position in the Old Testament. Abrahamic religions are messianic in nature, and one of the possible "anointed ones" according to a slight New Testament revision is known as Immanuel, "God is with us". The difference between the Jewish conception of the Messiah and the Christian acknowledgment of Jesus lies in the nature of that salvation: for Christians, that salvation comes in the form of forgiveness and an eternal heaven and redemption from original sin and the innately sinful state of man thanks to Adam's fall (the founder of Modern Pattern Products is Adam Bean), whereas for Jews the Messiah is usually considered a more secular savior of this world. "Forlesen" rather forcefully considers if the things of this world are worth enduring the weight of meaningless banality to attain.

Abraham says that he planted his inheritance, which grew to nothing, and Adam Bean has Abraham's face. The sides of the cop cars have fantastic beings and plants depicted on their sides, and Edna's name is derived from the Garden of Eden — it is impossible for Forlesen to stay with her when he must enter the secular working world, and the door to his house is locked behind him. This examination of the fall of man being linked to the creation of modern

structures such as highways and corporations strikes a chord — going to work is categorically the loss of the innocent garden paradise in the pursuit of transitory money, unfortunately something necessary to keep a family from starving.

HISTORICAL RESONANCE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF FRICK AND COAL:

While the physical description does not match a historical, nonfictional model, it is clear that the most important man of Forlesen's generation at Model Pattern Products is the gold toothed man with the mole whom he sees at the start of his day, Mr. Frick. Forlesen tells his wife that he is surprised that he is not that man. "Why should it be you?" his wife asks. "I just felt it should, somehow."

At the end of the day Mr. Frick says that it is he who envies Forlesen, who had "the better of it", but Forlesen disagrees. Frick appears in dialogue throughout, and at one point it is even rumored that he talks to the computer directly, though the speaker does not believe Frick is a programmer. Frick also says that he played prisoner's base one day with Forlesen (though it is a real children's game, perhaps Frick played prisoner's base the day depicted in "Forlesen" - his own company the prison that ensnares). Frick gives him a gift at the end of the day in a box similar to his coffin.

The real life Henry Clay Frick, a leading business industrialist of the late 19th and early 20th century, at one time regarded as the most hated man in America, helped create the giant US Steel company the Pennsylvania railroad. At one time he controlled the majority of the coal output from Pennsylvania. He was a partner of Andrew Carnegie, who eventually tried to get Frick to retire and tried to avoid giving him a voice in the company. Frick was anti-union and during one strike he erected a barbed wire fence around his mill's property and Pinkerton agents actually killed nine workers. The buildings in the business district of Wolfe's novella appear "surrounded by a high, rusty wire fence, with a barren area of asphalt or gravel beyond it as though to provide (Forlesen know the thought was ridiculous) a clear field of fire for defenders within." Perhaps the life of Henry Frick and his control of coal and resistance to unionized labor serve as the basis for the recreation of Model Pattern Products in some afterlife or "model" reconstruction. If Forlesen thinks that he should be Frick in some fashion, perhaps this is the hellish punishment of Henry Clay Frick, now dead.

When discussing the Creativity Group with Franklin, Forlesen says they should just start in with clay. This echoes both the creation story with man's start in the garden and the middle name of the historical Frick. Interestingly, Frick was also blamed for the Johnstown Flood, which killed 2,200 people.

Gwern Branwen — 14 Sep 2014, 19:04 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On Sun, Sep 14, 2014 at 2:10 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:
The red book's cover shows people surrounding a winged being. The left side is printed in scarlet in a language he doesn't understand, though he does not believe the translations match up very well. The black print describes the twelve natures of Death and the Dead:

Those who become new gods, for whom new universes are born. Second those who praise. Third those who fight as soldiers in the unending war with evil. Fourth those who amuse themselves among flowers and sweet streams with sports. Fifth those who dwell in gardens of bliss, or are tortured. Sixth those who continue as in life. Seventh those who turn the wheel of the universe. Eighth those who find in their graves their mother's wombs and in one life circle forever. Ninth ghosts. Tenth those born again as men in their grandson's time. Eleventh those who return as beasts or trees. And

last those who sleep.

... Forlesen picks up a hitchhiker named Abraham Beale dressed in a very old fashioned manner and leaves Forlesen with the impression of a cricket. He says Forlesen is awake while so many of the other drivers are asleep.

...He meets a woman who looks like Miss Fawn whose voice he recognizes from his car — Miss Fedd used to work in traffic. Forlesen says he is afraid to read the ending of the brown book, and she says it is the red book he should fear: 'It's the opposite of a mystery — everyone stops before the revelations.

Thoughts on this classification? Going through them:

1. new gods: no, Forlesen is powerless and the universe is old
2. praisers: no
3. soldiers: no
4. sportsmen in paradise: no
5. paradise or hell: no the former, maybe the latter
6. 'those who continue as in life': maybe, but there's a similar later category
7. turning the wheel of the universe: maybe
8. eternal returners: no, no wombs or natural life is involved, especially not if this is Frick
9. ghosts: no, Forlesen seems pretty physical
10. reincarnation as animals or plants: no
11. eternal sleepers: no, although Beale implies a lot of the other people are sleepers

That leaves:

- in hell

I don't like this one because hell is being opposed to 'gardens of bliss'; there would be no ambiguity about being in a garden of bliss, so likewise there should be no ambiguity about being in hell. One suffers horribly being tortured. If Forlesen's life is Hell, then it's a rather refined and existentialist sort of hell...

- turning the wheel of the universe

I have no idea what this might mean.

- 'those who continue as in life'

This fits best.

Fawn says it's the opposite of a mystery. In a mystery, you have a question for which you lack an answer (who/how/why dunnit) and you reach the answer at the end (it was the butler with the knife because his pay was cut). So here we must have an answer (here are the 12 kinds of dead), and lack the question.

The obvious question here is 'what am I?' If Forlesen wanted to know who and what he is, why doesn't he read the books to the end, especially after her comments? Perhaps he doesn't want to know.

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Marc Aramini — 14 Sep 2014, 20:58 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Well the new universe could have been created based on Frick's business model. Frick has praisers in the form of sycophants. Builders who move the universe could be the cloud highway pillars or the construction workers. The people like fields and freeling who love sports metaphors but have turned them to business clichés are those amused by sports/streams, we have a sold garden (all the wood that is charred in model pattern products could have been from that apple tree I suppose)... Edna's name means Eden, etc. The returners seem to be in the cappy dillingham Emmanuel Forlesen vein, asking the same questions and having the same concerns and winding up in the same desk. Someone will take Forlesen's place from the gh group.

So confounding ...

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7. turning the wheel of the universe: maybe
8. eternal returners: no, no wombs or natural life is involved, especially not if this is Frick
9. ghosts: no, Forlesen seems pretty physical
10. reincarnation as animals or plants: no

11. eternal sleepers: no, although Beale implies a lot of the other people are sleepers

That leaves:

- in hell

I don't like this one because hell is being opposed to 'gardens of bliss'; there would be no ambiguity about being in a garden of bliss, so likewise there should be no ambiguity about being in hell. One suffers horribly being tortured. If Forlesen's life is Hell, then it's a rather refined and existentialist sort of hell...

- turning the wheel of the universe

I have no idea what this might mean.

- 'those who continue as in life'

This fits best.

Fawn says it's the opposite of a mystery. In a mystery, you have a question for which you lack an answer (who/how/why dunnit) and you reach the answer at the end (it was the butler with the knife because his pay was cut). So here we must have an answer (here are the 12 kinds of dead), and lack the question.

The obvious question here is 'what am I?' If Forlesen wanted to know who and what he is, why doesn't he read the books to the end, especially after her comments? Perhaps he doesn't want to know.

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gwern

<http://www.gwern.net>

Marc Aramini — 14 Sep 2014, 21:07 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

The names Abraham, edna, Adam, and Emanuel must have some significance to the garden / fallen man imagery as well.

On Sunday, September 14, 2014, Gwern Branwen <gwern at gwern.net> wrote:

On Sun, Sep 14, 2014 at 2:10 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:

The red book's cover shows people surrounding a winged being. The left side

is printed in scarlet in a language he doesn't understand, though he does not believe the translations match up very well. The black print describes

the twelve natures of Death and the Dead:

Those who become new gods, for whom new universes are born. Second those who

praise. Third those who fight as soldiers in the unending war with evil.

Fourth those who amuse themselves among flowers and sweet streams with sports. Fifth those who dwell in gardens of bliss, or are tortured.

Sixth

those who continue as in life. Seventh those who turn the wheel of the universe. Eighth those who find in their graves their mother's wombs

and in

one life circle forever. Ninth ghosts. Tenth those born again as men in their grandson's time. Eleventh those who return as beasts or trees. And last those who sleep.

... Forlesen picks up a hitchhiker named Abraham Beale dressed in a very old fashioned manner and leaves Forlesen with the impression of a cricket.

He says Forlesen is awake while so many of the other drivers are asleep.

...He meets a woman who looks like Miss Fawn whose voice he recognizes from his car — Miss Fedd used to work in traffic. Forlesen says he is afraid to read the ending of the brown book, and she says it is the red book he should fear: "It's the opposite of a mystery — everyone stops before the revelations.

Thoughts on this classification" Going through them:

1. new gods: no, Forlesen is powerless and the universe is old
2. praisers: no
3. soldiers: no
4. sportsmen in paradise: no
5. paradise or hell: no the former, maybe the latter
6. 'those who continue as in life': maybe, but there's a similar later category
7. turning the wheel of the universe: maybe
8. eternal returners: no, no wombs or natural life is involved, especially not if this is Frick
9. ghosts: no, Forlesen seems pretty physical
10. reincarnation as animals or plants: no
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Fawn says it's the opposite of a mystery. In a mystery, you have a question for which you lack an answer (who/how/why dunnit) and you reach the answer at the end (it was the butler with the knife because his pay was cut). So here we must have an answer (here are the 12 kinds of dead), and lack the question.

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gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Gerry Quinn — 14 Sep 2014, 22:47 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 14/09/2014 19:10, Marc Aramini wrote:

The blue book is titled /How to Drive/. The rules include never picking up hitchhikers, waving, shouting, or invading the privacy of other drivers. He looks out the window and sees a bald man with a gold tooth and a mole looking at him from the window of a nearby house, and wonders that the man is not him at any age, because he feels it should be. Edna accuses him of reading the red book when he voices this sentiment.

The red book's cover shows people surrounding a winged being. The left side is printed in scarlet in a language he doesn't understand, though he does not believe the translations match up very well. The black print describes the twelve natures of Death and the Dead:

Looks like the red pill and blue pill of the Matrix, about twenty five years early, only in book form! [Anyway, the form should be irrelevant.]

I did a cursory internet check and found no precursors for a red/blue = reality/dream trope (except an unconvincing red-only pill from a 1990 film). Probably just coincidence, but it struck me when I read Marc's post. Of course the red and blue pills are someing of a meme now.

- Gerry Quinn

Marc Aramini — 14 Sep 2014, 23:23 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

There is a very matrix feel to Forlesen after the fact but nobody wakes up from this nightmare. Especially with the black and orange machines eating the buildings at the end of the day.

Forlesen is the one work of Wolfe I am almost willing to consign to postmodern irresolvability. I have thought about it for literally months and any uniform theory that makes sense of the oil and the changing reflection in the glasses and mirrors and the changing signs and the judeo-Christian names and the buildings being consumed and the "good engine" in his coffin never really gel and I am left with ... The idea of a corporate Hell/limbo. But it seems like something should explain why the rule book for bet your life is Forlesen's life story with minor changes.

Hour of trust and forlesen were the hardest to do of all the write ups- they are both kind of anti-establishment for Wolfe. My free live free write up listing every difference in the two novel edition texts was much easier than wrestling with these little pieces that never seem to add up to much at all outside of the theme in forlesen.

On Sunday, September 14, 2014, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

On 14/09/2014 19:10, Marc Aramini wrote:

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- Gerry Quinn

Kathrin Paschen — 16 Sep 2014, 21:57 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Thank you for the story analyses Marc -- I work my way through them as I re-read the stories.

On Sun, Sep 14, 2014 at 8:10 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:

Forlesen means "to lose completely" and forlorn is derived from it. When

Forlesen looks at his own face in the mirror, he sees a man much cruder, stupider, and less refined than he knows himself to be — but to the touch, it is his face. Everything here is a reflection of what society sees — he knows himself to be different than the exterior reflected back at him. While there may be something more to this "broken mirror" than portraying the difference between external and internal perceptions, it also works to show that people in this world (and the business world as a whole) are nothing more than external perceptions.

A minor comment on this. As you mentioned in the part 2 post, "Vorlesen" (pronounced the same as "Forlesen" if read in German) means "to read aloud". I took this as a reference to all the written material Forlesen is given and expected to read and follow. The story feels as though he were reading aloud from a script (acting much like the actors re-enacting the creativity discussion) instead of living. He is not real (not created from clay), his is a scripted life. The script, which contains external expectations of how he should behave, also dictates his appearance in the mirror.

This is one of my favourite Wolfe stories, maybe because the corporate hell resonates with me (yes, I work in a large corporation).

Kathrin

Always make sure that the obvious is true.

Marc Aramini — 16 Sep 2014, 22:39 · in reply to Kathrin Paschen

I agree Kathrin - a fully scripted life right out of the brown book. I think his whole life is a model "reenactment" and he plays the part in the mirror. Thanks for the kind words!

On Tuesday, September 16, 2014, Kathrin Paschen <kathrin.paschen at gmail.com> wrote:

Thank you for the story analyses Marc -- I work my way through them as I re-read the stories.

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