

# Forlesen

The Urth list — 6 messages, 4 voices, 24 Jun 1998

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Michael Straight — 24 Jun 1998, 16:17

Ack. People keep referring to this novella and I've got a note somewhere about how much I liked it, but I can't remember what it's about. Could someone please e-mail me a brief something to jog my memory?

-Rostrum (who needs to get copies of CASTLE OF DAYS & IODDAOSAOS)

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Derek Bell — 24 Jun 1998, 22:05 · follows Michael Straight

In message <199806242019.NAA25047 at lists1.best.com>, Michael Straight writes:

Ack. People keep referring to this novella and I've got a note somewhere about how much I liked it, but I can't remember what it's about. Could someone please e-mail me a brief something to jog my memory?

It's about a guy who wakes up in a house, meets a woman who is his wife, glances through the manuals for his life, goes to work and his whole life is short, over before he can take control of it. It's been described as Kafkaesque, which is appropriate, though the authority in question is the one that supplies the "manuals" (for want of a better word) and makes the rules. Oh, the main characters' job seems particularly strange and pointless, with (other) people showing great enthusiasm for something that isn't quite clear. (It's either a course in motivation, a course in managment, a game or all three.)

It reminds me of Heideggers' "throwness of being".

Derek

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Michael Straight — 25 Jun 1998, 10:43 · follows Derek Bell

On Wed, 24 Jun 1998, Derek Bell wrote:

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Ah, yes (no, no, yes, no, yes, no)! I get creeps just remembering some of the instructions in the wife's handbook.

Does anyone know where the word/name "Forlesen" comes from? Don't tell me Wolfe made it up or I shall be thoroughly disillusioned.

-Rostrum

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Craig Christensen — 25 Jun 1998, 10:44 · follows Michael Straight

Michael wrote:

Ack. People keep referring to this novella and I've got a note somewhere about how much I liked it, but I can't remember what it's about. Could someone please e-mail me a brief something to jog my memory?

Forlesen is one of my favorite Wolfe stories. The main character's, in fact most of the characters' lives, seem to be condensed into one long, drab, pointless day. Forlesen wakes one morning a blank slate. Some memories slowly return. He recalls that people cover themselves with clothing. He remembers language. Before he can remember more his wife begins to rush him off to work. She points out a stack of manuals which explain his responsibilities. He only has time to scan them.

His wife can barely contain her terror. She woke before him and had time to read through her manuals, one of which told her that if her husband doesn't go to work, she and the children will starve. After she finally pressures him to leave, he hears the door lock firmly behind him.

I believe that 'Forlesen' is a name invented by Wolfe to invoke the idea of someone forlorn or lost. I had the feeling that Forlesen was dislocated from a real past elsewhere. He seems to know that life isn't supposed to be like this. I thought that if he had more time to reflect he might remember more of his real past, but he is hurried from one station in his life to the next by his wife and coworkers. These people, themselves, seem to be as lost and befuddled as he is. They are obviously bluffing their way along and after Forlesen begins to imitate them his 'progress' at work becomes streamlined.

There is more to the story and there a couple of subplots. On the surface, it seemed to be a sketch of life in the industrial workplace. It reminded me of the movie 'Brazil'. The part that confused me the most was during Forlesen's drive to work. Can anyone tell me what he saw holding up the elevated road? I particularly enjoyed the scene with the patrolman here.

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Craig Christensen — 25 Jun 1998, 12:21 · follows Craig Christensen

From Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 1913 Edition Online at:  
<http://www.onelook.com/>

For\*lese" (?), v. t. [p. p. Forlore (?), Forlorn (.)] [OE. forlesen. See Forlorn.] To lose utterly.

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Alice Turner — 25 Jun 1998, 19:14 · follows Craig Christensen

Rostrum,

Does anyone know where the word/name "Forlesen" comes from? Don't tell me Wolfe made it up or I shall be thoroughly disillusioned.

Don't be disillusioned! It's a very old word, with an impressive (and apt) OED citation. which I won't quote. It's related to "forlorn" with implications of loss, perdition, ruin, shame, destruction.

It goes back to Old Frisian, and to Beowulf. I'm impressed!

-alga-