

wild speculations

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 29 Oct 2000

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Donn Seeley — 29 Oct 2000, 12:06

I have finally caught up with the Whorl list after reading JUNGLES and I would like to contribute to it, but I seem to have missed the lander, er, boat. I shall send this epistle to the list in the hope that someone is still reading it...

Reading the archives, I see that I have ideas about the SHORT SUN that haven't been discussed (or I missed the discussion by skimming over it :-). I find myself somewhat annoyed that I didn't make it to Readercon this year to talk some of this over with John Clute -- I went hiking in Colorado instead. Mea culpa.

Anyway, here are some questions and (for some of them) my provisional answers. I'll offer them even though we're only a couple of months away from the advent of RETURN. Boy, am I an optimist!

(1) Why does the narrator of JUNGLES seem so different from the narrator of WATERS, given the short amount of time that seems to pass between the events in the foreground story at the end of WATERS and the beginning of JUNGLES?

The question was discussed on the list, but I don't remember reading any comments that matched my own reaction. The figure in the shadows at the end of WATERS was the Outsider. The reason for the confusion between Babbie and Horn is that Babbie is to Horn as Horn is to the Outsider. Horn discusses the relationship between owners and pets / slaves [p. 368-369 WATERS]; I felt the emotional connection here before the intellectual one. From that step, I jump to the conclusion that the Outsider (partly?) healed the rift in Horn that prevailed through WATERS, allowing some of the Silk nature to appear in Horn in JUNGLES.

(2) Why does Fava seem to know how to speak when she meets Horn on Green in her second story?

Some messages that I've seen on the list seem to assume that Fava comes to consciousness in an egg, and that she breaks out of the darkness of the egg to reach the world. Fava notes that she couldn't simply break out of the container, however -- she had to rip at it with her claws. My own impression is that Fava wasn't in an egg but rather some sort of cocoon. The food wasn't a yolk sac, but a paralyzed prey creature. I vaguely recall reading about parasitic insects that wrap a living prey with their larva as food. Of course the 'prey' here is a human.

(3) Why does Horn seem to think that he doesn't look like Silk?

Why did Oreb depart for a year to 'find god'? What did the remark about the 'surgeon' and 'Passilk' mean? Why does the transmigrated Horn find himself covered with blood next to Hyacinth's body in an otherwise empty house?

My wild guess: when Horn arrives, Silk has two heads, and Horn gets the non-Silk head. The scene is bloody because the Silk head has been fighting with the Pas head. Thus Horn has Silk's

body but not Silk's head. For this to work, the Silk head must be removed in RETURN so that the body has a single head. Horn's search for Silk from Gaon in WATERS leads me to believe that he thinks that Silk was transmigrated (or surgically implanted on yet another body?), and survived.

My sketchy reasoning: (i) Silk's amazing abilities are surely due to the fact that he was created as an embryo to be the host for Pas. (ii) Pas is recognizable because he has two heads; surely the resurrected Pas would also have two heads? (iii) We know that Typhon and Piaton fought; why not Pas and Silk?

If this scenario is correct, then why does Horn seem to have so many mental and spiritual resemblances to Silk now? I think it's because he 'drank' Silk's blood, and we know that it's a principle of the Urth/Whorl universe that consuming the flesh of another can cause the consumer to acquire some of the soul of the consumed. Horn is Silk in the same way that Severian is Thecla or that Fava is Salica. (Or that any who partake of the Eucharist are God.)

Oreb went looking for 'god' and came back. I think that may be an indication that he found the transmigrated Silk. If so, then Silk is probably on the scene in WATERS and/or JUNGLES and we haven't recognized him:

'Oreb, why did you come back to me?' I asked him.

'Find Silk.'

'I'm not Patera Silk, Oreb. I've told you -- and everybody -- that over and over.' I ought to have asked him to find Silk for me, but I felt sure he could not unless he discovered some way to return to the WHORL, and I do not want to lose him again. 'Where did you go, Oreb?'

'Find god.'

'I see. Passilk? I think that's what the surgeon called him. Did you find him, and is that why you returned to me?'

'Find Silk.' [p. 369 WATERS]

Are we going to meet Silk on Blue in RETURN? Another clue:

Oreb has been pulling my hair. 'Go now? Go Silk?' (Or perhaps it is, 'Go, Silk!' I cannot be sure.) [p. 355 WATERS]

(Huh -- is 'Quadrifons' Horn's name for Silk's original head? Is that why finding 'Silk' is finding 'god'?)

I'm sure that this speculation will sound silly in January, but the idea seemed just so cool...

(4) Why did the Whorl come to Blue and Green?

Here I'm really stepping off into the deep blue waters...

The Neighbors abandoned Blue and Green to the inhum. The inhum descended into near-animal state, although they retained some subset the Neighbors' abilities that allowed

them to improve their camouflage.

A small ship arrives in the system bearing humans. Some inhumis feed on the crew. They acquire human characteristics and develop the skills to pass as human. An inspiration occurs to them about how to restore the inhumis race to its previous level of intelligence.

The human ship returns to Urth with a crew of humans and inhumis. The inhumis (passing as human) persuade Typhon to launch an enormous 'colonization' vessel to Green and Blue. Perhaps they play on Typhon's vanity... In any event, millions of prey are sent on their way to the inhumis. The inhumis on the Whorl boarded it on Urth.

(5) What secret did Horn learn from Krait about the inhumis?

I actually don't know the answer to this one, but I wanted to say a couple of things about it. One is that we have surely been shown the secret in action in WATERS and JUNGLES, but we haven't realized what it is. Horn is using it to control the inhumis who serve him. My second point is that the secret is NOT the Golden Rule, or at least not the Rule alone. Horn explicitly denies that the Rule is the secret in JUNGLES, and I believe him. However, I do believe that the answer is at least partly spiritual in nature.

One very strange tangent: In WATERS, Horn shakes the hand of a Neighbor, then stops himself from describing more of the experience. Is this because it would reveal part of the inhumis's secret somehow? I can't think of any other good reason why Horn would clam up here.

(6) Are the inhumis natural or artificial?

This subject comes up often enough with Horn (and on the list :-)) that I think there must be something to it. I think the grabber / colorcat is provided as an example of a native Green predator that uses camouflage in an essential way, just like the inhumis. That suggests that the inhumis are at least partly natural. But I then begin to wonder -- were the inhumis 'improved' by the Neighbors as weapons? Horn certainly uses them as weapons. If that's the case, then that might explain how the inhumis acquired the extreme abilities to reshape themselves and to cross the vacuum between Green and Blue. It's clear that humans have been reshaping animals (and themselves) for quite a long time before the Whorl sets off. Maybe the Neighbors provided a similar service to the inhumis?

(7) Why does Horn seem to have such a prejudice against 'things'?

Horn's relationship with animals and pets is an interesting one. I think Seawrack's diatribe [pp. 336-341 WATERS] is fundamental to the story. Evil characters like Rigoglio in SHORT SUN and for that matter in NEW SUN and DEVIL IN A FOREST and other Wolfe books seem to be evil in major part because they don't respect the moral obligation that they have to those whom they lead. That moral obligation is based on an appreciation of personhood, an appreciation that Horn originally lacks, but is gradually growing into.

... 'What I'm trying to say is, there are two people on this boat you don't think are people at all, Babbie and Krait. You don't think they are, but you're wrong. You're wrong about both of them.'

Sinew muttered, 'He doesn't think I'm anybody either.'

'Yes, he does!' In the chill starlight, I could see her turn to face him. 'You've got it exactly backwards. No wonder you're his son.'

While Sinew was wrestling with that, she added, 'It's the other part he doesn't like, the thingness. You try to be less of a person and more of a thing because you think that's what he wants, but it's really the other way.' ...
[p. 337 WATERS]

Horn is learning to be more of a person and less of a thing. Part of that lesson is to see others more as persons than things.

It's interesting to view the Eucharist scene in JUNGLES in this light. Up to this point, it has been acceptable to sacrifice animals to the gods. After this point, the gods have sacrificed one of their own instead, so His blood may substitute for the animals' (and ours). Horn's cooperation with the baletiger is an example of his new view of things. (But he still seems to resist granting personhood to inhumani. Maybe that breakthrough awaits us in RETURN?)

(8) Some questions that I have no answers to at all: Is the reference to Hyacinth as Seawrack on p. 121 of JUNGLES a typo? What happened in the City of the Inhumani after Horn's force cleared it of inhumani and inhumans? What happened to the lander that Horn almost rebuilt on Green? Is Green's orbital eccentricity natural? Why are there no annotations from Hoof and Hide in JUNGLES?

Having way too much fun with this stuff,

Donn

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.