

OBW: Horn and Silk

The Whorl list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 21 Nov 2000

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Michael Straight — 21 Nov 2000, 14:45

I just finished reading OBW and haven't started IGJ yet, but I couldn't resist reading through the archive discussions of the first book and posting a few responses. I'd appreciate if responses avoided spoilers for IGJ. If applicable, you could just say, "IGJ contradicts your theory."

I think this is the best book Wolfe has written. There are too many wonderful things to enumerate: the very moving story of what Marble has sacrificed to care for Mucor, the scene in the pit and Horn's ongoing relationship with Krait, Horn's obtuse but believable relationship with Sinew (especially the bit about how he couldn't follow his desire to be a coward in front of him on the lander)...

There are a lot of intriguing/satisfying/powerful allusions to the earlier books, and I really wouldn't recommend anyone read this without reading the Long Sun, but I was amazed at how satisfying this book is on its own. There is much left unanswered and more to Horn's story, but we do have Horn making a pact with the Neighbors, arriving at Pajaracu, flying away on the lander, liberating it from the inhumis with Sinew, being reconciled with Krait as he dies fighting to save Horn, saving Gaon, and escaping to rejoin his family. That's a lot more than we could say at the end of Shadow or Nightside.

I had seen bits of discussion on the list about Horn being in Silk's body, or subsuming some part of Silk into himself before reading the book, but even with that possibility in my head as I read, I didn't think that was right.

I'll start at the end. Horn says he's not ashamed of what he's accomplished: "I have snatched the ball and won the game." What a wonderful line. Some have seen this as Silk's personality speaking, referring literally to the game Silk won. But surely Horn is speaking metaphorically, using an image from the event he remembers well, the game where Silk was enlightened and with which Horn began the Book of Silk.

And what meaning did Silk's action have for Horn? Horn said to Silk at the time, "You were their best player. It wouldn't have been fair to them if you hadn't played your best." Silk used his power and strength to help the weak. Which is exactly what Horn did, using his power over the inhumis (and his wise leadership in general) to save Gaon from Han. Horn may be referring to some other action as well, but regardless, I take him as meaning he has, at least in some things, done as Silk would do. Which makes the line such a beautiful summary of how Horn has, throughout the book, sought to be a faithful disciple of Silk.

There's no evidence that Silk would even remember the game, preoccupied as he was by his enlightenment (note his lame response when the boys ask him what was the lesson in it). Seeing the reference as the personality of Silk himself literally remembering that game makes the line a trivial non sequitur.

As for inhabiting Silk's body, the ankle and Oreb are pretty strong arguments in favor (and the

hair, but that's doesn't necessarily point to Silk's body), but the height issue argues very strongly against. Silk notes that he and Horn are almost the same height right in that opening section of *Nightside* that has so much other rich foreshadowing. I can't believe Wolfe would have missed that.

In addition, if Horn has a new body, it seems very odd to me that he never once worries about his family not recognizing him. You'd think at least once when he's addressing Nettle, he'd say something about it, or that he'd mope, "Even if I do manage to return, I will not be recognized." It is very Wolfian for a narrator to not mention the obvious, but I think it would make even less sense than usual in this case.

I'll be reading IGJ soon, so I'll be able to catch up with the rest of the discussion. I'll be happy if it's half as good as OBW!

-Rostrum

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

Alex David Groce — 21 Nov 2000, 15:04 · follows Michael Straight

Rostrum: I will hold comment until you are done with IGJ, to avoid prejudicing your reading. But I must say:

I'll be reading IGJ soon, so I'll be able to catch up with the rest of the discussion. I'll be happy if it's half as good as OBW!

I think it's slightly better, which is saying a lot.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

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Alex David Groce (agroce+ at cs.cmu.edu)
Ph.D. Student, Carnegie Mellon University - Computer Science Department
8112 Wean Hall (412)-268-3066
<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~agroce>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 21 Nov 2000, 12:37 · follows Alex David Groce

Rostrum a ecrit:

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If applicable, you could just say, "IGJ contradicts your theory."

I think this is the best book Wolfe has written.

IGJ contradicts your theory 8*)

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Here I want to disagree strenuously.

By the end of *_Shadow_*, Severian has told us at least twice that he is become Autarch; drowned and been resurrected; been exiled for his crime against the guild; received his two talismans, the Claw and Terminus Est; met most of the Book's major characters, including (in no special

order) Dorcas, Agia, Vodalus, Thecla, Thea, Dr. Talos, Baldanders, the Autarch, Jolenta, the aquastors, and the bride of Abaia; raised at least one person from the dead, fought a duel, died and been raised again himself; made love to his own grandmaw; and exercised his Art.

Nightside is a bit slower, but I think a longish list of major developments could be made -- just not by me today.

I had seen bits of discussion on the list about Horn being in Silk's body, or subsuming some part of Silk into himself before reading the book, but even with that possibility in my head as I read, I didn't think that was right.

IGJ probably contradicts your theory, but this is Wolfe, so who can say for certain? But there is strong evidence. I'll shut up about that now.

I'll start at the end. Horn says he's not ashamed of what he's accomplished: "I have snatched the ball and won the game." What a wonderful line. [...] surely Horn is speaking metaphorically [...]

If you should prove to be right about Horn and Silk, your interpretation would be brilliant. As it is, even if you are wrong, your interpretation is still quite valid: there is no need to limit the remark to one meaning or the other. Horn can be Silk (in some sense) and _still_ have the metaphor in mind
also.

Nice call.

I'll be reading IGJ soon, so I'll be able to catch up with the rest of the discussion. I'll be happy if it's half as good as OBW!

You will be ecstatic.

--Dan'I

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Michael Straight — 21 Nov 2000, 15:55 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

On Tue, 21 Nov 2000, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:
Here I want to disagree strenuously. [With my comment that there's more closure after OBW than Shadow or Nightside]

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Nightside is a bit slower, but I think a longish list of major developments could be made -- just not by me today.

Oops. OK, so what I really should have said was that I found OBW far more satisfying on its own than Shadow or Nightside, but I have no idea why.

Maybe it's because OBW is really Book 5 and not really a first book like the other two?

-Rostrum

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