

Long, cranky post

The Whorl list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 14 Feb 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1163>

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akt — 14 Feb 2001, 19:53

From W. Ansley:

In fact I got heartily sick of all of the "distinctive" ways Wolfe came up with for his characters to speak in this book: Pig's dialect, the village of the Yodas, Olivine's repeating, Olivine's repeating herself, Prolocutor Italics and Remora's mumblings.

Yeah, me too. Pulpy, sort of cheap and not in the least consistent--not in the Italian or Hindu encounters. Also the moralizing got boring--but to contradict myself, I did love IJG in spite of HornSilk yattering on and on to Fava and Mora. I guess I just liked *them,* the girls, though, damnit, I liked Jahlee even more (much more complex). I intermitently did find Remora entertaining, though it went way too far.

> The encounter with the godling struck me as very similar to one of Sev's meetings with Juturna ('I would save you'), or with the hierodules, where they kneel before him. In a sense, the godling is a debased version of a hierodule, and recognises Silk as the 'holy one'.

Well, yes. But I do think the operative word is "debased." I love Juturna and the hierodules and think they are used *extremely* well by the author (especially in that last book that some on this list like to put down), but as I said in an earlier post, the godling, to me, seems like a Hollywood special effect that serves no purpose other than cover art.

I was also bothered by the impossibly large size of the (big) godling. Wolfe should make up his mind, is he writing science fiction or isn't he?

At 20:16 2001-02-13 -0800, Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

Putting aside the godling issue as the lesser, I'm still working on how alga is bugged by Jahlee's death.

From the Myopic Bear:

Let me have a go.

1. Jahlee thinks of herself as a beautiful woman - a bit of a vamp,

one might say. Compare her teasing Hide, and probably others, plus the guard on Urth, and her general attitude.

2. The Rajan is a) charismatic b) powerful c) the first man who has ever treated her with kindness, let alone respect. If alga or anyone else can make a case for her *not* falling in love with him, I'd like to see it.

3. She meets Nettle. Nettle is her great rival. Even if she was human, how safe would Nettle? But Jahlee isn't human, however kind Horn has been to her, however much she wants to be (and Nettle *is*, which would inspire bitterness and envy in a better person than Jahlee). Without wishing to appear speciesist, she *is* a blood drinking reptile. And Horn loves Nettle. He really does, though he may not have been very good at showing it, and Jahlee can see that.

Given the above, if you were Jahlee, could *you* resist biting Nettle?

Bear,

I would go right along with you--were we reading a different sort of book. But we have been taken on a journey where great changes have occurred. And Jahlee is an important character, who has been taken up to now much more seriously than Dorcas or Jolenta. For her to act in this way seems pretty cheap to me, an author lining up his exits so as to get out in a hurry (I truly object to the way all the still living concubines (or such) are herded off at the end for a silly Star Trek adventure, whether they have motivation or not).

And if you were Horn, how would you feel when you saw it? The original Horn, dour, impulsive, and knowing the inhumani only as vampiric monsters, would be right in there. Horn who has come to know Jahlee might feel more charitably towards her, but the betrayal will surely make this *more* horrific for him. There's hardly an aspect of his character, Horn or Silk, that isn't going to be outraged. He loves Nettle. He brought Jahlee to Lizard, and she betrayed his trust - both her guilt and his own, projected, are going to add vehemence to his attack. It's significant that he doesn't calmly use the lethal weapon he carries. This is personal. I've spent a paragraph arguing for the plausibility of Horn attacking the inhumani who's biting his wife, but I don't really need to, I think.

Finally, though he didn't intend murder (I'm fairly sure of that), she's hardly going to get better. There isn't much place in a happy ending for a jealous vampire, however much we want there to be.

Bear, it's not Horn. It's Silk. I'm worried about that: it really *is* murder. After all they've been through? (H/S and J. I mean.)

Aside about RTTW's ending seeming to exhibit authorial fatigue. Oh, really?

Yes, that's nonsense. Sorry, alga, my unicellular friend, but what I mean is that I don't agree with it at all. I found the resolution of the book to be as satisfying as advertised, which is very interesting considering

it only involved a change of point of view - "does Horn know he's Silk?"

is a nonsensical question when looked at closely. It's a contradiction, and the resolution is that only Silk can be Silk. It is more than a change of perspective as well, of course - Silk recovers.

If he were tired of the characters I'd expect a retirement of some sort, happily ever after or simply dead--I'd hardly expect him to launch them on a starship!

I must admit, as an aside to the aside, that of all the possible things that I could have guessed might happen, Nettle setting out on a starship was not one of them!

Authorial fatigue, my esteemed furry friend.

From: Allan Lloyd <lloyd at nexus.kc3.co.uk>

Although there are of course many good things in RTTW, overall I found it one of the most disappointing of Wolfe's books. The initial impression of the cover right through to the awful proof reading make it seem an unattractive and rushed book.

As Alga said, Pig's accent is extremely annoying (it sounds more Newcastle Geordie than Scottish to me), but his whole character does not convince. Compare Pig to Auk, both performing similar functions in their respective books. When Auk suffers from concussion in the tunnels we feel real sympathy and concern for him, and although he is a violent criminal he has redeeming qualities which make him a well rounded character. Pig does nothing but fawn over Horn/Silk and whine about his e'en. Like Alga, I feel that I am being manipulated into feeling sorry for him. Giving someone a quirky way of speaking is a very lazy way of showing character, and is an increasingly worrying feature of Wolfe's recent work.

As above, ditto.

Other points in the book that did not work for me-

1. Projecting astral versions of yourself to other planets is a convenient and unbelievable fantasy gimmick which may work in Edgar Rice Burroughs, but does not sit well with the predominantly sf approach of the rest of the book. Even the time travel in BOTNS is given some justification, but I find instantaneous projection over a distance that has taken the Whorl 300 years to travel completely unconvincing. And when the various groups are in their astral bodies, how can we read about Oreb without laughing. The image of Oreb as a child of four with feathers, or a feathered dwarf instantly stops your suspension of belief. The image is straight from Sesame Street or the Muppets.

Well, the point is made that he is "more human" than he seems, but yes, it really is sort of Goofy (or Disneylandish), and I agree that it's cheap.

2. We are asked to believe that faithful Oreb, the most honest character in the book, has been possessed by Scylla for most of the three books. This is the violent jealous Scylla who, when possessing Chenille, first ordered the sacrifice of a harmless fisherman, then changed her mind to request the sacrifice of 50 to 100 babies to attract her attention. So all the time Oreb has been possessed by a cruel vindictive Goddess. Often in Wolfe's books I don't understand what is happening, so I read again and again to try to work out the meaning. This is the first time that I have simply not been convinced. The idea reads like something that was tacked on just to produce a shock, with little preperation or purpose.

Absolutely agreed--I'm annoyed by this too, and feel that it is an unwarranted and even unethical tweaking of readers's sensibilities. I realize that sounds pompous, but it seems to me a further proof that Wolfe was getting bored with this endless series and just wanted to stir things up a bit before skedadling.

3. Seawrack. In the first book, Seawrack is a significant part of the action. We want to know more about her, why she is given to Horn, what is the motive of the Mother. So in the next two books she is just forgotten. Like Dorcas, she emerges from the water, supports the protagonist, and then is casually dumped. It is almost as if Wolfe thought "sea voyage, Odyssey, must have a Siren" and then lost interest. This makes her offstage reunion with Silk at the end of the book seem casual and pointless, and I fail to see her motive in joining the return to the Whorl.

I'm on your side, bro. What could possibly develop from the Star Trek voyage of this feral--and psychically damaged-- creature? She seems to be included only as a sex object, TV style.

4. The Neighbors. Mysterious Aborigines are appearing with alarming regularity in Wolfe's books, and are becoming a bit of a cliché. All-powerful near-supernatural beings are very useful for getting your hero out of a jam, but in this case come across as just one more layer of plot manipulators. Horn is given a magic ring so that he can see them, loses it on Green, is presented with a replacement which changes size and colour at random (why?). This is the stuff of fantasy and does not fit the atmosphere of the book. And why give the neighbors (and the other fauna of Blue) a double quota of arms, legs and eyes? To see why it does not work, look at the Neighbor on the cover of IGJ. This is the worst sort of science fiction shorthand, a gimmick that saves the trouble of original thought. Can you imagine an ur-elephant with eight legs, two trunks and four eyes?

Agreed here too, not necessarily about the legs--Wolfe is entitled, and maybe he is thinking of Odin, and Sleipnir's eight legs--but it's true that the Neighbors are never resolved. Not fair to readers.

5. The Horn/Silk/Horn question has been discussed enough already. All I want to add is that I found the final revelation contrived and unconvincing, a bit like the final twist to a horror movie, there

because there always is a final twist.

Agreed here too, and much too Hollywood.

6. Can anyone explain why Merryn should be Severian's sister. There was no sign of recognition in their scene together in BOTNS, and there seems no reason that they should be related. Just because they are similar ages and both probable orphans, they have to be siblings.

Shakespearian

coincidence again?

I had hoped for much more here too. the meeting seems not only perfunctory but mean-spirited wrt Merryn. Merryn counted for a lot more in the encounter with the Cumae and we had legitimate hopes for more from her.

Retort to those who object to: Right Bro, I agree, statements: Adam Lloyd is a pretty new poster, this is a good post. I do agree with most of it. And I can use some help in an adversarial position.

From vizcacha:

I find Jahlee's death very straightforward, if disappointing. Jahlee attacks Nettle because she has always loved Horn, and she will never have him because Horn loves Nettle. Horn kills Jahlee because she violated the agreement never to touch his family, not to mention his obvious rage that his wife is being attacked (no Michael Dukakis, he). (Yes, this agreement was made with Krait, but that's a legal quibble; as Rajan his agreement with her was all-encompassing, too). Jahlee is clearly a loose cannon, almost as much so as Jugurna. Doesn't the attack happen the morning after Horn/Silk and Nettle spend the night together? Jahlee has no way of knowing there was no "warm commerce" involved. She is a woman "trapped in the body of a blood-drinking reptile," and she will never be human, never experience the kind of love Horn has for Nettle. The tragedy of the inhumis is that they are humans who will never be human.

I wonder if Wolfe's "failure" to provide a satisfying conclusion to the problem of the inhumis is that there is none. The inhumis, like evil in the abstract, are created by people. If people solve the problem of evil, they will solve the problem of the inhumis.

Not your usual SF resolution, where Silk would have found the Seekret Formula for Inhumis-bane hidden away in Mainframe (virtual reality sword-fight with Pas optional). I see Keanu Reeves as Silk.

Gee, I thought he was blond. I think your argument would work if Jahlee really were still a "loose cannon." But should she be? Wolfe put a lot of work into Krait and Jahlee (and Quetzal too). Should he have dismissed them so quickly when they became inconvenient. Q, yes, I'd agree. K, maybe. But J's end just seems hasty and pulpy; with more of Nettle's input it might have worked better. Or more emphasis on, as you say, the "human who will never be human." It's kind of Bette Davis without the superior qualities that made Bette soar sometimes. Face it, Wolfe is *not* very good with women characters, see details of above long boring post.

-alga

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

Kevin J. Maroney — 14 Feb 2001, 22:41 · follows akt

At 07:53 PM 2/14/01 -0500, Alga wrote:

I intermitently

did find Remora entertaining, though it went way too far.

I think it's amazing that Wolfe put the emotional climax of the entire series into the hands of Remora, who up to that point had basically been comic relief. And pulled it off.

Kevin "Wombat" Maroney

<kmaroney at ungames.com>

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

Spectacled Bear — 16 Feb 2001, 18:42 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

At 19:53 2001-02-14 -0500, akt at attglobal.net wrote:

Given the above, if you were Jahlee, could *you* resist biting Nettle?

From the Myopic Bear:

[...]

Bear,

I would go right along with you--were we reading a different sort of book. But we have been taken on a journey where great changes have occurred. And Jahlee is an important character, who has been taken up to now much more seriously than Dorcas or Jolenta.

Oh. Ah. Well, mm. Still, I enjoyed _RttW_ while I was reading it :-/

...

Finally, though he didn't intend murder (I'm fairly sure of that), she's hardly going to get better. There isn't much place in a happy ending for a jealous vampire, however much we want there to be.

Bear, it's not Horn. It's Silk. I'm worried about that: it really *is* murder. After all they've been through? (H/S and J. I mean.)

He's both of them, and he was defending Nettle. I do agree that it's a Bad Thing to happen.

2. We are asked to believe that faithful Oreb, the most honest character in the book, has been possessed by Scylla for most of the three books. This is the violent jealous Scylla who, when possessing Chenille, first ordered the sacrifice of a harmless fisherman, then changed her mind to request the sacrifice of 50 to 100 babies to attract her attention. So all the time Oreb has been possessed by a cruel

vindictive Goddess. Often in Wolfe's books I don't understand what is happening, so I read again and again to try to work out the meaning. This is the first time that I have simply not been convinced. The idea reads like something that was tacked on just to produce a shock, with little preperation or purpose.

Absolutely agreed--I'm annoyed by this too, and feel that it is an unwarranted and even unethical tweaking of readers's sensibilities. I realize that sounds pompous, but it seems to me a further proof that Wolfe was getting bored with this endless series and just wanted to stir things up a bit before skedadling.

Oh dear. This really does hit the mark. Not that there was **much** of Scylla in there, of course, and most of the time it really was Oreb.

5. The Horn/Silk/Horn question has been discussed enough already. All I want to add is that I found the final revelation contrived and unconvincing, a bit like the final twist to a horror movie, there because there always is a final twist.

Agreed here too, and much too Hollywood.

Disagreed, sorry - I found it convincing, satisfying, and a worthy resolution to the question of the protagonist's identity. It didn't feel bolted on at all. Now if it had been that short story about the house thinking the woman who lived in it was a witch, then I would agree with you.

6. Can anyone explain why Merryn should be Severian's sister. There ...

I had hoped for much more here too. the meeting seems not only perfunctory but mean-spirited wrt Merryn. Merryn counted for a lot more in the encounter with the Cumae and we had legitimate hopes for more from her.

Retort to those who object to: Right Bro, I agree, statements: Adam

<tactful whisper>"Allan"!</tw>

Lloyd is a pretty new poster, this is a good post.

It took me about three days to parse that sentence, but I agree too.

I do agree with most of it. And I can use some help in an adversarial position.

I had definitely hoped for some new light to be cast on the story or characters of the New Sun - else why bother with them? The fact of the ship being the Samru, Jahlee being Krait's mother, Severian being the boy Horn et al meet on Urth - they remind me of something, and I worked out what it was. They remind me of some of the idler speculations there have been on this list. Turning a little cranky myself for a moment (and you always risk that with a bear), I feel lucky that Blue and Green **aren't** St Anne and St Croix.

Spectacled Bear.