

This little Piggie had none

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 19 Feb 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1196>

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Robert Borski — 19 Feb 2001, 00:59

Part IV of V-part Piggie Sequence; if you haven't read its predecessors you may be confused.

One of the things I've always wondered about is the provenance of the ring given to Horn by Seawrack. Since the ring allows Horn to be identified as a friend by the Neighbors, and indeed saves his life on Green (or more properly, catalyzes his transfusion into dying Silk on the Whorl), it almost certainly must originate with the Neighbors. Indeed, shortly before Seawrack returns with it, fires are seen in the hills that are later identified by She-pick-berry as Neighborly in origin ("Many Neighbor here. Build many fire."), so it doesn't seem all that speculative to imagine the ring has come from them; further support of the hills origin is given by He-pen-sheep, who points to the ring and tells Horn it identifies him as a "Neighbor-man." This alliance between the Mother (since it seems likely she's passed on the ring to Seawrack) and the Neighbors also does not seem particularly odd in OBW because at this stage we do not know who or what the Mother is any more than Horn does--his best guess is that's she a sea goddess of the Vanished People (a.k.a. the Neighbors). But by the end of IGJ, it's more than clear that the Mother is somehow related to Scylla--as I was quick to point out in a series of posts in the previous volume--and this completely reconfigures the alliance between the Mother/Scylla and the Neighbors. It also seems to support my theory that the gods of Mainframe--or at the very least Typhon--may originally be from the Blue/Green system, and it's this shared heritage between the starcrossers and the indigenes that allows them to interact so quickly.

Further evidence of this link between the Mother, Seawrack and the Neighbors comes in IGJ when Horn sings a song "following Seawrack's own intonation and pronunciation," and which is filled with "the lapping of the waves...and the eerie cries of seabirds, and the lonely whistling of the wind." Horn subsequently tells the assembled group that the song "is in the language of the Neighbors, whom you call the Vanished People," and even translates the lyrics as, "In our small house with shining windows, I waited till the tide brought your wreck through. Lie here beside me in the darkness. I'll wake to life the corpse I say is you." Horn immediately adds, "That isn't exactly right, but it's as close as I can come in the Common Tongue." Poorly translated though they be, however, these lyrics, and the fact that Horn can translate them from Neighborese, will become more important later, so keep them in mind.

Back to the ring, however, which remains behind with Horn's body when he dies on Green; but while he's imprisoned in Dorp, Oreb-Scylla brings him another one. It's unclear where the ring comes from, but since Babbie (who I maintain is a Neighbor-like being) is in the vicinity, I'd like to suggest that he is its provider; this might help explain its rather large size since the Neighbors are bigger than humans (it may also have originally been sized for Pig [see previous Piggie post]), although it later resizes itself to fit Horn (self-adjusting hi-tech Neighbor jewelry?). This second ring also allows Horn to contact the Neighbors; consequently, one even testifies at his trial. And later we're given a glimpse through the ring, but as described by Hoof, it's a little difficult to determine what he's seeing--there's a Neighbor, for sure, who looks like he's sitting in some sort of upright tree limb, but from the description of the latter, with its huge size, and

silver and green leaves, it might almost be the mast of a huge ship--possibly interstellar, like that of the Hierodules. Is this the mothership of the Neighbors, plying its way to new galactic waters? ("We found a way to leave and we left, seeking a new and better home." This might also explain why Pas relaunches the Whorl at the end of RTTW: he's seeking to join his fellow outward-bound Neighbors). If so, it makes Horn's contacting the Neighbors a little more problematical, although it is interesting to note that in IGJ, there are passages suggesting the Neighbors use mirror technology to transcend space. I'm therefore a little more inclined to believe that the tree is one of those Horn describes as growing on Green ("The towers of the City of the Inhumani are not of twelve stories, or fifteen, or eighteen, like the towers of the city in which I was born, but of stories beyond counting. As from the cliffs, trees sprout from their sheer walls and every ledge...")

The first ring is given to Horn by Seawrack after she receives a ring from him, and for all intents and purposes symbolizes a putative marriage between the two (parallels here with Horn and Nettle, as well as Silk and Hyacinth). Horn soon responds by sexually assaulting her, although he may be unable to resist doing so since Seawrack's singing appears to compel the act.

But here again several questions beg asking. Why, for example, does the Mother give Seawrack to Horn? If Seawrack is the source of the fish thrown up at the rock at Mucor's island, it seems likely that the Mother knows the purpose of Horn's journey (I've already conjectured that Mucor and Seawrack are both special talents of the über-sister variety). But why, knowing that Horn is seeking to bring back Silk to Blue, would she then adapt the strategy of placing the siren with Horn? Possibly she knows that Silk is now Passilk, and envisioning Horn to be successful in his mission, she wants to keep tabs of his whereabouts--especially since she, her mother Echidna, Molpe and Heirax have previously tried to eradicate father Pas from Mainframe, and he's been seeking revenge. Seawrack might therefore be meant to provide reconnaissance, and if she can get Horn to fall in love with her, it might further enhance Seawrack's prospects of being taken aboard the Pajarocu lander. But doesn't it seem likely that the Mother/Scylla could come up with a better special talent than Seawrack--a mere slip of a girl, with gills, and who talks with fishes? Given the male-dominated worlds of both Blue and the Whorl, it seems that she would be particularly vulnerable to predation, especially since her singing seems to amplify men's sexual furies. So again why give her to Horn?

Perhaps she hasn't. Perhaps the real person she's being given to is Babbie, who's also along in the boat. Babbie, as I've attempted to show, is far from a simple hus. He may indeed be Tartaros/Pig, or Tartaros riding the hus the same way Scylla has been riding Oreb. Given that he and sister Scylla were originally on opposite sides (Tartaros is described in the Proper names as "Pas's loyal son, the god of thieves and commerce"), this seems to argue for some sort of reconciliation, or perhaps more likely talks between the two sides. "I am one of you," Seawrack says at one point, and Horn automatically assumes she's talking to him, not Babbie. It's also interesting to note that the Mother is still apparently alive and well on Blue; if she's meant to eventually reunite the Scylla of Mainframe with the cloned (godling?) body of the original Scylla, why hasn't Pas attempted to eradicate her? One would think that Scylla could take refuge in the Mother and not have to resort to Oreb (if there no more Sacred Windows to accomplish this, couldn't she use the reflecting surface of any large body of water on Blue? Scylla, after all, uses Lake Limna for such purposes in NEW SUN), but perhaps she fears the Mother's great size would be hard to hide from Pas's technology.

But what if there were another reason that Pas couldn't directly attack Scylla? What if Scylla holds the ultimate bargaining chip when it comes to dealing with her father? What if Scylla's captured Kypris, and is holding her hostage in special talent Seawrack? Look at the following snippets from the Mother's farewell speech to Seawrack: "You must go to your own people. Your time with me has ended. Do not return. For my sake I would have you stay. For yours I tell you

to go." The phrase *for my sake* here, I believe, is very important (as is "your own people"); we know that Scylla is far from the benign entity the Mother first appears to be, rising out of the sea like something in a fairy tale to give Horn a mermaid/siren companion. She is, in fact, hiding out from Pas, and though much of her evil nature may be constrained by Oreb's limited cognitive functions (he is, after all, a bird brain), it's still hard to view her overall motives as maternalistic.

Considering Scylla means "She who rends," I also believe she is the source of Seawrack's armlessness--perhaps a severe warning to Kypris/Seawrack that she had better stick to a prefabricated script about who she is or else (although Krait somehow seems to know that Seawrack is lying). Scylla turning Kypris into a siren whose singing invites sexual assault also seems in character with the vindictive goddess; as she laments in LAKE, "I was going to say that we took new names that would fit. What none of us knew was that [Daddy would] let [Kypris], too. So she picked love, what a surprise. And got sex and everything dirty with it." Everything dirty, indeed, including unbridled sexual savagery. (Wolfe, fortunately, spares us the details of Seawrack's rape, but even on a minimalistic level it sounds grim.)

Unfortunately, at least in my opinion, Seawrack and Babbie leave center stage at the end of OBW, but I do think it's important to note that they exit together: Horn cobbles up some ruse about berry-picking downriver from Pajarocu; then has Sinew strand them. But it's with a curious lack of remorse that Horn describes what he envisions as their fate near the end of OBW: "I felt sure that Seawrack made what repairs she could and that she and Babbie tried to sail the sloop back up the river. They must have arrived much too late, if indeed they arrived at all. She has returned to the sea now, for which I would be the last to blame her." Nothing in Horn's detached manner at this point seems to suggest he will miss his darling siren overmuch, or how later, when asked in IGJ, where would he like to be if he could be anywhere, he will answer: "With Seawrack, in our little sloop." Are we therefore to believe that Seawrack's desireability simply becomes amplified over time--that the siren song she's sung has become more and more potent the longer he's been away from her?

Personally, I don't believe that this is the answer. Rather, I believe that Horn's growing desire for the absentee Seawrack only *begins* after he's merged with Silk--a fact that's difficult to realize given SHORT SUN's complex narrative skeins. Moreover, it's only upon merging that HornPassilk begins to confuse the loves of the three women "he" has been involved with: Nettle, Hyacinth and Seawrack. But because our tendency is to identify the narrator as Horn-husband-of-Nettle, we tend to see "him" as swaying in affection between Nettle and Seawrack, whereas I contend the person who's actually expressing his desire for Seawrack is the Pas moiety of Passilk. (Not that the true Horn doesn't emerge in numerous loving asides to his wife; she's also the main person for whom he's writing tBotSS). Another clue in this regard is the song Horn translates; suddenly, we're given to understand he comprehends Neighborese? This is contradicted earlier, however, by several statements from ur-Horn: "I broke off my foolish argument because something had begun to sing. It was not Seawrack's song, but the Mother's, a song without words, or at any rate without words that I could understand." "[Seawrack] sang only a note or two, just a word or two in some language never spoken by human beings, and I was upon her."

Mythological parallel: Kypris is another name for Aphrodite, and she too, like Seawrack, is a child of the sea.

Other clues to Seawrack's true nature can be found in RETURN. Horn, at Blood's mansion, rhapsodizes about his old musicbox and "the tune played by the steel comb that sang to itself of a virgin braiding her hair by candlelight...seated on her bed in a chemise, and she was the most beautiful woman in the whorl, was Kypris and Hyacinth because she had yet to learn how

beautiful she was and the power of her smile." Note again the juxtaposition of singing, Kypris and Hyacinth.

Not much later at Blood's abandoned mansion then, both Horn and Pig find themselves together in Hyacinth's old bedroom, and this leads Horn to conclude that Pig carries not only Silk, but Pas. "If it had only been that Pig had wanted very much to be alone in this room, I don't believe I'd have guessed. I would have thought of Silk the god, of Silver Silk as the augurs call you, with Kypris and dismissed the thought. You're not with her now, I realize. As long as Pig is blind, you can't go back to her." To which Pig responds, "Correct." Thus we now have confirmed the notion that Kypris is still alive (as opposed to Echidna and Hierax, who are not), coupled with the parallel conceit that Pas will be able to rejoin her once Pig can see again.

By the end of RETURN, of course, Pig, thanks to Horn, is able to see again--although when you think about it, it's rather a strange process: Horn (who has a piece of Passilk in him) donates an eye to Pig (who also has a piece of Passilk in him), so that the Passilk in each of them can be reunited with Kypris. This may also explain the necessity of Pig killing Silk in the manse--to prepare him as host for Horn, who carries vital and important memories of Seawrack that Pas needs to recement the bond between them. Ur-Horn, we must also remember, was symbolically wed to Seawrack--thus there's a transfer of husbandship. And together Passilk and Seawrack/Kypris go off on a honeymoon to the stars aboard the relaunched Whorl. This makes much more sense to me than accepting the notion that Seawrack was compelled to go by the Mother--a rather harsh sentence no matter how you cut it, and far from the fairy-tale happily-ever-after ending Wolfe seems to want to give us.

But it also allows us to make a little more sense of the exquisite foreshadowing in the song of Seawrack's that Horn sings and translates earlier: "In our small house with shining windows [the manse], I waited till the tide brought your wreck through [dying Horn, with his memories of Seawrack]. Lie here beside me in the darkness [Silk's death and/or Pig's blindness, with Pas trapped inside; alternately Kypris's subjugation to Scylla, or possibly even the Whorl's darkday]. I'll wake to life the corpse I say is you." [Passilk returned to full glory.]

And mediating all this? The Wolfean entity variously known as Babbie, Pig or Tartaros, but who for all his hard work receives what choice reward in the end?

Robert Borski

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

Alex David Groce — 19 Feb 2001, 12:47 · follows Robert Borski

The proposition: Typhon is originally from Blue/Green (is a Neighbor, I suppose).

Pros:

- (1) Gives a reason for his sending the Whorl to Blue/Green.
- (2) Explains Mother/Scylla relationship (maybe).
- (3) Fits the naming scheme: Typhon is a Greek monster thus must be an offworld visitor.

Cons:

- (1) The Typhon Severian meets seems to be a human tyrant with a head grafted on his shoulder, rather than any kind of alien.

(2) The naming scheme doesn't have to be super-consistent. Baldanders gets to be a "monster" (sort of) by modifying himself; surely Typhon can do the same?

(3) Scylla doesn't seem very alien when we see "the real Scylla" either. Note that she doesn't seem to actually be the sea-monster Scylla, but to be her human ally (thus betraying her father, odd if he is a Neighbor and they are allied with "Scylla" who is also the Mother, as Robert seems to imply).

(4) The Whorl leaving at the end makes me think the Whorl may be more of a colony seedship than a one-shot. The place has non-frozen residents not only for the reasons given in LS, but so they can replenish themselves "the natural way" between stops, after losing much of their populace.

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

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