

Linguige, cowinkydink, etsetteruh

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 15 Mar 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1272>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 15 Mar 2001, 08:32

B-b-b-Borski done did wrote:

Call me an ignoramus* by default, but I still do not understand how the Greater Scylla of Urth knows how to summon the Mother of Blue _in any language._

Ummmm. Consider this: the oceanbound giants of Blue, Urth, and indeed all w[h]orl[d]s are in fact one spacegoing, perhaps even spacedwelling by nature, race. This is, I believe, implied at several points in tBotNS.

If we take this as a given, _then_ it is no mystery that they speak the same language (as each other); given their longevity, it isn't even terribly surprising that they haven't wandered off into mutually-incom- prehensible dialects.

Rather more puzzling to me is that the folk of Urth in Severian's day, the folk of the Whorl, and the folk of Urth in Typhon's day seem to speak the same dialect, or at least dialects so similar that they can't be distinguished in Mr Wolfe's texts -- modulo, of course, specialized words like "whorl." One could make a case for the Typhon-era Urthers and Whorl-inhabitants aby arguing that the constant influence of the gods (all of whom are native speakers of Typhon-era Urthish) might be a stabilizing influence on the language, but then you have to explain away the dialects of places like Dorp and, uh, wherever Pig comes from.

We're all of us a little chagrined, I believe, by the use of coincidences in Wolfe's fiction

Ummm: No, I'm not. But I also unashamedly like Dickens (as, I gather, does Mr Wolfe), whose plots positively _run_ on coincidence. But then it's also my experience that "real" life does in fact contain a fair number of extraordinarily long-odds coincidences; one of my most important friendships (not one of my "best" friends, but one whose influence in my life and those of others in my set has been very important) happened like this:

One of my "best" friends picked a co-worker to bring to our weekly gaming sessions. He (call him JM) fit in and kept coming. Some months later, JM and I went out to pick up pizza for the group. On the way, he started noting some landmarks from his past; these turned out to be landmarks from my own highschool years, so I asked him which school he went to. JM said, "actually, I went to school in Los Angeles, but I used to date a girl from --" my high school. "H'mmm. I wonder if I knew her?" JM named a name; I said, "Oh. I was the best man at her wedding last summer."

-- But wait, there's more: After JM and this woman broke up, JM became interested in another woman. Her job moved to the Bay Area and JM moved with her: she worked for my employer. In the same building as me. Across the corridor.

And if I tell you that I have half a dozen stories like this (like the time in college I worked on a Finnegans Wake metaglossary with two professors: a CS prof named James Joyce and an English professor who turned out to have gone to high school with my father thirty years earlier, and...), you'll begin to understand that I don't find coincidences terribly unrealistic in fiction.

Of course, since I am not an agnostic, they're easy for me to explain as "intended." (Remember Chad Mulligan? "Coincidence (n): You weren't paying attention to the other half of what was going on.")

At any rate, given the one-spaceborne-race-of-giants hypothesis, there is no coincidence involved in the Mother and Great Scylla speaking the same language, or having similar habits.

Is she, like the Scylla of Urth, plotting to take over Blue?

I'd guess rather that she took it over some time ago.

... certainly the Whorl colonists do not seem like any rich prize.

Those who like to rule seek to do so for its own sake and not because the ruled are particularly valuable in themselves.

... this seems to me a little bit like Star Trek, where everybody except the Klingons speak English.

Fussy Trekkish note: They don't; but there's some kind of magic device called a Universal Translator which works so well it's invisible except when the plot calls for it not to work, or for a being so alien it doesn't work right.

And I don't really see any evidence for it.

Well, everyone on Tzadkiel's ship seems to speak Urthish, for what that's worth.

*Any of you Christian scholars know who once claimed that ignoramus was the Latin word for agnostic? I've forgotten.

No, though it sounds like something Newman might have said in a grumpy mood. I'll have to use it myself now 8*)

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