

Pajarocu

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 29 Mar 2001

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Robert Borski — 29 Mar 2001, 20:49

Some random thoughts about Pajarocu, the phantom town.

The name apparently derives from pajarraco, Spanish for 'mysterious bird' (pàjaro = bird), which ties in with Wijzer's little fable about the pajarocu, which "has never been painted and nobody him can see." Wolfe may also be attempting to link Pajarocu, where the inhumis roam with impunity, with Quetzal, the "mysterious bird" of the LONG SUN series. Pajarocu is mysterious because it is not permanently sited, being, in essence, Platonic and portable and difficult to find (more below).

Several reasons have been advanced previously for why the citizens of Pajarocu are not preyed upon by the inhumis. (I still love the beer theory!) Here are three more, plus a modification, that I don't think have been suggested:

1) When Horn finally does manage to find the phantom city, he notes the presence of "colossal images of Hierax, Tartaros, and the rest, called by outlandish sobriquets and the objects of strange, cruel veneration." Given that the people of Pajarocu seem like the Whorlish equivalents of Mesoamericans, I immediately wondered if they practiced human sacrifice, the way the Aztecs did--this perhaps being the "strange, cruel veneration" that Horn mentions, with Xipe Totec and Tlazolteotl (among others) being the aforesaid sobriquets. The sacrificial victims, or their blood, could then be given to the inhumis in exchange for freedom from predation. Unfortunately, there seems to be little evidence of or for this, at least in the narrative that Horn tells.

2) The citizens of Pajarocu suffer terribly from thyroid disease. At least that's how I'm interpreting the following passage: "There is a disease among them that causes the throat to swell. At first I believed it a disease of women only, because the first few sufferers I saw were all women, but He-hold-fire had it, as did various other men." The physical disfigurement involved may be enough to scare the inhumis off, as might the collateral thyroxine deficiency, if iodine is a necessary inhumis nutrient. Sounds to me like a Gahan Wilson or a Farside outtake, with the *sauve* Count Dracula about to take a love bite out of a potential victim, only to discover a monstrous goiter.

3) According to Horn, the phantom city of Pajarocu goes elsewhere when "the streets are badly fouled or the river rises." This ties in with my theory that the inhumis are able to breed in the sewers of Blue. Jahlee claims that the necessary nutrients aren't present, but I believe she's lying; human excrement is eaten by all sorts of animals, and is rich in bilirubin diglucuronide, which the inhumis might actually favor because of its heme moiety. Somehow or other the Pajarocuan may have intuited that the inhumis can breed in foul conditions, and this is why they decamp every time the sewage level builds up, or the river (which may be the local laboratory) floods over; possibly they've even threatened to share the knowledge with the rest of Blue's colonists, resulting in a kind of truce between the two. You don't drink our blood; we don't spread the knowledge about your breeding grounds. Note the achievement of civil engineer

Inclito, who brags about designing better sewers; plus factor in the lesson Horn is supposed to have learned by cleaning the Great Sewer on Green, and it all begins to connect.

4) Then again, perhaps beer IS the answer: if you drink enough of it, as the Pajarocuans apparently do, maybe you just don't realize there are giant flying leeches sucking away your life's essence or you think they're imaginary, like double-trunked, carnation-colored pachyderms.

Robert Borski

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