

Not-So Bad Horn

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 16 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1359>

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Michael Straight — 16 Apr 2001, 17:32

While I agree that Horn has serious flaws, I think you're exaggerating things here to try to make your point.

On Sat, 19 Feb 2000, Allan Lloyd wrote:

Horn is not a terrific father either. I'm sure all of us with teenage kids can sympathise with a father getting annoyed with sulky adolescent sons, but Horn actively hates poor old Sinew, even after he follows him on the long and dangerous journey to Pajoruco. He takes pleasure in shocking his son by showing his relationship with Seawrack. He suspects Sinew of wanting to kill him, and considers killing Sinew himself. He only makes some reconciliation with his son after the fighting on the lander when he is forced to admit that his son has some good qualities.

I'll give you most of this one, but my impression was more that Horn tragically misunderstands his son. It's pretty obvious Sinew loves Horn at some level, but Horn is convinced Sinew hates him and views every action through that belief, imagining malign motives for obvious gestures of love.

What we're missing is how Horn came to view Sinew this way. Near the beginning of OBW, Horn offers Sinew a look through his telescope (or something like that) and remarks "I instantly regretted it. It was always a mistake to show him the least kindness." Apparently Horn feels like his attempts to love Sinew have been consistently rebuffed. How much of that has been Horn's misperception from the beginning, we don't know.

Horn is a careless and violent man, blaming others for his own mistakes. He loses all of the supplies that he was given for his mission, and then violently beats the man who was supposed to be looking after the boat, although he had no proof that he was involved in the theft.

"Loses" them? He asks the guy to watch his boat, and when he comes back his stuff is gone and the guy has no explanation for what happened to it. I can see criticizing Horn for resolving the dispute with violence (though we don't know who threw the first punch) but I can't see faulting Horn for blaming the guy, and it's pretty harsh to call this careless. Naive, maybe.

But worst of all is the savage and brutal rape of Seawrack. His excuse is that he was acting under enchantment from the Siren's song. (I don't see that standing up in a court of law: "Honest, Judge, she was asking for it. She sang at me.") I would argue that, even though Seawrack may have seduced him with her singing, the brutality of the attack comes from Horn's character. It must have been pretty bad if he is advising her not to go swimming afterwards because the bleeding may start again.

I don't think you have enough evidence for an indictment here. Seawrack and the Mother are sufficiently uncanny that it's at least possible Seawrack's song would compel a man to act that way. Even from a distance, it seems to have some sort of maddening effect on that officer Incanto meets defending Blanko. Short of having Seawrack sing for other men and watching what happens, I don't think we can say how much of that incident reflects Horn's own brutality.

(Is Chenille responsible for the things she did when Kypris was possessing her? Is Silk responsible for the things he did under Horn's influence? How much responsibility do people possessed by Mucor bear for their actions? There's a lot of different kinds of mind-control in this series. I don't think we know enough to pass judgment.)

At a minimum, Horn is at fault and bears responsibility for insisting that Seawrack sing for him.

But what does Horn think about the rape? He says that the fault is his own, and he says the song is no excuse, but he does mention it, possibly wanting his readers to excuse him. (Of course this is Silk|Horn writing. Is Silk dragging an honest confession from a rapist who wants to excuse himself, or is Silk finding the true cause behind Horn's attempt to blame himself?)

So, I don't like Horn. This makes his transformation into Silk more noticable and dramatic, and may explain why his character is almost completely erased by the end. I say almost, because the killing of Jahlee at the end of RTTW could have been the emergence of the violent nature of Horn, showing Silk that he was not fully redeemed and not quite the saint that he thought he was.

If the Book of Silk is accurate on this point, Silk has always been quite aware of his own faults and did not think of himself as a saint.

And while Silk|Horn's killing of Jahlee was wrong, I think it's extremely understandable, considering the danger to Nettle and the depth of Jahlee's betrayal. In spite of Silk's contributions to the whole thing, it is amazing that Horn could learn to love as a daughter the creature that almost killed Sinew, leading to a major rift in his marriage to Nettle. To bring Jahlee to Lizard was a huge imposition on Nettle, requiring her to put a lot of trust in Silk and/or Horn. It's not just Silk|Horn's trust in Jahlee that is broken, but Nettle's trust in Silk|Horn.

-Rostrum

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

William Ansley — 17 Apr 2001, 00:28 · follows Michael Straight

At 5:32 PM -0400 4/16/01, Michael Straight wrote:

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I have always been puzzled by this passage. If the guy Horn asked to watch his boat was involved with the robbery, then *Why* did he stick around? In fact, if he wasn't involved in the robbery but had just left the boat unguarded, why did he come back and why did he stick around when he saw that all the stuff had been stolen?

To me, it seems as if the boat-watcher is just guilty of gross stupidity or fecklessness. This may

warrant a beating, but I don't think a good man, or even a man who had any control over his temper, would have given him one.

William Ansley

P.S. Horn does have one very important trait for a violent man to possess. He does seem pretty good at judging who he can beat up. <g>

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