

godlings

The Whorl list — 13 messages, 7 voices, 19 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1374>

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Robert Borski — 19 Apr 2001, 13:20

Rostrum writing:

<I thought the main objection to the godlings is that in Act 1 (New Sun) the author goes into detail about why anything that big would have to live in the sea or collapse under its own weight and then in Act 3 he presents us with such a creature without giving us any hint of how it is possible, or even a sense that we're supposed to see this as a physics-defying miracle (and Typhon/Mainframe's wonders seem to be otherwise technological, unlike the "miraculous" wonders of Severian or Silkhorn's astral travel).>

<(Maybe our hint is in Act 2 at the talus construction plant, but then what do you do with the obvious hints that organic Pig (he eats, his eyes are flesh) is a godling?)>

Would it help to suggest that the term "godling" might be a generic one used by the human Whorlese to connote anything of unusual size, whether it's organic or mechanical? It's never used by anyone in Mainframe if I remember correctly; and the first time it's mentioned by Horn (OBW, 157), it's linked with his supposition that the gods themselves might be giant-sized. ("It may be that our gods did not come among us except by enlightenment and possession because they were too large to do so; even the godlings that they send among the people now are, for the most part, immense.")

I've already argued that the godlings may have originally been designed to host the gods of Mainframe, of course, giving them an alternate *raison d'être*. How better to preserve their prestige and awesome nature than by taking on larger-than-life forms? Surely, whenever he got to where he was going, Pas was not going to spend the rest of his life as a computer entity. And there's evidence in the LS series that the gods of Mainframe can ride not only people and animals, but chems.

Some of you also seem to believe the gravity aboard the Whorl is tantamount to Urth's, but somewhere or other (can't find the actual passage), it's mentioned that any potential departees with cardiac problems would be better advised to stay aboard the Whorl because the strain is less on hearts there. So a giant being of the size that picks up Horn would not be subject to the same forces that preclude such magnitude here. Even if the Whorl's gravity were earth-normal, however, there's the dinosaur parallel--are the godlings really that much bigger than the largest of these? Plus we're also told by Horn that "[The godlings] move slowly," (RTTW, 162) implying that even with reduced gravity, there are constraining forces at work. Hide's dream also contains a doll, "walking slow," which seems at least to me an obvious parallel with Horn's slow-moving godling--implying perhaps that the godling who picks up Horn is indeed a talus. Pig--he's something else--an organic giant created by the same technomagic of Mainframe, only using different components. But I'd argue that neither Pig nor the Brobdinagian who picks up Horn are science-defying miracles, even by our own limited 21st century standards. Just godlings--at least as the inhabitants of the Whorl define them.

Robert Borski

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

Kevin J. Maroney — 19 Apr 2001, 14:46 · follows Robert Borski

At 01:20 PM 4/19/01 -0500, Robert B wrote:

Would it help to suggest that the term "godling" might be a generic one used by the human Whorlese to connote anything of unusual size, whether it's organic or mechanical?

That seems contrary to the idea of "small godlings". If the Narrator is indeed thinking of Pig a small godling, it seems odd to call him that when he's only slightly larger than a normal human. It seems more likely that the term "godling" refers to "constructed servants of Mainframe" regardless of their body type.

Is there textual evidence that the giant godling is a flesh creature? I don't remember seeing any such clues. If they aren't, then the restrictions which apply to the sea giants don't apply to them. (I've made this point before and don't remember anyone commenting on it; please forgive me if I missed a previous response.)

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

Michael Straight — 19 Apr 2001, 16:07 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

On Thu, 19 Apr 2001, Robert Borski wrote:

Would it help to suggest that the term "godling" might be a generic one used by the human Whorlese to connote anything of unusual size, whether it's organic or mechanical?

But one of the main arguments for Pig's demideity ("godlingness"?) is that comment about his ears, suggesting some kind of biological kinship with the big guy.

I've already argued that the godlings may have originally been designed to host the gods of Mainframe, of course, giving them an alternate *raison d'être*. How better to preserve their prestige and awesome nature than by taking on larger-than-life forms? Surely, whenever he got to where he was going, Pas was not going to spend the rest of his life as a computer entity. And there's evidence in the LS series that the gods of Mainframe can ride not only people and animals, but chems.

I agree, but if the godlings' purpose is to carry the gods to Blue, that kind of negates your argument that they can be big because the Whorl's apparent gravity is low.

same forces that preclude such magnitude here. Even if the Whorl's gravity were earth-normal, however, there's the dinosaur parallel--are the godlings really that much bigger than the largest of these?

I can't do the math myself, but I've read discussions of why a bipedal human-type mammal can't be as big as a dinosaur. Maybe with drastically different biology and prosthetic bones and extra hearts to pump the blood around it would be possible. The muscles would probably have to be augmented too.

But the point that the godlings don't seem anywhere near as big as the undines is a good one.

-Rostrum

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

Robert Borski — 19 Apr 2001, 16:51 · follows Michael Straight

Kevin J. Maroney writing:

<That seems contrary to the idea of "small godlings". If the Narrator is indeed thinking of Pig a small godling, it seems odd to call him that when he's only slightly larger than a normal human.>

Guess it depends on how you configure Pig's height. When Horn first encounters him (perhaps significantly the chapter is entitled "Great Pas's Godling"), he is in Silk's body, who is considered tall. Horn subsequently describes how Pig's hands are twice his own size, and at one point how Pig's elbow brushed his ear. My own elbows are located at about the 3/5 mark of my total height (I'm 6'4"), which may mean Pig is as tall as ten feet. Robert Pershing Wadlow--the tallest person ever in history according to Guinness--was only 8' 11". So I'd argue that Pig's height may well fall within the parameters that define "small" godlingness.

Rostrum then arguing:

<But one of the main arguments for Pig's demideity ("godlingness"?) is that comment about his ears, suggesting some kind of biological kinship with the big guy.>

The ear link is almost certainly valid. As is shared eye size and the thick black nails. But to argue this implies biological affinity isn't necessarily so--chimps, after all, resemble human beings (at least superficially) and aren't related to us except as mechanical simulacra.

<I agree, but if the godlings' purpose is to carry the gods to Blue, that kind of negates your argument that they can be big because the Whorl's apparent gravity is low.>

You're right, but only if the giant godling who picks up Horn is organic. In my post I tried to account for how either biological or taluslike godlings might be technologically feasible; my own belief is as I stated: i.e., that the bigger godling is a talus, who, as a mechanical, shouldn't be that impeded by heavier gravities. (Of course, we all know that gravity doesn't work the same way in the Blue-Green system as it does on Earth, since it allows the inhumi to fly from one to another and then back again.<gr>)

Pig, I don't think, even as big as he is, would find it that difficult to maneuver on Blue or Green--plus he may have had modifications like the talents to improve his overall agility.

I'm also on record as stating that I believe the Mother is a godling and meant to host Scylla, but this involves accepting my notion that Pas and the other Mainframe gods are Neighbor-type aliens.

Re yet another discredited theory of mine--that Pig has assassinated Silk in his manse--one of the objections raised is that the structure containing the augur that Pig kills has doors big enough for Pig to go through without kneeling. But manse, according to the OED, also means mansion, and doesn't mansion connote big doors?

Robert Borski

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

James Jordan — 19 Apr 2001, 18:19 · follows Robert Borski

At 04:51 PM 4/19/2001 -0500, you wrote:

I'm also on record as stating that I believe the Mother is a godling and meant to host Scylla, but this involves accepting my notion that Pas and the other Mainframe gods are Neighbor-type aliens.

Surely you don't still maintain this? If so, you should take up the arguments presented against it. Also, since you now say the other mainframe gods are neighbors, what about the very human pre-adolescent Scylla?

Re yet another discredited theory of mine--that Pig has assassinated Silk in his manse

But Pig clearly "sees" that the Narrator is Silk, so how can he think he killed Silk? I just don't think this works.

Robert Borski

Nutria

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

Robert Borski — 19 Apr 2001, 20:46 · follows James Jordan

Nutria dipping his ratty tail into electric ink and writing:

I'm also on record as stating that I believe the Mother is a godling and meant to host Scylla, but this involves accepting my notion that Pas and the other Mainframe gods are Neighbor-type aliens.<<

<Surely you don't still maintain this? If so, you should take up the arguments presented against it. Also, since you now say the other mainframe gods are Neighbors, what about the very human pre-adolescent Scylla? >

Yep. Still do. Such is the strength of my various delusional belief systems, including the one that maintains the Neighbors are capable of shape-shifting. You all don't have to buy it. But it's how I choose to view the book--just as others believe there are ubiquitous Scylla-type aliens scattered throughout the universe or the inhumani can negotiate the vacuum between Blue and Green or that Silk has committed suicide or accidentally bled to death from cuts inflicted during the grieving process. Çaçun yadda yadda yadda. As for Scylla's very human pre-adolescent appearance, let me note that the head of Typhon grafted to Piaton appears human (when in Rome, et cetera), and only the mythic aspect of his name allows us to surmise he is actually an alien. Typhon possibly being able to shift his appearance toward the human is one potential explanation for this; but just as easily he could have had his technicians provide him and his wife and children with humanoid-type features.

Which brings me to yet another unaccepted plot point. Alex David Groce once accused me of conflating Cilinia, Greater Scylla, the Mother, and Mainframe Scylla, and he's absolutely right because I think all four are aspects of the same entity. Sisters of a feather, if you wish to throw in Oreb. And therefore sort of an alien Mother-Daughter-Holy Ghost conglomerate.

<<Re yet another discredited theory of mine--that Pig has assassinated Silk in his manse>>

< But Pig clearly "sees" that the Narrator is Silk, so how can he think he killed Silk? I just don't

think this works. >

But the original human Silk--that is to say the unalloyed Patera Silk we meet in the Long Sun series--or at least his biological housing or meatware--_has_ died, if temporarily, whereas the "person" Pig bonds with is an amalgam of Horn and Silk and Pas downloaded into Silk's body. And Pig himself is clearly a dissembler, never once admitting he's a godling (although the ear remarks in the Mainframe surgery comes close). It's also in his best interests not to say he's killed Silk, since he needs Silk|Horn to help him gain his sight back. Ergo, the semi-factual story he weaves and tells the Narrator.

Robert Borski

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

William Ansley — 20 Apr 2001, 00:27 · follows Robert Borski

I have been thinking about the godlings for a while, but I can't say I have really gotten anywhere. The large one that Horn|Silk encounters is described as having bestial pointed ears, cavernous nostrils, a huge mouth and relatively small eyes. To me this sounds like a fairy-tale ogre. If I look up ogre on a web dictionary

<http://www.yourdictionary.com/>

I see the following etymology:

Etymology: French, probably ultimately from Latin Orcus, god of the underworld

This doesn't seem to get me anywhere except to provide a tiny bit of tenuous support for Robert Borski's "Pig is a vehicle for Tartaros" theory.

Oh, well.

I am not at all sure we can definitely say Pig is a bio and not a chem. Chems are designed to look as much like bios as possible. For example:

At 5:16 PM -0700 4/19/01, maa32 wrote:

Maytera Marble's rusings indicate that she was once covered in flesh (this occurs even before she takes Rose's parts).

I don't think this is quite correct. Chems seem to have a skin of flesh-like plastic when new. This has worn off of Maytera Marble during her long lifetime. The prosthetic hands Marble took from Maytera Rose look like an old lady's hands. But they cannot be covered in flesh since, if I recall correctly, Marble reaches into a sacrificial fire at some point during the Long Sun series (during an Epiphany of Echidna, I think) and her hands (which are Rose's old prosthetic hands at this point) are not harmed.

I assume that new chems must have artificial fingernails and hair if the illusion is to be complete, so Pig would have those if he was a chem. The fact that Silk|Horn's eye is transplanted into Pig really proves nothing; Wolfe treats chem parts and prosthetic parts for bios as interchangeable in the Long and Short Sun series [1]. This should mean that bio parts could serve as prosthetic parts for chems.

One thing I really disagree with is that, if the godlings are chems, they have anything to do with the super-taluses described in Long Sun. (Sorry, alga.)

Taluses were built with cargo technology [2], they were basically tanks with arms. They incorporated an AI chip "brain" that could not be built with cargo technology. There is no evidence that cargo technology could build chems. Even though the fact that godlings were really, really big might make them easier to build in some ways, the fact that they were capable of bipedal locomotion puts them beyond the reach of cargo technology. The taluses didn't have legs at all, they had treads. Even today we can barely build a robot that can "walk like a man." [3]

It seems to make more sense to me that all godlings are bios, even the big ones. This explains the different godling sizes naturally: they grow. If all godlings are chems, then they (probably) cannot grow and are constructed in various sizes for mysterious reasons.

Godlings certainly could be meant as vehicles for the gods of mainframe, but why would they wait to use them until they got to a planet. Even if that was Pas's plan, the rest of his family wasn't following it. Can you see Echina or Scylla passing up the chance to don the body of a gaint and terrorize people, if either of them could?

On the other hand, if the godlings are meant to act as an additional spur to drive people off of the Whorl, they don't seem to be necessary and they certainly don't seem more effective than the droughts and darkness already are.

William Ansley

[1] I still think this is a weak point in the books, although some have defended it. I certainly suppose that might be possible to make robots out of parts that could all serve as replacements for various human organs, but I am sure that the cost of designing and building such robots would be astronomical compared to the cost of building robots that were made of parts that did not all have to be compatible with human biology. I assume Wolfe did this to achieve an effect. It leads to a blurring of boundaries (how human are these chems, do they have souls?) and SF reversals (Jonas replacing his mechanical parts with biological tissue in the New Sun books, Marble taking parts from the dead Rose). Wolfe has a similar confusion in New Sun; among his characters, he has sailors that don't distinguish between sea-going and space-going ships.

[2] The level of technology possessed by the passengers on the Whorl, as opposed to the level of technology possessed by the builders of the Whorl or even it's crew.

[3] You may well say I am arguing as if I still consider the Sun books to be SF, although I said that I had abandoned that belief in an earlier message. That's not exactly what I said but I will admit I took a somewhat disingenuous position to make the rhetorical point that I had problems with RttW that went far beyond its hard-SF quotient.

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Michael Straight — 20 Apr 2001, 08:52 · follows William Ansley

On Fri, 20 Apr 2001, William Ansley wrote:

[1] I still think this is a weak point in the books, although some have defended it. I certainly suppose that might be possible to make robots out of parts that could all serve as replacements for various human organs,

Do we see any chem to human transfers in Long Sun? Or were you just referring to Jonas? Having a robot cannibalize a human's prosthetics for spare parts is not so hard to swallow, but I agree going the other way seems a lot harder.

[3] You may well say I am arguing as if I still consider the Sun books to be SF, although I said that I had abandoned that belief in an earlier message.

The Sun books are SF, they're SF in a universe where miracles happen. But just because some miracles occur (the New Sun, FTL Astral Travel) doesn't mean that everything should be explained as a miracle. For example, just because astral travel is possible, it doesn't follow that robots can use human organs for spare parts.

I feel certain Wolfe wants his readers to be asking, "How did that happen? How does that work?" in an SF sort of way, but at the same time, he gives us a story where the answer to some of those questions is that there is no scientific explanation.

-Rostrum

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James Jordan — 20 Apr 2001, 09:47 · follows Michael Straight

It seems to make more sense to me that all godlings are bios, even the big ones. This explains the different godling sizes naturally: they grow.

William Ansley

Like Baldanders? Any possible connection?

Nutria

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

matthew.malthouse — 20 Apr 2001, 16:01 · follows James Jordan

On 19/04/2001 22:51:26 Robert Borski wrote:
Kevin J. Maroney writing:

<That seems contrary to the idea of "small godlings". If the Narrator is indeed thinking of Pig a small godling, it seems odd to call him that when he's only slightly larger than a normal human.>

Guess it depends on how you configure Pig's height. When Horn first encounters him (perhaps significantly the chapter is entitled "Great Pas's Godling"), he is in Silk's body, who is considered tall. Horn subsequently describes how Pig's hands are twice his own size, and at one point how Pig's elbow brushed his ear. My own elbows are located at about the 3/5 mark of my total height (I'm 6'4"), which may mean Pig is as tall as ten feet. Robert Pershing Wadlow--the tallest person ever in history according to Guinness--was only 8' 11". So I'd argue that Pig's height may well fall within the parameters that define "small" godlingness.

In the thriving scene soon after reaching Viron which I read (in a rather befuddled state) last night there's a comment that Horn would come up to Pig's knees.

It jarred me because although Pig is big nothing intimidated *that* big to me before.

Roughly I'm 70", to the knees is 20" so Horn/Silk might be 2/7 the height of Pig. If H/S were say 6'4" Pig would be 266" or 22 foot 2 inches at which point I go Eek!

The only other passage which I can recall that hints at such height is where Pig and Horn leave

Hyacinth's room an Pig "crawls" through the door. Now the doors in Blood's mansion are not likely to be mean little things but still I hadn't visualised anything like a 20 foot jolly green (if grubby) giant.

Matthew

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

Kevin J. Maroney — 20 Apr 2001, 13:27 · follows matthew.malthouse

At 08:46 PM 4/19/01 -0500, Robert Borski wrote:

...just as others believe ... that Silk has committed suicide or accidentally bled to dead from cuts inflicted during the grieving process.

Does anyone believe the latter? Silk's body is healthy, but his spirit/soul is dying, implies the Neighbor.

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

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 20 Apr 2001, 10:07 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

Der Borgelnuskie wrote:

... [O]thers believe ... that Silk has committed suicide or accidentally bled to dead from cuts inflicted during the grieving process.

As the originator (as far as I know) of the Silk-cut-himself-in- grief hypothesis, I have to point out that this hypothesis does
not involve Silk bleeding to death, accidentally or otherwise.

In fact, I profoundly doubt the value or validity of _any_ theory that involves Silk being (physically) dead at the time Horn "possesses" him. The whole point of what the Neighbor offers Horn is to take a living soul from a dying body and put it into a living body with a dying soul. (My wording; I don't have the text before me.)

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

Kevin J. Maroney — 20 Apr 2001, 13:36 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

At 05:01 PM 4/20/01 +0100, Matthew wrote:

Roughly I'm 70", to the knees is 20" so Horn/Silk might be 2/7 the height of Pig. If H/S were say 6'4" Pig would be 266" or 22 foot 2 inches at which point I go Eeek!

If Pig is 22 feet tall, it's hard to imagine that one of Silk|Horn's eyes would fit into his eye sockets.

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Kitchen Staff Supervisor, New York Review of Science Fiction
<http://www.nyrsf.com>

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