

Nightside; story vs mystery

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 28 Feb 1997

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Ranjit Bhatnagar — 28 Feb 1997, 19:09

Let me ask another question (and this one is prompted by laziness, I fear -- I haven't searched for quotes). What is the shade and how does it work? Is the night sky of Viron dark but lit with the lights of the cities on the other side of the whorl, or is it bright with the sunlight shining on those cities?

The shade seems to be a strip which covers about half the sun, and rotates around the sun so that it's day on one side of the whorl and night on the other. The glare of the sun blocks the view of the other side -- the Skylands -- until shadeup (or shadedown -- now I can't remember which is which). After Silk is knocked out cold by the white-headed bird, he wakes up with the skylands swimming before his eyes (i.e. he's flat on his back). It must be pretty darn bright even at night, but on the other hand it's nearly pitch dark in Mucor's room at night even though she has a window.

In Exodus, the travelers to Mainframe see the thing which makes the shade -- it appears to be blowing opaque smoke or mist out along the axis of the whorl. Presumably, as the whorl rotates around the sun, the shade forms a gentle spiral around it; perhaps the spiral effect is too slight to notice.

Maybe Mainframe distinguishes summer from winter by varying the width of the shade, to emulate the shorter days/longer nights of winter on a planet.

I was wondering today -- is the Whorl long like a cucumber, or fat like a potato? It's gotta be big, with hundreds of cities (Sand or Hammerstone in the tunnels). Silk sees "countless" cities in the skylands, yet only a few are close enough for travel and trade. On the other hand, it's only a few days or weeks by airship to Mainframe. If nearly all the Whorl is visible in the sky but the east pole (or was it west?) is close, that argues for a potato shape.

Why did Wolfe choose to put East/West along the axis, instead of North/South? Just out of perversity, I suppose. The sun rises (shade lowers) in the south (north?), and there's a west pole. If the shade is spiral-shaped, then the sun could rise in the southeast, but nobody ever mentioned a spiral.

I'm a lazy reader; I like an entertaining story without too much work. But I'm also a curious reader; if the puzzles and mysteries are intriguing enough, I'll enjoy puzzling them over. The New Sun and Long Sun books are to me a good balance of story and mystery, though Exodus gets just a bit too mysterious for my tastes. Even if I didn't appreciate any of the symbolism and hidden connections in the Book of the New Sun, I could still enjoy Severian's adventures. Exodus, on the other hand, leaves the reader going "Huh?" The surface story doesn't quite work for me, the Lazy Reader, so the mystery becomes more vital.

- raton

Questions or problems to whorl-owner at lists.best.com