

More Whorl Mysteries

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 10 Jan 1997

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Patri10629 — 10 Jan 1997, 14:47

The Long Sun Books are full of puzzles and mysteries--that's part of their power and charm, I think.

But after having read the series three times I remain mystified/intrigued by these:

1. What purpose did the tour of the Talus factory serve? It happens late in Exodus and seems to lead nowhere--a battle plan that didn't pan out? I wonder what others make of this scene...
2. In the same scene why does Oreb cry out in apparent fear/anxiety at something disturbing that is happening "off screen? I think he says something like "No! NO!" Huh?
3. What is the deception/lie of Maytera Marble which so distressed Silk near the end? Is it ever made explicit?
4. Has anyone else gotten the impression that all the political maneuvering and intrigue, strategems and plots, temporary victories and reprieves--a large portion of the Long Sun story, in fact--amounts to nothing? It's as if "the best laid plans of mice and men..." As if the true purpose and meaning of the whole whorl is unknown to its occupants until the last 100 pages. All this futile spying and scurrying, useless battles and needless bloodshed, border skirmishes and diplomatic bargaining--what a joke! Perhaps this triggers Silk's despair--the dawning realization that His Story wasn't about saving his Manton, wasn't about overthrowing the government, wasn't even about making Peace or saving the whorl--his people and himself have been pawns of a larger scheme--Pas's or The Outsider--Perhaps he's not sure. And perhaps that's why he despairs.

It seems to me a very religious, if not downright Christian take on the true history of humankind--that there is a larger, more profound divine plan hidden beneath the trivial parochial concerns of humans.

It annoys me a bit--but that's part of the pleasure of Wolfe's work, too.

Patrick O'Leary

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CoxRathvon — 11 Jan 1997, 10:38 · follows Patri10629

This is to thank Patrick O'Leary for the recent "Whorl" comments, which seem to me insightful and interesting. (But I wish, Patrick, you'd enlarge upon your closing comment: "It annoys me a bit." I too find Wolfe's work unsettling in many ways--and I do not belong to his religion--but I'd like you to expand on your comment, if you can, to let me see if we're reacting to the same qualities in Wolfe's writing.)

I too am in the midst of my third reading of the "Long Sun" series, and I must say I'm enjoying it more than ever and perhaps understanding it better.

Patrick mentions some particularly mysterious points. He asks:

"Has anyone else gotten the impression that all the political maneuvering and intrigue, stratagems and plots, temporary victories and reprieves--a large portion of the Long Sun story, in fact--amounts to nothing?"

My answer is--yes, very much so, and I agree with Patrick that Silk's hour of despair atop the airship derives in part from this perception of the largely futile surge of history. It's typical, I think, for Wolfe's stories to take place against a backdrop of war, espionage, and political chaos--all of it absorbing and vital to its participants--which however is ultimately pointless when compared to one's search for self or truth or God. Wolfe's vision seems to be that mankind will **always** be thrashing about in politics and war, and that innocent people will be swept up and killed in these endless, bloody tides. If anything, this inevitable social chaos makes the quest for a deeper meaning more precious--and more difficult. Poor Silk is thrown into the midst of a political storm at the very same time that he's shown a path of redemption. It must tear his heart to realize that so many people will perish in the chaos without sharing his vision.

But of course, Silk has some purely personal sorrows in that hour of despair on the airship, and I'm still trying to understand those. One involves Hyacinth and another involves Maytera Marble, as Patrick points out.

Hyacinth, as has been suggested in recent postings here, is almost certain to have done some spying for Crane and Trivigaunte; evidently she and Chenille have not fully divulged to Silk the extent of such activities. But also, it's clear that Kypris used to visit Hyacinth (through the glass at Blood's villa), and is therefore apt to have possessed her and "left a piece" of the goddess with Hyacinth. Does that perhaps explain Hyacinth's ability to overcome a trooper? I'm still not sure and would welcome further suggestions from fellow readers.

As for Maytera Marble, she seems to have lied about her past (she was not Moly after all) in order to marry a soldier. She had good reasons for pursuing happiness in this way, but nevertheless she lied, something Silk finds saddening. I suppose he's struck, in that moment on the airship, at both the futility of politics on a large scale and the frailty of individuals on a small scale.

As for the tour of the talus factory, I think it simply illustrates Silk's determination to do his job as calde. He doesn't know he'll be leaving the whorl in a matter of days, so he's laying military plans that could be effective months in the future. Whether his special-ordered taluses are manufactured in time to be effective in Viron's wars remains unknown--and of course, is ultimately meaningless.

Perhaps I should add that although I do not, as I've said, share Wolfe's Catholicism, I do respond sympathetically to a vision of humanity in which cruel chaos is the rule on a large scale while redemption of some sort is possible on a personal scale. I think the "Long Sun" books explore

this vision in a fascinating way--with a lot of extra twists and turns, of course, of an almost postmodernist literary sort.

Sorry if I've carried on too windily. I'm still working a lot of this out in my own mind. It's great having a forum in which to compare thoughts.

--Henry Rathvon

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