

the mystery of Q

The Whorl list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 12 Jan 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/21>

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CoxRathvon — 12 Jan 1997, 18:53

Patrick wrote: "Anyone else get the feeling that there are fathoms of mystery yet unplumbed in these books? Every time I reread I'm stunned by how Wolfe can couch the most startling revelations in a throwaway bit of dialogue."

I concur heartily on both points. One of the deepest mysteries in the whole four-book series is the blood-drinking Quetzal. I wince to admit it now, but on my first reading of the books, I completely missed a number of what Patrick calls "throwaway" revelations about this inhuman. For example, Mucor refers more than once to "the man who isn't there," and Wolfe casually has Silk misunderstand her; Silk thinks she's referring to Pas (the god who no longer exists). But of course, Mucor must have tried to possess Quetzal and evidently found that instead of a human consciousness for her to inhabit, there was "nothing there"--nothing, at any rate, that she could penetrate.

For another example, the wonderful bird Oreb (who eats eyeballs and who sees more clearly than anyone, as Patrick coyly observes), refers to Quetzal as "Bad thing." But again Wolfe has Silk misunderstand; Silk thinks Oreb is referring to a walking stick, or a hole, or whatever else nearby might be a "thing."

As someone else in this communal letter has asked, how the hell did Quetzal get aboard the Whorl? How old is he really? What are his deepest motives?

Does he befriend Silk only because Silk will bring about the "plan of Pas" and thereby deliver a supply of human food to Blue and Green? Even my third rereading of these books is not helping me answer all these questions.

Speculations from other readers are warmly welcomed!

By the way, I love the name "Quetzal." Not only does it evoke Quetzalcoatl, a rather fearsome serpent god of the Aztecs, but the real-life quetzal of Central America belongs to the "trogon" family--and I have discovered in my handy dictionary that "trogon" comes from a Greek word meaning "gnaw." Very funny, Mr. Wolfe! In addition to all that, there is the alphabetical appeal of the letter Q, the chief letter of question, query, quest, Quixotic, and quiz, among other queer things. It's nice when a name in a story resonates this way.

And finally, I agree with everyone who's cited the line "Then I walked in" as a major shocker. It exploded off the page at me! I wanted to ask myself whether it was a cheap shot, but my mind was too busy reeling, trying to see everything in this new light--which itself answers any question about the line's effectiveness. In short, it just about killed me.

Boy, this is fun!

--Henry Rathvon

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

James Stewart — 12 Jan 1997, 19:13 · follows CoxRathvon

At 11:53 PM 1/12/97 +0000, you wrote:

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I feel like an idiot, where was this line and what was its significance?

By the way, I am new here. Having read the Book of the New Sun and Book of the Long Sun, I was a Wolfe fan.

James A. Stewart

james.stewart at worldnet.att.net

or

jstewart at cougar.colstate.cc.oh.us

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CoxRathvon — 12 Jan 1997, 19:25 · follows James Stewart

To James Stewart: The line in question is actually "At that moment I burst into the room." It occurs on page 282 (the last page of chapter 13) of "Exodus from the Long Sun." Until that moment, the entire story has seemed to have a third-person omniscient narrator. But with this sudden intrusion of an "I," the focus of the narration is jarred. One realizes a couple lines later that the "I" is the boy Horn, and one then sees everything from a new perspective. Some readers, I wager, will consider this sudden narrative shift too gimmicky. As for me, I've always loved surprises.

--Henry Rathvon

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James Stewart — 12 Jan 1997, 20:23 · follows CoxRathvon

At 12:25 AM 1/13/97 +0000, you wrote:

[Posted from Whorl, the mailing list for Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun]

To James Stewart: The line in question is actually "At that moment I burst into the room." It occurs on page 282 (the last page of chapter 13) of "Exodus from the Long Sun." Until that moment, the entire story has seemed to have a third-person omniscient narrator. But with this sudden intrusion of an "I," the focus of the narration is jarred. One realizes a couple lines later that the "I" is the boy Horn, and one then sees everything from a new perspective. Some readers, I wager, will consider this sudden narrative shift too gimmicky. As for me, I've always loved surprises.

Well, I feel a lot less stupid now. I haven't even seen that book yet.

So, does one need to reread the first three to get into the fourth?

By the way, who was Severin's mother--oops, wrong series!

James A. Stewart

james.stewart at worldnet.att.net

or

jstewart at cougar.colstate.cc.oh.us

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Doug Eigsti — 13 Jan 1997, 13:01 · follows James Stewart

[Posted from Whorl, the mailing list for Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun]

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Quetzal is first mentioned in LAKE on page 81.2 (2nd paragraph). On page 86.1 Remora notes that he is fond of beef tea. Remora says "A man can't live on beef tea and air", we now know that he was supplementing his diet with blood.

As someone else in this communal letter has asked, how the hell did Quetzal get aboard the Whorl? How old is he really? What are his deepest motives? Does he befriend Silk only because Silk will bring about the "plan of Pas" and thereby deliver a supply of human food to Blue and Green? Even my third rereading of these books is not helping me answer all these questions. Speculations from other readers are warmly welcomed!

On page 310.1 (I think, I don't have the book on me, only my notes) of NIGHTSIDE Silk remembers that Pike believed that devils entered the Whorl against Pas' will. Silk comes to a different conclusion, to mislead us. I think this is our clue. Quetzal is a Vampire/Pirate that boarded the whorl enroute to some other, closer, planet (everything seems to be in service past its' engineered lifespan) and commenced to corrupt its' original mission and change its' course and destination.

By the way, I love the name "Quetzal." Not only does it evoke Quetzalcoatl, a rather fearsome serpent god of the Aztecs, but the real-life quetzal of Central America belongs to the "trogon" family--and I have discovered in my handy dictionary that "trogon" comes from a Greek word meaning "gnaw." Very funny, Mr. Wolfe! In addition to all that, there is the alphabetical appeal

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