

Ask Gene Wolfe

The Whorl list — 10 messages, 9 voices, 12 May 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/279>

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m.driussi — 12 May 1997, 20:30

Attention ladies and gentlemen, lurkers and larkers, et cetera, et ali, and all ships at sea.

In my regular correspondence with Gene Wolfe I asked him if he would have the time for a round-table interview (about THE BOOK OF THE LONG SUN) by snail mail, composed of questions from the Whorl list audience. He has agreed to this scheme, writing, "Collect some questions and I'll proceed to dodge them."

Okay! So here are the rules: interested parties should individually come up with the one question they would most like to ask and post it to the whorl list asap. I would like to get something in the mail by Friday, so we'll assume that is when the train is leaving the station--the response and the next train would come a few weeks later. Please limit the question to THE BOOK OF THE LONG SUN, and (as we normally do anyway), be sure to cite the text if the question is tied into a particular scene or scenes.

I'm thinking that each person can get in one question per round. (Conditional follow-up questions can probably be appended. I'll judge on a case-by-case basis, so go ahead and include the follow-up if you have it in mind.)

Don't be scared, don't be shy!

=mantis=

Patri10629 — 12 May 1997, 18:08 · follows m.driussi

Patrick O'Leary approaches the sphinx and asks his one question:

Who or What is Oreb?

Michael Richman — 12 May 1997, 23:22 · follows Patri10629

From: m.driussi at genie.com
Subject: (whorl) Ask Gene Wolfe
Date: Mon, 12 May 97 20:30:00 GMT
BestServHost: lists.best.com
Sender: whorl-errors at lists.best.com
Errors-To: whorl-errors at lists.best.com
Reply-To: whorl at lists.best.com
To: whorl at lists.best.com

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

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SUN) by snail mail, composed of questions from the Whorl list audience. He has agreed to this scheme, writing, "Collect some questions and I'll proceed to dodge them."

=mantis=

Gene Wolfe seems to be very fond of pretenses that turn out to be the truth (one might almost call them 'True Lies' if one were extraordinarily brave).

For example, Patera Silk thinks he's only pretending to sabotage the Trigivante Derigible, when in fact instead of cutting off the fuel he's cut off the lubricating oil, causing the engine to freeze. Earlier, he plans to fool the Trigivante general into believing Maytera Mint is alive by setting a place at the table for her, but by the time the dinner begins he's already learned that Mint is in fact alive.

I would like to ask him what is his attraction to situations like this?

Michael Richman
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Kieran Cleary — 13 May 1997, 11:43 · follows Michael Richman

This is like the three wishes problem ("I wish for infinite wishes"). I guess I'd have to ask "What was Typhon's purpose in launching the Whorl and was the Blue/Green system the intended destination?" Somebody will have to arbitrate as to whether that's two questions, but I can't help feeling that Mr. Wolfe will be tricky in his answers.

BTW, Michael Richman: somewhere in tBotNS, Severian says "Have I said that time turns our lies into truth?" referring to a number of similar situations (his armiger disguise which made him seem "a pilgrim bound for some vague northern shrine" amongst them).

Lasrach

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Reusch — 15 May 1997, 07:47 · follows Kieran Cleary

Thank you mantis for arranging this with Gene.

OK, I've got to know. What are Quetzal's motives?

I realize that's a pretty open-ended question, but like Mr. O'Leary, I don't know how or where to make it more specific than that.

Vance

Derek Bell — 15 May 1997, 20:20 · follows Reusch

In message <199705122048.NAA11050 at lists1.best.com>, m.driussi at genie.com writes:

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Ok - in the scene where Silk first meets Kypris, what is the "beam" that she says has not yet been fixed? (This is before Silk goes remembers to complete the "third circuit" and the rest of the exorcism. I can see it as a possible biblical reference - the quote about "removing the beam from your eye", but it a more literal interpretation might be a link with the rest of the Whorl/Mainframe network.)

Derek Bell (a.k.a. Tercel)

Fernando Q. Gouvea — 15 May 1997, 18:11 · follows Derek Bell

OK, here's my question for Gene:

In Horn's "Defence", he writes: "Fewer than I have expected have found fault with Silk's assertion that [Mint] took her warlike character from the Goddess of Love, although it seems implausible to me." What did cause the change in Mint's character?

Fernando Q. Gouvea
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No matter what other nations may say about the United States,
immigration is still the sincerest form of flattery.

m.driussi — 15 May 1997, 22:47 · follows Fernando Q. Gouvea

Reply: Item #3615878 from WHORL at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET01#

Reef and Tercel,

Got the questions. Thanks.

=mantis=

Marcos B. Gouvea — 15 May 1997, 22:30 · follows m.driussi

Gah! I was so busy doing my science fair project that I didn't check my e-mail until now... I would've been disappointed if I had missed this opportunity for some *real* answers to all those mysterious questions. Cutoff is Friday, right? (I hope I hope I hope I hope!)

I don't really want to be attributed with ruining the mysteries of the whorl, and I don't think I've really contributed enough to justify me asking one of the big ones. It's being knawing on me for a while anyway. So, with that in mind, my question is: "Who WAS Blood's father?" I don't think we ever found it out.

Bloody was a baby,
and Rosey was his Ma,

and though she vowed her secrecy,
We should know who was his Pa!

Sorry. Just feeling a little inspired.

In case anyone who hasn't asked their question yet didn't notice, no one's thought of asking whether Blue/Green was St. Anne/Whatever (I haven't read that series yet, so I wouldn't know). Come on, we needed to get all of the biggies! Also, did anyone ask specifically for the five things Mint gave up after she became 15? One final loose strand: At the beginning of Chapter 8 in Calde, Marble/Rose remembers having seen an object in the sky and thinking that it was dirty, causing the soldier nearby to remark "Why don't you dust it?" Was the dirty object the Whorl?

"A memory so remote that it seemed to have lain behind her curved metal skull stirred at this, her third view. Dust flew, as dust always does when something that has remained motionless for a long time moves at last."

Thanks!
---Quill

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Marcos Gouvea-----m_gouvea at colby.edu

Brutha tried to nod, and thought: I'm on everyone's side. It'd be nice if, just for once, someone was on mine.
-- (Terry Pratchett, Small Gods)

Doug Eigsti — 15 May 1997, 22:10 · follows Marcos B. Gouvea
mantis,

It is a daunting proposition to boil down all the variables and uncertainties from the Long Sun into just one question. The Whorl is nearly as grand and unsearchable as our world, peopled with characters toiling away in their quarter oblivious to the grand gambits of unseen forces above. Part of the mystique of the series is the mystery. If I know Gene Wolfe, never met him, he will not give away anything he deems important in an answer to a direct question that he has evaded in 1400 pages of fiction. Such things, it seems, are meant to be an exercise for the reader. I almost feel guilty in hoping that his answers are as elusive and diffuse, and delectable, as his text. I am reminded of LeGuin's THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS where one must take exacting care in drafting one's question else risk getting an unexpected answer. None the less, the offer is irresistible. Here's hopin':

As has been lamented in these postings the publicized link between the NEW SUN and LONG SUN turns out to be tenuous when all is said and done, Typhon/Pas being the only common character. (Scylla seems only to share the common name).
My search for a more robust connection lead me to the story told to Severian by Cyracia of the "race of ancient days [that] reached the stars, and how they bargained away all the wild half of themselves to do so, so they no longer cared for wind...love or lust...songs or any other animal things they believed they had brought with them out of the rain forests at the bottom of time-though in fact, so my uncle told me, those things brought them." (SWORD, Ch.VI, p. 38, paperback). These machines later tried to restore the "wild" thoughts to men, in order to destroy them, by introducing "artifacts of every kind, calculated by them to revive all those thoughts that people had put behind them because they could not be written in numbers". (SWORD, Ch VI, p.39, paperback).

The necessity for having living cultures on the Whorl segregated in city-states, isolated by topographical barriers fortified by Chem armies programmed to be mutually hostile in order to dissuade an organized revolt against Mainframe seems to be an overly complex means of transport, considering that Typhon obviously had access to "sleeper" technology (Mamelta). My question, in a roundabout way: Was the live cargo of the Whorl only put on board to preserve the "wild" half of mankind so the Typhon/Pas entity could establish a vital human vassal state on the destination world, or did the Inhumani require the "wild" parts to satisfy their blood lust?

=Talon=

aka Doug Eigsti