

(blue) Notes from a 2nd reading [SPOILERS]

The Whorl list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 08 Nov 1999

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Kieran Cleary — 08 Nov 1999, 15:25

The following are some scribbles from a second reading of OBW. A mixture of points and questions in no particular order.

Kieran Cleary

IDENTITY CONFUSION

1. "Even Hoof and Horn [sic].....Horn and Hide [sic]" [p.129]
2. "Horn made several [Molpe's dulcimers] for his younger siblings.." [p.139]
3. "I snatched the ball and won the game." [p.381]
4. "...reminding me forcefully of a man named Horn I used to know." [p.309]

MASQUERADING AS SILK

1. "Silk may be here on Blue already, after all.....So I am searching here, although I am the only person in Gaon who could not tell you where to find him. Searching does not necessarily imply movement. Thinking it does, or rather assuming it without thought, may have been my first and worst mistake." [p.18]
2. "They had been told that Silk was here, 'ruling Gaon,' and wished to invite me to rule Skany as well" [p. 147]
3. "Up there I nearly wrote: 'when I was in the schola'. So accustomed have I become to talking in that fashion, as I must." [p.172]
4. "...I told her about you, Nettle, calling you Hyacinth." [p.222]

EVIDENCE OF A METAMORPHOSIS

1. "Marrow is...balder even than I was then." [p.21]
2. "At thirty-five, only a little taller, thick bodied and nearly bald.." [p.65]
3. "My own height...was three cubits and two hands at that time - a good deal less than it is now." [p.196]
4. "...explaining that I...was half blind." [p.225]
5. "Yet they cheered for the one-eyed man with white hair." [p.289]
6. "Saw my own reflection...wild white hair and empty socket, lined and worried old face." [p.281]

INHUMI, GENERAL

1. Sinew was bitten by an inhumana, therefore not by Krait.

"I thought of Sinew, livid and scarcely breathing in the little bed.." [p.198]

"One of you nearly killed my son.'
His head wagged. 'That wasn't me.'" [p.205]

"..the inhuma that bit Sinew." [p.241]

2. What is the issue with the inhumi and tools/technology?

Referring to a boat, "The inhumi do not understand such things, even when they make use of them." [p.350]

Krait cannot use a slug gun:
"I can't use it and you can.." [p. 201]

Krait can, however, sail:
"I stared at...the inhumu at the tiller...'You told me that you couldn't'....'Because I don't know how. I can pull a rope though...'"

Is their use of tools purely mimetic also? They do not appear to have high technology of their own and Pajarocu reminds Krait of an inhumi town.

"What sort of town is [Pajarocu]?'....'It's more like one of ours, Father dear'" [p. 305]

3. Given that the inhumi were once "mindless, hideous, blood drinking animals" [p.372], and assuming that the source of their intelligence is somehow the blood of humans, then was Quetzal originally an 'animal' when he came to the Whorl? I assume that there were no humans in the Blue/Green system before the arrival of the Whorl.

4. Many inhumi will die in "In Green's Jungles"?

"Three dead so far, Jahlee says, but she cannot know of all of those whose lives have been lost."

5. Horn says "I can threaten the inhumi as well as save them." [p.311] Does 'saving' the inhumi refer to anything beyond releasing those buried alive in Gaon?

6. For inhumi, the sky is always black: "The sky I see is always black" [p. 220]. Krait can see the sun: "If you look carefully, you can see the sun on it..." [p.257] Also "The whorl to him is the airless starlit plain..." [p.223]

Their eyes are (only) sensitive to light outside the human visual spectrum? UV, IR? Intriguing possibility of connection with blue glass in the Vanished People ruin on the Island: "I've been trying to figure out how this blue glass works. it's as if it sees more light from the Short Sun than we do and shows it to us." [p. 192]

7. Horn speculates that the inhumi may have skeletons of "cartilage, as those of some sea-creatures" [p.109] while Wijzer says of the inhumi, "Them you cannot drown" [p. 109]. Connection with the sea or red-herring? We know that the inhumi can survive without air (travel through space, survive being buried alive).

VANISHED PEOPLE (VP)

1. Remora suggests that the VP have disappeared underwater: "You came by sea...most of this...foreign whorl....Concealed. You conceive that its former...population dead, eh?" [p.58]

2. Horn's meeting with the VP on Shadelow suggests they moved off-world? "...face lifted to the western stars. 'Some of you call the place where we are the Neighbor Whorl.'" Or is the VP referring to Blue?

3. What is the issue with the VP and names? "My name is Horn also" [p. 272] Reminiscent of the inhumu who do not appear to have names amongst themselves.

4. There is enmity between inhumu and VP. Krait avoids VP: "If you'd like my guess, I think he knew who or what they were and avoided them" [p.259] while the VP kill inhumu: "'Neighbour kill you?' I suggested. He shook his head. 'Kill inhumu.'" [p.263]

5. What happens to Horn after his encounter with the VP on Shadelow?

Reflexes heightened, kills breakbull [p.273]

Trees 'part' for him: "My face and arms...were never scratched again" [p.275]. Also in Gaon "the Neighbours' gift came back to me." [p.300] His strength is increased: "I surprised myself and them by lifting the huge [breakbull's head]" [p.282]

6. Is Seawrack ex-human or VP? "Were those gills the gift of the goddess, or the badge of the original owners of this whorl?" [p. 166] Also "...her legs, which were very long...seemed almost to coil about her. 'She's going back to what she was,' the inhumu told me" [p. 230] Also, on the island with the VP ruin, Seawrack says: "...we'd mend our boats and the walls we'd built for a while..." [p.193]

OPEN QUESTIONS

1. Why didn't Pas put pure seed strains on the landers?

2. How did Mucor swim to the island given that it takes a day to sail there: "It'll take you all day, even with a good wind" [p. 77]

3. Why did the Mother send Seawrack to Horn?

4. What climbed aboard the boat: "Something climbed into our sloop that night.." [p. 161]

5. Why did Krait tell Horn to ask Seawrack to sing for him?

6. For those who lean towards the Green=Lune hypothesis, some tantalising pointers? Of the trees on the island with the ruin, "Mighty trees clung to rocks.." [p.188] Then, "On Green one finds trees...ten times the height of the tallest trees I saw on the island" [p.189] Also, "...Green's monstrous beasts would never be credited....I will have to represent them as...smaller, than they actually are" [p. 324] Does this point to lower gravity on Green?

7. Who or what did Horn see looking into the pit? "Once...it seemed to me that a man with a long nose (a tall man or an immense spider) stood over me....He touched my forehead with something?" [p. 203] Is this just an hallucinated Babbie?

8. Does Horn die in the pit?

9. Krait claims that Seawrack is unreliable: "Most of you lie constantly, as Seawrack does". [p. 307] Also "she talked about her life beneath the sea, of people she had known...(not all or even most of them actual, I believe)" [p.326] So what has Seawrack lied about?

10. Are, as it seems to Horn, the inhumu waiting for him to arrive in Pajarocu before leaving in the lander?

11. Why does Krait need Horn to get to Pajarocu anyway?

12. Why did Krait want Seawrack aboard the lander?

13. Who was in the trees calling for Babbie? "Someone on the shore called again for Babbie" [p.377] And who did Horn find in the forest? "I found him in the forest, sitting in the dark under the trees" [p.378]

HORN'S FAMILY (informed from OBW only)

Father: Smoothbone [p.79]

Siblings: Calf [p.74], various sisters [p.158]

Sister-in-Law: Hop

THESE ARE THE JOKES

Well, for sheer chuckle value, it's got to be when Seawrack starts to call the hus "our Babbie".

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

Alex David Groce — 08 Nov 1999, 13:03 · follows Kieran Cleary

13. Who was in the trees calling for Babbie? "Someone on the shore called again for Babbie" [p.377] And who did Horn find in the forest? "I found him in the forest, sitting in the dark under the trees" [p.378]

Babbie, I think.

Hmmm... This listing makes very clear just how much is hinted at but not answered in OBW. I think that, by comparison, SHADOW OF THE TORTURER left a lot less openly hanging threads to tie together. Most of the major mysteries of NEW SUN were suddenly revealed, things we'd never have expected, doors opened in the walls reshaping our reactions to everything--Vodulus the Autarch's agent, etc. If SHORT SUN follows the same path, then given the level just of the mysteries we expect to be resolved, we're in for some shocks.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

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William H. Ansley — 09 Nov 1999, 00:06 · follows Alex David Groce

"Kieran Cleary" <kieranwn at tinet.ie> wrote:

3. Given that the inhumans were once "mindless, hideous, blood drinking animals" [p.372], and assuming that the source of their intelligence is somehow the blood of humans, then was Quetzal originally an 'animal' when he came to the Whorl? I assume that there were no humans in the Blue/Green system before the arrival of the Whorl.

Not necessarily. Among the items that Dave Lebling found (his list of evidence for Krait's secret) is this:

p. 375: "That's the kind of thing the inhumi must have done before the Vanished People reached Green -- reshaped themselves to look like the animals they hunted ... "

This implies that before the inhumi acquired (more or less) human intelligence by drinking human blood they acquired "Vanished People intelligence" by drinking the blood of the Vanished People. Whether they could take on the Vanished People's appearance as well is another question.

7. Who or what did Horn see looking into the pit? "Once...it seemed to me that a man with a long nose (a tall man or an immense spider) stood over me....He touched my forehead with something?" [p. 203] Is this just an hallucinated Babbie?

This certainly could have been one of the Vanished People. They are tall, seemingly, and four arms and four legs could equal a giant spider. Working against this idea, we have the facts that Horn never described the Vanished People, when he definitely(?) meets them, as having long noses. And you would think that if Horn, in retrospect, recognized this "tall man or an immense spider" as one of the Vanished People, he would have said so.

13. Who was in the trees calling for Babbie? "Someone on the shore called again for Babbie" [p.377] And who did Horn find in the forest? "I found him in the forest, sitting in the dark under the trees" [p.378]

This is one of the oddest sections of the book. My interpretation is that at this point, for whatever reason, Horn's and Babbie's identities become totally confused (or maybe it's just the reader who becomes totally confused). Babbie hears Horn calling his name, but Horn hears it as well, as if he is Babbie. As far as who finds who in the forest, the full passage reads:

I found him in the forest, sitting in the dark under the trees. I could not see him. It was too dark too see anything. But I knelt beside him and laid my head upon his knee, and he comforted me.

I think the pronouns in this passage can be thought to refer (with the exception of "I knelt beside him and laid my head upon his knee") equally well to Babbie or Horn.

The most amazing thing about Kieran Cleary's list is how many questions he leaves out.

Here is one more I could think of without any effort:

What made the fish that Mucor told Horn would be on a flat rock, jump out of the water so Horn could catch them, on page 81? Was it Seawrack?

William Ansley

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Kieran Cleary — 09 Nov 1999, 11:28 · follows William H. Ansley

William H. Ansley wrote:

What made the fish that Mucor told Horn would be on a flat rock, jump out of the water so Horn could catch them, on page 81? Was it Seawrack?<<

This seems likely, especially given the implausability of Mucor swimming to the island on her own. Either Seawrack or some other agent of the Mother. Question is, why has Mucor allied herself with an agent of the Mother?

The most amazing thing about Kieran Cleary's list is how many questions he leaves out.<<

<g> Did I really need to state in advance that the list isn't exhaustive? Just trying to foment some discussion on this strangely quiet list.

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

Urash, Tom — 09 Nov 1999, 10:52 · follows Kieran Cleary

"Kieran Cleary" <kieranwn at tinet.ie> wrote:

7. Who or what did Horn see looking into the pit? "Once...it seemed to me that a man with a long nose (a tall man or an immense spider) stood over me....He touched my forehead with something?" [p. 203] Is this just an hallucinated Babbie?

I keep telling myself this isn't plausible - but, am I the only one getting a creepy feeling reading the above passage and remembering how Severian almost inevitably used the claw by holding it to the forehead? Horn's recuperation seems consistent with others "brought back" by Severian: the bewilderment, amnesia, etc.

Tom Urash