

Bear with me

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 10 Feb 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/779>

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Peter Westlake — 10 Feb 2000, 17:48

On the Urth list, alga wrote:

Happy Birthday, dear Bear!

It was, too! I have just finished reading my best present.

Two things struck me: first, the apparent simplicity of the writing. It reminds me of a drawing of a winter landscape by Rembrandt that I saw once, and of Alusz Iphigenia in Vance's Demon Prince books. It's so well written that the writing is almost transparent; the best word for it that I can come up with is "lucid". Secondly, the *thoroughness* of the experience; all parts of my mind and emotions felt exercised. The story works on all levels; emotional, intellectual, sensual, and probably even spiritual. All this while ostensibly written rather badly! The funny thing is, Horn really isn't a very good writer, but Wolfe is ... yet both wrote the very same book.

Now that I've caught up with all my archived mail, here are some replies, followed by a few speculations, and suggested answers to the questions:

Who bit Sinew when he was a baby?

Why does Krait appear as a boy, not a grown man?

Why is Krait like Sinew, even after preying on many other people?

Why didn't Quetzal think like a little girl?

vizcacha wrote:

At one point Krait remarks that inhumis prey on humans preferentially, because they like human blood better than that of other "cattle." I think this is at least morally suspect on their part. This is worse than humans preferentially eating chimpanzees or dolphins, I think: inhumis show little evidence (so far) of being more intelligent than humans.

Maybe they like being intelligent, especially after experiencing it? After all, none of us would want to become a mindless beast, apart from the occasional zoanthrop.

Alastair Reynolds wrote:

How does Mucor's possession ability work? Maybe I missed something (very likely) but it seems hard to rationalise her talent with an underlying SF-nal explanation, in the usual Wolfe manner. I probably need to re-read TBOTLS...

Straightforward astral projection, surely? Her spirit goes out from her body. Of course, that requires you to accept the existence of a spirit, but that is entirely reasonable in this universe. Likewise, I think that Patera Pike's ghost is the ghost of Patera Pike, that Silk met his parents when his spirit departed his body before he was revived, and that Horn is correct when he talks about his spirit leaving his body for a while in the pit and then returning. He distinguishes this from the incident on Green when he was fatally injured; naturally his spirit didn't return to his body. That's almost a definition of "fatal".

Having spirits be real also avoids the need for downloads from the Mainframe to get Horn into Silk's body, if it really is that.

Narwhal (before he was Narwhal) wrote:

Thoughts on inhumis hibernating and whether or not this is The Secret --

[...]

Like Alga was saying, it's a good idea, and seems rather obvious. However, how would this translate into a secret that would destroy the inhumis?

[...]

I think a slightly better

interpretation than this theory would be that they require a certain amount of warmth or sunlight for energy, like dimetrodons or iguanas,

And we are told that they can't reproduce in the climate[s] of Blue.

however I

don't really see how the colonists could act on that in response to the entire population of inhumis.

No, you would have to reduce the amount of sunlight. Can't imagine how that would happen, or what Blue would be like if you did. As David Lebling wrote: "Subject: (whorl) Black Hole Series -- I hope not!"

Seriously, Pajarocu is pretty cold. Horn is glad of his new fur coat, but Krait flies around quite cheerfully, and it's even colder up in the air with no clothes on. [bearfully resisting the temptation to add ", believe me!"]

Dennis/Endy wrote:

I still don't understand why Krait couldn't mimic the use of the gun and thus fire it.

Recoil! He's too *squishy*!

On elephants: surely no other native creature has its Earth name? It would reduce the impact of "trunks" considerably to find that this wasn't an elephant but another animal of the same name. My spectacles nearly fell off at that one, and they're part of my fur. I like to think something funny is going on. Maybe they aren't really elephants, but I hope they are.

Of course, if Horn looks like Odin, he would need an 8-legged horse.

William Ansley wrote:

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 to 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.

On the very last page, Brother and Sister say they have spoken to the Vanished God in the forest, and Horn tells them about him (!) and "much more besides". I understood it to mean that the Vanished God was the one sitting under the tree.

Rostrum wrote:

On Fri, 15 Oct 1999, Jim Jordan wrote:

We certainly cannot assume that Horn had access to Luke, Acts, and the book of Revelation to use as templates. That would seem to be the doing of the Outsider and, behind him, Wolfe.

Or vice versa.

-Rostrum

Aaaugh! Douglas Hofstadter meets C.S.Lewis meets Ian Watson! A scary thought indeed, though it *would* account for the quality of the writing ...

Other things:

I was very chuffed to see Oreb again! So, where does "The Night Chough" fit in, chronologically? Someone please tell me it's set after Long Sun but before Horn gets back to the Whorl. Does it have shed any light on events in the Long or Short Sun?

Why are the neighbours not illuminated by the fire? Could their cloaks be some really dark colour - darker than black? Is that why they are hard to count if they stand too close together? "How do you count a party of Neighbours? Count the legs and divide by four!"

Can the inhumu *really* fly through space? I don't recall when and how we learn that, but we haven't witnessed one actually doing it. It takes an awful lot of kinetic energy to get to escape velocity, even jumping off a very tall tree in a gale. Maybe the secret is that they can't fly through space at all, and the way to defend Blue against them is to deny them access to landers? As someone points out, rescuing the colonists on Green would be desirable too, though not essential from the point of view of those on Blue in this scenario.

Finally, another idea about the secret. I asked who bit Sinew when he was a baby, why Krait appears as a boy, why he resembles Sinew, and why Quetzal didn't think like a little girl. Here are my suggestions, which definitely fall into the balancing-a-stick- and-trying-to-climb-it class:

- Krait isn't quite full-grown yet; his appearance as a boy reflects his size, age and maturity as an inhumu. Maybe Krait is just a little younger than Sinew, in fact.

- Quetzal didn't think like Teasel, as far as I can see. Nor did Krait stop being like Sinew after feeding on different people; and when did he ever bite Sinew anyway? If he ever did, it was a long time ago. Why would that one personality persist?

In fact, is the blood theory **WRONG**?

- Now, who bit Sinew. Just once, as far as we know. A long time ago, if so.
I suggest that it was Krait's *mother*.

Spectacled Bear.

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