

Horn's body, Green's orbit, and candles

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 02 Apr 2000

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Adam Stephanides — 02 Apr 2000, 14:52

alga wrote:

Since Horn is going to inhabit Silk's body[...]

From reading the archive, this seems to be the consensus. It is clear that Horn is in a new, or at least transformed, body. I have a problem with this body being Silk's, though: if Horn is inhabiting Silk's body, why doesn't he know it? That he doesn't know it is shown by Horn's thoughts on p. 66: Silk "might have landed on some part of Blue remote from us. (This still seems possible to me, as I wrote when I began this straggling history.) ... Here I am in a part of Blue a very considerable distance from New Viron, and hear nothing of Silk; but that means nothing. If he were a hundred leagues east of Gaon and me--or on Shadelow--it would explain everything." From this passage, it seems clear that Horn does not even know whether Silk was on the Whorl when he returned.

It could be argued that Horn is referring to another lander that returned from the _Whorl_ after Horn's revisitation, which Silk might have been on; but the wording of the next-to-last sentence, which implies that Silk is not now at Gaon _or_ New Viron, makes this unlikely. Furthermore, if Horn has Silk's body, and Silk is on Blue, it's presumably in another body, in which case there would be no need to invoke distance to explain why Silk is unknown. (Horn clearly thinks that if Silk is on Blue, he is trying to avoid being found.)

And if Horn knows he is in Silk's body, why doesn't he say so? True, he never explicitly says that he is in a new or transformed body either. But if he were in Silk's body, this would have more relevance, given his frequent references to his failure to find Silk.

Well, we learn about this in OBW. The orbits of the planets are irregular,

I have a great deal of trouble putting together the fragmentary information in OBW on the orbits of Blue and Green. At first I assumed that they orbited each other, like Earth and the Moon or St. Anne and St. Croix (possibly because I'd read the speculation that Blue and Green were St. Anne and St. Croix). But then I read Horn's words on p. 182: "We know that conjunctions with Green occur every sixth year. That interval is determined by the motion of both about the Short Sun." This seems to say that Blue and Green independently orbit the Short Sun, and simply come near to each other in their separate orbits every sixth (Blue) year. And if Green orbited Blue, and conjunction occurred only every six years, that would mean that Green's orbital period around Blue was six times as long as Blue's around the Short Sun, which I doubt would be possible.

But then I came to p. 223, where Horn refers to "the slow circling of the Short Sun and the other, more distant, stars, and the somewhat quicker rising and setting of Green." Unless Horn is being pedantically accurate, this suggests that Green moves significantly with respect to the stars in a single night, something I don't think is compatible with Green being an independent planet with an orbit close to Blue's. And again, on p. 195 when Horn is in the pit, he writes: "I remember seeing Green directly above my upturned face, and later seeing it no longer, but only the innocent stars that had fled before it and returned when it had gone." This also suggests

that Green moves visibly with respect to the stars in a single night. True, it might just be a clumsy way of saying that the stars moved and Green moved with them; but elsewhere Horn's narration is neither clumsy or pedantic. Furthermore, as someone else once pointed out, if Blue and Green's orbits brought them into conjunction as frequently as every six years, they would not be stable: the repeated perturbations from each other's gravity would pull them into new orbits.

I'm not sure what kind of "irregularity" would solve this problem. Neither Blue or Green can have orbits that are too eccentric and remain habitable for humans. The best I can come up with is that Green normally orbits the Short Sun, but every six Blue years makes a sort of figure eight around Blue. I have no idea whether this is even possible, let alone stable, but I suspect it isn't.

and at "confluence," and only then, the inhumi are able to suspend breathing (as in > the burials) long enough to to fly from Blue to Green (and back, presumably).

Has anyone figured out what is the minimum possible distance Green can approach Blue at confluence? Green has to be a lot heavier than the Moon to retain a breathable atmosphere (unlike Lune, presumably, neither the inhumi or the Neighbors have the technology to artificially supply Green with an atmosphere). And while Green's tides are stronger than the Moon's, they aren't so strong as to destroy everything on the coast. I suspect that these two facts, taken together, imply that Green can't approach any closer than the Moon does the Earth, but I haven't done the calculations.

While we're on the subject of science, I just noticed something else. On p. 223 again, Horn says "everyone has seen the flame of a candle disappear in sunlight and knows that the invisible flame will burn a finger." I've never seen this, and I've never even heard of it. Is this true on Earth? If not, is it telling us something about the Short (or Long) Sun? Or just about the candles Horn has seen? Or about Horn's accuracy?

--Adam

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