

These are the jokes, pt. 2; more inhumini mysteries

The Whorl list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 13 Apr 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/819>

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Adam Stephanides — 13 Apr 2000, 09:20

There is very little humor in OBW (a trait it shares with most of Wolfe's books), but a while ago Kieran Cleary posted one humorous bit. Here are two more.

1) On p. 126 Horn refers to the burials alive of inhumini practiced in Gaon as "inhumations." I don't know whether this is an actual word meaning "burials alive" or a coinage by Wolfe on analogy with "exhumation." Either way it's a pun, if a grim one.

2) Recalling his speculations about what had gotten on board the boat and been wounded by Babbie, Horn tells us: "For a moment I thought of the woman I had shot, swimming league upon league after our boat, intent upon revenge. If I were spinning a fireside tale for children here, no doubt it would be so; but I am recounting sober fact, and I knew that any such thing was utterly impossible." (136) In "sober fact," of course, it turns out to have been a beautiful naked woman with gills, living under the sea with a sea-goddess who is training her as a siren. This is a joke by Wolfe, on both himself and Horn, and a good one.

The passage on p. 126 in which "inhumations" are mentioned is a cryptic one, in more ways than one. First, Horn ponders: "Would it be effective for us to dig up one of the recent inhumations and release him to warn the others?" Warn the others of what? Of Horn's threat to reveal Krait's secret, presumably. But what does Horn hope to accomplish by this? We have no clue (this is before the war with Han has even begun). Then Horn briefly speculates that the inhumini may not be "natural creatures," but instead may have been created by the Neighbors! What does Horn know about the inhumini, or the Neighbors, that leads him to entertain this possibility even briefly?

--Adam

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

mark millman — 13 Apr 2000, 15:01 · follows Adam Stephanides

At 09:20 am -0700 on Thursday 13 April 2000, Adam Stephanides
<adamsteph at earthlink.net> wrote:

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It is a grim pun, but it may not be quite as bad as Adam suggests. "Inhumation" means "a burial", but doesn't imply that it's a living burial. Merriam-Webster on-line (at <http://www.m-w.com>) gives:

Main Entry: in·hume
Pronunciation: in-'hyüm
Function: transitive verb
Inflected Form(s): in·humed; in·hum·ing
Etymology: probably from French inhumer, from Medieval
Latin inhumare, from Latin in- + humus earth -- more at
HUMBLE
Date: 1604
: BURY, INTER
- in·hu·ma·tion /'in-hyü-'mA-sh&n/ noun

and the 1913 _Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary_ (at
http://humanities.uchicago.edu/forms_unrest/webster.form.html) has:

Inhumation (Page: 764)
In`hu*ma"tion (?), n. [Cf. F. inhumation.]
1. The act of inhuming or burying; interment.
2. (Old Chem.) The act of burying vessels in warm earth in
order to expose their contents to a steady moderate heat;
the state of being thus exposed.
3. (Med.) Arenation.

Neither dictionary ascribes "inhumation" a connotation of live burial, and I don't recall ever
seeing it used that way.

2) [snipped, sorry]

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cryptic one, in more ways than one. First, Horn ponders: "Would
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Horn hope to accomplish by this? We have no clue (this is before
the war with Han has even begun).

I'd always thought that the inhumu released from his grave would warn
the others of the harsh treatment they'd face in Gaon. No doubt an in- humu forewarned could
avoid capture and burial, but Horn likely hopes that at least some inhumu will avoid Gaon so as
not to face such risks. I don't think that Krait's secret comes into play here.

Then Horn briefly speculates that the inhumu may not be "natural
creatures," but instead may have been created by the Neighbors!
What does Horn know about the inhumu, or the Neighbors, that
leads him to entertain this possibility even briefly?

I suspect that we won't find this out until we read _In Green's Jungles_.

Nacre

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Alastair Reynolds — 17 Apr 2000, 12:32 · follows mark millman
another joke in OBW:

When one of the sailors from Dorp (the community with a Dutch-type feel to it) meets Horn and Seawrack, he addresses Seawrack as "mer-frau" (ie sea-lady). It's a sort of joke because what he actually says, rather than what Horn thinks he says, is presumably the identical sounding "mevrouw" which is simply a polite Dutch way of addressing a woman.

Not hilarious, but worth a mention I thought...

Al

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