

[SPOILERS] In Green's Jungles, first thoughts

The Whorl list — 10 messages, 4 voices, 22 Jul 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/864>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Dan Rabin — 22 Jul 2000, 23:19

Spoiler space courtesy of Christopher Culver:

SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE

Wow, that was smooth! I found the reading to be much easier than in On Blue's Waters, which is odd because the narration is, if anything, more complex. It's amazing, when I think about it after finishing the book, that Wolfe makes a bunch of characters sit around on the brink of war telling each other stories for many chapters. This just happen to fill in the back story and advance the plot at the same time.

It seems pretty daring to me that Wolfe builds up to the recognition scene between Horn/Silk and Auk and Chenille, and then yells "Cut!", only confirming our suspicions in the conversation afterwards back on Blue.

Even withing the conceit that Horn is writing during a war in which he is a leader, he seldom fills us in on events in a straight line. He keeps jumping ahead and back and around. The narration reminds me of the 1970's US TV detective "Columbo", who affected a bumbling, easygoing style to disarm suspects into giving up crucial clues. Behind the bumbling incompetent narrator Horn, who's always remembering something he should have said already, is the ruthlessly analytical Wolfe, who knows *exactly* the conceptual order in which he wants events to be revealed. That order just happens to have only a little to do with the internal flow of time in the story. Perhaps if we reanalyze the narrative in terms of the progress of enlightenment (ours, Horn's, Horn's

interlocutors') the series will turn out to be progressing in a perfectly straight line.

It seems like we're converging on a revelation of Krait's secret at about the rate at which we're approaching Horn's homecoming. I would hazard a guess that there's a third important progression to be tied up: Horn must understand by the end that he *has* brought Silk. I don't know how this fits with the major new twist in IGJ, which is all that spirit travel. In those scenes, the spiritual natures manifest as physical. This would seem to dictate that the spirit (Horn in this case) should be more "real" than the body (Silk's); but we also have to contend with the occasional intrusion of Silk's memories into Horn's consciousness.

Certainly it's becoming clear that Horn/Silk is an extraordinary leader who behaves much like Silk under pressure: brilliant, but wants to resign his position the whole time he's bringing victory.

We should have some very beautiful strangeness lying in wait for us in Return to the Whorl.

-- Dan Rabin

P.S. Has it occurred to anyone else that Silk "sits as the right hand of God"? Couldn't resist--sorry.

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

Adam Stephanides — 23 Jul 2000, 10:29 · follows Dan Rabin

Dan Rabin wrote:

Spoiler space courtesy of Christopher Culver:

SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE

It's amazing, when I think about it after finishing the book, that Wolfe makes a bunch of characters sit around on the brink of war telling each other stories for many chapters.

Of course, we don't (I didn't, anyway) feel any sense of urgency to find out about the war, since it comes out of left field in the story as a whole, and since Horn has very little invested in it. It feels more daring to me that Horn's adventures on Green, which are what I had expected IGJ to be about, are told only in fragments, and the bulk of them are summarized in the eight pages of Horn's second story. My guess is that by doing this, Wolfe is foregrounding the act of narration, as he frequently does elsewhere: the events on Green were so traumatic that Horn can't bring himself to describe them at length.

Behind the bumbling incompetent narrator Horn, who's always remembering something he should have said already, is the ruthlessly analytical Wolfe, who knows **exactly** the conceptual order in which he wants events to be revealed.

In having Horn, Mora and Fava play their "guessing game," it seems to me that Wolfe is teasingly symbolizing the game he is playing with his readers.

I would hazard a guess that there's a third important progression to be tied up: Horn must understand by the end that he **has** brought Silk.

Now that we know how Horn got into Silk's body (assuming it is Silk's) the question I asked about IGJ remains: why doesn't Horn know he's in Silk's body? Why doesn't he recognize whose body is in the grave (assuming it's the obvious person, whose name I'm hiding from accidental readers of this post)? Even if he doesn't recognize Silk's body, didn't he meet anyone on the Whorl who addressed him as Silk? Of course, maybe he does know he's in Silk's body, and is hiding the fact from his readers (while leaving obvious clues). But then why was he continuing the search for Silk at the start of OBW?

Certainly it's becoming clear that Horn/Silk is an extraordinary leader who behaves much like Silk under pressure: brilliant, but wants to resign his position the whole time he's bringing victory.

The Horn of OBW resembles the non-apotheosized Severian: someone who feels strongly, suffers greatly, and is very human, to the point of being unsympathetic. The Horn of IGJ is much more like Silk in more than a physical sense; he's clearly a good man, and a dispenser of wisdom and good counsel, while humbly insisting all the time that he is no such thing. I have to admit that as a protagonist I prefer the first model to the second.

We should have some very beautiful strangeness lying in wait for us in *_Return to the Whorl_*.

It's clear now that revealing the titles of all three books in advance was a trap set by Wolfe for the reader. After reading OBW, I naturally assumed that the other two books would be about the Green and Whorl legs, respectively, of Horn's search for Silk. But little of IGJ takes place on Green, and much of what does occurs on a subsequent visit. In light of this, we can't assume either that the Whorl referred to in "Return to the Whorl" is the Long Sun Whorl, or that if it is, the "return" referred to is that of Horn's quest for Silk.

--Adam

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

Fernando Q. Gouvea — 23 Jul 2000, 12:22 · follows Adam Stephanides

SPOILER SPACE

SPOILER SPACE

SPOILER SPACE

SPOILER SPACE

SPOILER SPACE

[illegible]

Well, I just finished reading IGJ. Cost me a partly sleepless night, it did. I thought this one was even more gripping than OBW, and at times really moving.

To join the conversation...

**** On Sun, 23 Jul 2000 10:29:44 -0700, Adam Stephanides <adamsteph at earthlink.net> said:

Adam> Dan Rabin wrote:

It's amazing, when I think about it after finishing the book, that Wolfe makes a bunch of characters sit around on the brink of war telling each other stories for many chapters.

Adam> Of course, we don't (I didn't, anyway) feel any sense of urgency to Adam> find out about the war, since it comes out of left field in the story Adam> as a whole, and since Horn has very little invested in it.

I didn't react that way at all. The stories reveal some interesting characters, and the characters were deeply involved in the war, so I found that I did care a great deal, though I cared more about Mora and Fava and what would become of them.

I thought that the way Horn ends up telling/not telling us about what happened on Green is quite appropriate. Green is a nightmare world, and the experience gets told in dreams and stories and nightmares, which makes sense.

I was fascinated by the fact that the book really is about Green's Jungles and the hold they have on Horn's memories, which is so great that he can actually, given the proper circumstances, take himself back in a kind of astral projection. The central thread on which the book hangs is the inhum: one or another of them seems to be around all the time, and a lot of the action and talk has to do with them.

I would hazard a guess that there's a third important progression to be tied up: Horn must understand by the end that he *has* brought Silk.

Adam> Now that we know how Horn got into Silk's body (assuming it is Adam> Silk's) the question I asked about IGJ remains: why doesn't Horn know Adam> he's in Silk's body?

My impression is that he does know he is in Silk's body, and maybe even realizes that there has been some mingling of the personalities. But he is not really Silk, just as Fava is not really an inhum, as the "astral projection" sections reveal. Or at least he's not completely Silk: Hide notes that he looks much more like Horn during at least one of the trips. On the other hand, he seems to be going to become Silk in some sense.

It's clear that many of Wolfe's usual themes are going to be important in this series of books too: one who has died and come back changed, the issue of becoming the person you are meant to be, the fact that those who are closest to being truly good are exactly those who feel they are farthest from being good. There's a lot of Christian imagery too, from the "unknown God" of the Neighbors to the Eucharist at the stone table.

Wolfe never ceases to amaze me.

Fernando

Fernando Q. Gouvea
Department of Mathematics Editor, FOCUS and MAA Online
Colby College <http://www.maa.org>
Waterville, ME 04901
fqgouvea at colby.edu <http://www.colby.edu/math>

=====

WHERE CAN THE MATTER BE

Oh, dear, where can the matter be
When it's converted to energy?
There is a slight loss of parity.
Johnny's so long at the fair.

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

Adam Stephanides — 23 Jul 2000, 14:55 · follows Fernando Q. Gouvea

[illegible]

Adam> Now that we know how Horn got into Silk's body (assuming it is
Adam> Silk's) the question I asked about IGJ remains: why doesn't Horn know
^^^

Adam> he's in Silk's body?

But, IIRC, at the start of OBW Horn is looking for Silk by circulating Silk's physical description. Even if Horn believed that Silk's spirit had somehow been transferred to another physical body (as opposed to Mainframe), there's no reason for him to think that this new body would look like Silk's old body.

Fava is really an inhuma, as is Jahlee. Their spirits are human in appearance because they absorb their intelligence and personalities from the humans whose blood they drink.

Why do you see the Neighbors' unknown god [it's lower-case in the book] as Christian? And why, if he is Christian (or even if he isn't) do the Neighbors refuse to tell Horn who he is "for your sake"? Another mystery to ponder until RETURN. Possibly they believe that every race should stick to its own gods; but that's a very un-Christian sentiment (at least un-Wolfe's brand of Christianity).

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

**** On Sun, 23 Jul 2000 14:55:35 -0700, Adam Stephanides <adamsteph at earthlink.net> said:

[illegible]

My impression is that he does know he is in Silk's body

Adam> But, IIRC, at the start of OBW Horn is looking for Silk by
Adam> circulating Silk's physical description. Even if Horn believed that Adam> Silk's spirit had
somehow been transferred to another physical body Adam> (as opposed to Mainframe), there's
no reason for him to think that Adam> this new body would look like Silk's old body.

True, there's something here that's unclear. But it's impossible to imagine that Horn hasn't
looked himself in a mirror!

Fava is not really an inhuman, as the "astral projection" sections
reveal.

Adam> Fava is really an inhuman, as is Jahlee. Their spirits are human in Adam> appearance
because they absorb their intelligence and personalities Adam> from the humans whose blood
they drink.

Yes, of course. I was using "really" in the sense "not physically, but in spirit", just as Horn is
Horn, not physically, but in spirit.

There's a lot of Christian imagery too, from the "unknown God" of the
Neighbors to the Eucharist at the stone table.

Adam> Why do you see the Neighbors' unknown god [it's lower-case in the Adam> book] as
Christian?

My point was just that using the phrase brings in Christian associations and images, not that
one should literally read it as Christian. When St. Paul preached in Athens, according to the
book of Acts, he was disgusted by the polytheism of the Greeks but noted that one of their
temples was dedicated "to an unknown god". In his sermon, he explains that this is the God he
is talking about. So the phrase rings a bell, especially when used in a context where one is
talking about religious contact between two different cultures.

Fernando

Fernando Q. Gouvea
Department of Mathematics Editor, FOCUS and MAA Online
Colby College <http://www.maa.org>
Waterville, ME 04901
fqgouvea at colby.edu <http://www.colby.edu/math>

=====

Money is the root of all wealth.

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

Adam Stephanides — 23 Jul 2000, 23:19 · follows Fernando Q. Gouvea

Fernando Q. Gouvea wrote:

**** On Sun, 23 Jul 2000 14:55:35 -0700, Adam Stephanides <adamsteph at earthlink.net> said:

Adam> Fernando Q. Gouvea wrote:

SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE

SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE
SPOILER SPACE

True, there's something here that's unclear. But it's impossible to imagine that Horn hasn't looked himself in a mirror!

Do they have mirrors on Blue? I don't remember, but the level of technology is low enough that it's possible that they don't. But if they do, it reinforces my point. If Horn were in Silk's body, he should know it. But there's no indication that he does, and some indication that he doesn't.

Fava is not really an inhumana, as the "astral projection" sections reveal.

Adam> Fava is really an inhumana, as is Jahlee. Their spirits are human in
Adam> appearance because they absorb their intelligence and personalities
Adam> from the humans whose blood they drink.

Yes, of course. I was using "really" in the sense "not physically, but in spirit", just as Horn is Horn, not physically, but in spirit.

I realized it was a technicality when I wrote it. But by your reasoning, no inhumi would "really" be inhumi, since presumably they would all appear "in spirit" as whatever species they have absorbed the nature of.

There's a lot of Christian imagery too, from the "unknown God" of the Neighbors to the Eucharist at the stone table.

Adam> Why do you see the Neighbors' unknown god [it's lower-case in the
Adam> book] as Christian?

My point was just that using the phrase brings in Christian associations and images, not that one should literally read it as Christian. When St. Paul preached in Athens, according to the book of Acts, he was disgusted by the polytheism of the Greeks but noted that one of their

temples was dedicated "to an unknown god". In his sermon, he explains that this is the God he is talking about. So the phrase rings a bell, especially when used in a context where one is talking about religious contact between two different cultures.

Ah. That's what I get for presuming to discuss religion in Wolfe without having read the New Testament.

--Adam

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

Fernando Q. Gouvea — 24 Jul 2000, 09:19 · follows Adam Stephanides

**** On Sun, 23 Jul 2000 23:19:09 -0700, Adam Stephanides <adamsteph at earthlink.net> said:

Adam> I realized it was a technicality when I wrote it. But by your
Adam> reasoning, no inhumis would "really" be inhumis, since presumably they Adam> would all appear "in spirit" as whatever species they have absorbed Adam> the nature of.

I haven't made up my mind about this one... Is Wolfe saying that *all* inhumis have essentially human spirits, or that some get to that point after extensive (and friendly) contact with humans? Or is contact with *Silk* necessary? (After all, we have only two points of evidence...)

The inhumis seem to be spiritual (as well as physical) chameleons. One might conjecture that they are all semi-human in spirit, but the slave masters in Green wouldn't be very clearly human while the ones who live in Blue are closer.

Another question: if the inhumis eventually become close copies of those they prey on, shouldn't the inhumis be fighting among themselves now? After all, this characteristic of humanity is strongly emphasized in the book.

On a completely different tack: I'm intrigued by the interlude in Nessus. Given timescales, this would presumably be Severian's time. Of course, the appearance of this bunch of strange people is a trivial event in Nessus, but I keep wondering whether we have seen this event before, or heard hints of it, in the New Sun books.

Fernando

Fernando Q. Gouvea
Department of Mathematics Editor, FOCUS and MAA Online
Colby College <http://www.maa.org>
Waterville, ME 04901
fqgouvea at colby.edu <http://www.colby.edu/math>

=====

Nihilism should commence with oneself.

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

Adam Stephanides — 24 Jul 2000, 20:54 · follows Fernando Q. Gouvea

Fernando Q. Gouvea wrote:

I haven't made up my mind about this one... Is Wolfe saying that *all* inhumis have essentially human spirits, or that some get to that point after extensive (and friendly) contact with humans? Or is contact with *Silk* necessary? (After all, we have only two points of evidence...)

That last possibility hadn't occurred to me, but it's an intriguing one, and seems quite possible in view of Horn's special relationship with inhumis. (He also has a special relationship with the Neighbors, as well as with at least one hus, one night chough and whatever Seawrack is: he really gets around.)

--Adam

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

David Wells — 07 Aug 2000, 14:47 · follows Adam Stephanides

From: "Fernando Q. Gouvea" <fqgouvea at colby.edu>

Date: Sun, 23 Jul 2000 12:22:05 -0400

Hide notes that [Silk] looks much more like Horn during at least one of the trips.

I think that this is simply logical (well, spirit-logical anyway).

His body is 100% Silk. But his spirit is 50% Horn - hence looks more like Horn. Cf. the changed appearance of Oreb's spirit (and, for that matter, those of the inhumis).

I concur with others that Horn knows that he's in Silk's body, but denies "being Silk" because

- basic honesty. He isn't 100% Pure Silk(TM)
- neither he nor the fragment of Silk's spirit within him actually want to try to live up to the legendary status which Silk has attained (The latter is, arguably, rather a selfish motive, although maybe I am unfair in ascribing it to him).

old newt

P.S. Inhumis secret: I don't think anyone has cited this bit yet:

p. 253, SHorn speaking:

"After that [more people being killed] something else will happen, and still more people will die, and the inhumis will come in the night to drink our blood, _carousing upon our hates and fears and lusts_. Seems a fairly explicit statement of the "let's all be virtuous" hypothesis.

P.P.S. Is it possible that the "glamour" of the inhumis - their ability to convince people that they are human beyond the illusions of shape-modification and make-up - was inherited by feeding off the Vanished People? This sort of ability seems right up the VPs' street...

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

Adam Stephanides — 07 Aug 2000, 19:17 · follows David Wells

David Wells wrote:

I concur with others that Horn knows that he's in Silk's body, but denies "being Silk" because

- basic honesty. He isn't 100% Pure Silk(TM)
- neither he nor the fragment of Silk's spirit within him actually want to try to live up to the legendary status which Silk has attained (The latter is, arguably, rather a selfish motive, although maybe I am unfair in ascribing it to him).

But, as I've said before, the problem isn't just that he denies being Silk. It's that he never mentions being in Silk's body, and does things which suggest that he doesn't know where Silk's body is.

P.S. Inhumani secret: I don't think anyone has cited this bit yet:

p. 253, SHorn speaking:

"After that [more people being killed] something else will happen, and still more people will die, and the inhumani will come in the night to drink our blood, _carousing upon our hates and fears and lusts_".

Seems a fairly explicit statement of the "let's all be virtuous" hypothesis.

Horn says elsewhere that our bad behavior makes the inhumani worse. But since he says it, it isn't the secret.

--Adam

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