

Between worlds: inhumu-powered flight

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 29 Aug 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/988>

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Robert Borski — 29 Aug 2000, 14:44

This will probably put me at odds with the usual bunch, but I'd like now to suggest that the entire notion about how the inhumu are able to fly back and forth between Green and Blue is folklore concocted by the scientifically-illiterate colonists.

Consider the following two passages from BLUE:

"The inhumu can fly...They can even fly through the airless vastness of the abyss, passing from Green to Blue, and back to Green, when they are at or near conjunction. I have never understood how that was possible." (180)

This does not stop Horn, however, from speculating thusly:

"By an extreme effort, they could 'jump' out of the great sea of air surrounding the whorl they wished to leave, taking aim at the whorl to which they wished to go. Their aim would not have to be precise, since they would begin to fall toward the whorl they were trying to reach as soon as they neared it. Landers, as I knew even then, must be built so that they will not overheat when they arrive at a new whorl. But landers are much larger than the largest boats, and being constructed almost entirely of metals, they must be much heavier. The inhumu are not bigger than small men, although they appear so large when their wings are spread; and even though they are strong, they are no means heavy. Light objects fall much more slowly than heavy ones, something that anyone may see by dropping a feather as I have just dropped Oreb's here at my desk. The heat that troubles the landers must present no great problems to the inhumu."

Apparently, basic science has never been taught at Horn's schola, and if an equivalent speech were someday made in a George Lukas movie, we'd all be howling our sides off. But by showing us how scientifically naïve Horn is, I believe Wolfe is attempting to suggest that Horn and his fellow colonists do not have the necessary background to see how wildly implausible winged-flight between the two worlds is. "Jumping" so mightily they escape Green's gravitational pull; "falling" toward their new destination; failing to burn up when they hit the new whorl's atmosphere because they're lighter than landers; these are the sorts of speculations an ignorant (if innocent) person makes, but they are definitely not congruent to reality. (Horn does not attempt to explain why an inhumu's blood gases don't boil off in the vacuum of space, but his biology is also suspect; thus his failure to explain correctly the facts of life to Mora, where nutrition and body fat percentage are the primary determinants of menarche.) As for the observation that the inhumu seem more plentiful during a conjunction, I'd like to suggest that this is because the inhumu are simply seeking to exploit a niche created by the giant storms and tidal havoc, and where there may be quite a few displaced persons and ruined, vulnerable buildings; and that the niche is why they migrate, not because the worlds are closer for a crossing.

But if the inhumu don't wing their way across the void, how do they accomplish the transit? mantis has mentioned the landers already, but surely there are not many of these. But what

about the oneiric transport Incanto uses, always undergone, at least so far, with an inhuma at his side? As Krait at one time tells Horn, "Our race is older than yours, and has learned things that you can't even dream of." Could this then be the method by which they access Blue--perhaps appropriated from the Neighbors as a blood secret?

Because no matter which way the feather falls, I'm not buying the wings-across-space theory.

Robert Borski

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

Peter Westlake — 30 Aug 2000, 08:31 · follows Robert Borski

At 14:44 2000-08-29 -0500, Robert Borski wrote:

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I suggested this a while ago, but alga had some evidence that they really could:

Yes, they really can (see LS3, the end). They shut down their breathing. But they can't do it for very long distances, only when the two worlds are at their closest conjunction. They come to Blue to feed (assuming that the Green colonists are not enough for them), but they need to return to Green to breed. Landers are not part of the scenario, as they are not good with tools (Krait pretty much tells us this).

Of course, they do have human slaves, now. I can't look up the passage alga cites until I get home; anyone recall the details?

As for the science, I might believe they could survive re-entry, being able to spread their wings like a parachute, but then how would it be possible to kill them by burning? Horn reports seeing this during his visit to (?)Skano.

Sbearo.

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