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The Whorl list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 30 Aug 2000

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Josh Levitan — 30 Aug 2000, 20:25

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 inhumani 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 inhumani 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 inhumani 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 inhumani."

Apparently, basic science has never been taught at Horn's schola, and if an equivalent speech were someday made in a George Lucas 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 inhumani'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 inhumis seem more plentiful during a conjunction, I'd like to suggest that this is because the inhumis 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 inhumis 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

Then Peter Westlake wrote:

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.

I'm gonna have to agree with Borski on this one. They can fly, and survive buried/in a vacuum. But how the hell can they reach escape velocity and survive re-entry. Horn's explanation is very poor medieval-level science indeed, and it never even occurred to me until Borski pointed it out.

Narwhal

akt — 30 Aug 2000, 20:59 · follows Josh Levitan

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

Your question about reproduction is one I've pondered myself, but mainly in

the Green-Blue-Green transmission route. Do I have this right? An inhuma flies to Blue from Green during a conjunction and then spends the next seven years attempting to slake her blood thirst. During the next conjunction (or the following one?), she returns to Green, where she mates with an inhumu (or might this happen while still on Blue?), reproduces, and the resultant egg incubates in the uv-rich climate of Green until it hatches. (Are there no equatorial hot zones on Blue? Is Green that much closer orbitally to the sun?) This seems to me like an extremely awkward reproductive strategy--even if the inhumi lay multiple eggs. It also means in Krait's case that he must undertake the hazardous hejira to Blue probably during the first conjunction he witnesses, but if he wants to reproduce go back again later. ("Hmmm. Food or sex? Well, you can never be too thin.") Also: how exactly does the blood-to-egg core personality transfer work? If I'm an inhuma, does the first, middle or last person I dine on imprint my offspring? And do the male inhumu's sero-victims contribute nothing?>>>

No, not exactly. Please, some other people look at IGJ 81-83 when Krait is actually telling the Secret. Let's agree: Events of 20 years ago are a big clue; it says so right here. Sinew is, let's say, between 21 and

25. An inhuma bit him as a toddler, dangerously, enough so that he nearly died, maybe because he was so little and she didn't realize that she had taken too much blood. My assumption has always been that conjunction lasts long enough (weeks, months?) that an unhumu(u) could make a round trip, which cuts out the 7-year thing. (And yes, there's plenty of evidence--I'm not going to look up page numbers just now--that they can make the trip at conjunction. Neighbors predated landers.) No, I am sure they can't reproduce on Blue; if they could there would be far more of them on Blue, and it's necessary to the plot to have to have them return.

The other evidence we have is Fava's second tale. But this is puzzling. The baby vampires' birth seems almost exactly like that of baby turtles. How would Krait have the least notion of who Mom was? Is some kind of weird DNA instinct at work, the kind of thing that sends salmon upstream? I had originally thought that the reason Krait seemed so like Sinew to Horn was that Sinew himself was very like Horn--hence the enmity--and that Krait, patterning himself as a younger Horn, became very like Sinew. And this is still an attractive thought. But, reading over p 81-83 again. I realize it must be more than that. Horn seems to think it is more than that, too, though the last sentence of IGJ (such a lovely sentence) soars it into metaphor.

The Secret has something to do with a fertile or gravid inhuma and a human child. Of course, I don't really know that it has to be a child, but it was in this case. Maybe an odd take on the changeling idea?

-alga

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

Alastair Reynolds — 31 Aug 2000, 07:14 · follows akt

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Narwhal

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Me neither, I'm ashamed to say - but Robert is quite right that the muddled "explanation" seems to be a tip-off from Wolfe that all is not quite what it seems.

Al

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