

Blues for Johnny Raven, the sequels

Tony says Thomas had a few other plots ready, but they were all the same story. (Thomas would have said, "Of course! There was only one film noir plot...")

I, on the other hand, found Blues for Johnny Raven endlessly fascinating in ways that had nothing to do with the film noir plot. I want to explore the Loop...

- What do the people in the loop do when they're not "on mike"?
 - Do they have private lives? Or are they in some kind of suspension?
 - Either way, "lives of quiet desperation" might well describe them.
- There is clearly some kind of economy. People (not just characters in the shows) have money--how else can they pay What's-His-Name for ambience? So what is it, and how do they earn it?
- Being part of the show is clearly desperately important to them. How so? What is their relation to the Off-Mike People?
- What is the relationship between the voices/people and the characters they play?
 - Is Johnny Raven a private detective when he's not part of a Plot? And if he is, what about everyone else?
 - What about the people who take whatever parts they can get?
 - Are they all those people?
 - Do they switch?
 - Is there a conflict between who they play and who they are?
- Jessica Rabbit's famous line: "I'm not a bad girl. I'm just drawn that way." Does it apply here?
 - And what would that do to the people involved.
 - (That could be a darn good McGuffin...)

Questions and concepts

The Economics of the Loop

The Ambience Man wouldn't be in business if people couldn't pay him. And they obviously can't pay him in ambience. Therefore there must be some other valuable good. Something that can be used for currency.

So what is it?

What else can you buy with it?

How do you earn it?

Where do you spend it?

Spare time

This brings up the next question. What is the relationship between the world of the shows and the Loop?

What is a Track, and how closely is it related to the Show that's going on in it?

What do you do when there isn't a Plot?

Does Johnny Raven get cases when there isn't a Plot involved? (You certainly get that impression.) Who hires him? What do they need him for? How do they pay him?

Metaphysics

What is the relationship between the Tracks, the Loop, and the Off-Mike People? Who controls whom, or what?

Are the Off-Mike-People regarded as gods? Devils? Both?

Are ordinary Voices aware when they're in a Plot? Or is that another of Johnny's gifts--based on his "outsider" status?

If the latter, then how does the Ambience Man fit in? How does he get ambience to sell? And how do his customers know about it to buy it from him?

If the former, how do you separate the Voice from the Character? And yet you have to--BLUES is the only series where the Fourth Wall is quite this permeable...

Ambience is good. Privacy is good. They are mutually incompatible. The implications there get extremely complicated.

What are life and death in the Loop?

- You obviously can end up in different Tracks, after surviving at least some kinds of death. How does that affect you, the Voice?
- Does that mean something like reincarnation? If so, how aware are you of "past lives"?
- And is there a final death?
 - (Likely--if the Off-Mike actor dies or quits, what happens to YOU?...)
 - Or do you kind of hang around in the background, occasionally returning to repeat your lines when they pull out the tape? (Recordings. Now there's a can of worms...)

Locations

The club Johnny drops by is a Setting--Johnny recognizes it as based on a place that actually existed in Atlanta for a while.

Is it just a Setting? Is everyone there a Character--even the murmurs in the background?

Or is it also a part of the Loop itself? How much overlap? Are the murmurs in the background "actors"?

People who are out enjoying the night? Or are they desperately hoping to be "noticed"? Or all of the above?

Where DO you go to relax if you're a voice on the Loop? Where do you work? Where do you live?

Plots (economics)

A story set in Johnny's track. The Ambience Man hires him to investigate the death of one of his boys.

Can't be more specific yet, because the whole thing would hinge on the economic and other questions above. What can you be robbed of? How did you earn it? How will the killer spend it?

And what happens to you when you die?

Private lives

Johnny investigates a murder in a soap opera. Digging through the convoluted relationships of the show is bad enough. But he also has to dig through the convoluted relationships of the Voices who play the Characters. Which set of relationships is relevant here?

For that matter, which set is real? Or are they both real? And how do they mix?...

Subplot: Johnny Raven, Homewrecker

Johnny has to have a cover while he's here (not everybody knows the investigation is underway). So they write him into the present storyline--as an out-of-town relative of one of the ladies, here on business.

Well, you know what goes on in those soap operas. And so do they. And Raven came out of nowhere, with no warning. Every man on the Track is convinced the New Guy's here to wreck HIS home.

Cue fight scenes.

And every man's woman is convinced he's here to wreck HER home. And since this is a soap opera, quite a few wouldn't mind that at all.

Cue awkwardness.

His "cousin" is as interested as any of them. And she can't make a move--he's her "COUSIN," for cryin' out loud.

Cue friction. Lots of it.

Being the dark handsome brooding outsider never looked so bad...

Villain and motive

The victim was the "new bad boy" who'd just arrived on the show. He was already making moves on Mrs. J, who wasn't at all unwilling.

The murderer was Mrs. J. Or, more accurately, Mrs. J's Voice.

There was a disconnect between the Plot and the Voice's actual personality. She's a sweet, loving, loyal young woman. And the Plot required her to be a slut.

See "HAL 9000."

Crossover

Johnny Raven investigates a murderous stalker roaming the corridors of a great starship.

Doctor Bishop is the ship's Chief Medical Officer--a grumbly but likeable fellow who dispenses miracle cures and sage advice between philosophical arguments with the Chief Engineer. Everyone aboard loves him.

So why is he in terror of his life? Who has made two attempts to kill him--so far? And why is Security always one step behind the attacker?

Everybody loves him. Here. But Johnny knows that voice. And so would a lot of other people--if they could notice things the way he does (some do, occasionally). And if they came here after being murdered by the villains he's played in a dozen different gangster shows.

What is the relationship between a Voice and the Characters he plays? Is Doctor Bishop just Doctor Bishop? Or is he also responsible for the crimes committed by people who happen to sound just like him?

And whether he is responsible or not, does someone aboard think he is? And are his victims still his victims--here? Is revenge for a murder in another Track a motive for murder in this one?

Or might it be self defense?

And why the hell did the Writers get off on this goddam psychological/philosophical kick? Didn't he have enough trouble on his own Track??!!

Characters (not entirely serious)

This is obviously a STAR TREK knockoff. But the story is a serious one. So maybe I'll have to play all this straight. Darn it...

- **Captain Geoffrey Churchill**

A middle-aged man of immense dignity and military gravitas. With an understated but clearly-there French accent (think Louis Jourdan). And a tendency to quote Voltaire and a taste for cafe au lait.

Of course he's British. Why do you ask?

- **Hfraah**

An eight-foot-tall biped that vaguely resembles an Appaloosa grizzly bear. With a voice to match. Yeah, I'm trying for Wookie or (better yet) Kzin.

He's the ship's Hospitality Officer. He greets visitors and makes them feel at ease.

- **Rhea Shelly**

Five foot two, 100 lbs, and cute as a button, with a cheerful Shirley-Temple-esque voice.

Chief of security. "I can yell 'ki-yai!' as well as anyone on this ship. What else do I need?"

(This may be the only one I use. That one-liner is a clue. She's more "media-savvy" than most Loop-residents are.

(Turns out she's the stalker. The only one who remembers Dr. Bishop from another Track--where he was a major villain, who murdered her in a gruesome fashion.

(Perhaps she only sort-of remembers him. Something about him gives her nightmares. And in her nightmares she hunts him--through ship's corridors that look strangely like alleyways...)

Bits

Little things that might make a scene sometime...

The Androcles moment

Johnny gets an important clue--or a timely rescue--from someone who just shows up out of the blue. He wasn't really part of the Plot--he just stepped in.

Johnny likes to spread the ambience around. He talks to the extras, gives them a moment in the foreground whenever he can. This time it mattered, because someone remembered. Someone for whom that casual toss-off long aag made the difference. The difference between an occasional bit part and a lifetime of scratchy off-mike phone calls and indistinct murmurs in the background...

Possible "powers"

Johnny Raven doesn't belong here. That is a major disadvantage, sometimes. But sometimes it's a huge advantage.

Below are a few things he can do--simply because he can imagine doing them. He almost never does--becoming a Wizard of the Loop would almost certainly attract the wrong kind of attention. Perhaps even from the Off Mike People. And that ups the danger from life-threatening to downright existential.

But occasionally he will pull one of these stunts. Usually as a desperation measure. And in as low-profile a manner as he can manage...

- **Alter exposition**

What he suggested to Miss Kinsolving is within his power. And he's almost the only one who can do it. Not because he has some strange power, but because he can imagine it at all.

- **LISTEN!**

As Miss Kinsolving said, nobody pays attention. If they did, they'd never do anything else. They treat it like a fish does water. They would never think of listening to it AS SUCH.

But Johnny would. And occasionally does.

If you know the exposition is reality, and you listen very hard, you can learn all sorts of things...

- **The reality behind**

The voices are voices. The Loop and its settings are real to them, but they have no idea what those settings represent. Gloria Kinsolving is a gorgeous redhead. But does she know what red hair is?

Johnny does. That might make a difference, at just the right moment...

- **Know voices**

Like the kid in THE LAST ACTION HERO, who knew the cop was crooked because that actor ALWAYS plays treacherous bad guys.

The Voices don't seem to know each other most of the time, outside the context of their Tracks. ("Crossover," if it's written, would be based on a rare exception). Johnny does. Sometimes it helps...

- **Exposition**

In BLUES, Johnny establishes that exposition is a "real thing" in the Loop. Everyone is constantly narrating their lives, and most of them never notice it. It kind of "soaks in" and provides the setting for their interactions.

He scares the daylights out of Gloria Kinsolving when he points out that her beauty might not be real. What if he'd changed the exposition? Would that change her identity? Phenomenology is a terrifying thing in a world where everyone defines everyone else's existence...