

(no subject)

The Urth list — 13 messages, 8 voices, 26 Nov 2012

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6314>

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Lee Berman — 26 Nov 2012, 13:39

Jeff Wilson: And the secret is only that we torturers obey.

the badger: For some reason I want to believe that there's something else, something esoteric ...

I agree with badger that this is too broad and simplistic. I agree with Jeff that this is, in some fashion, "the secret" that Master Gurloes imparted but there is more to it that we are supposed to derive.

When talking to Dorcas, Severian provides an elaborate, well-thought out justification for why his job as torturer is necessary. Yet when given Autarchial powers, one of Severian's first acts is to abolish the guild.

M. Andre-Druissi has provided an nice framework for showing how BotNS tracks Gene Wolfe's life up to that point, including his military service in Korea. I wonder if the "secret" of the torturers might relate to something personal that happened to Gene Wolfe; perhaps something he was ordered to do as a soldier.

(this is in keeping with my interpretive notion that BotNS is written at numerous levels- fictional/ narrative, mytho-religious, socio-political and autobiographical. So when a gap appears at the narrative level, the answer may be found by extrapolation at one or more of the other levels)

I think this torturer guild secret is in direct parallel with the secret of the Inhum. There also, we are told of a secret which will not be revealed. Later we apparently are told the secret but it seems so vague and general it seems there must be more to it.

nate jarvis — 26 Nov 2012, 14:06 · in reply to Lee Berman

I think this torturer guild secret is in direct parallel with the secret of the Inhum. There also, we are told of a secret which will not be revealed. Later we apparently are told the secret but it seems so vague and general it seems there must be more to it. </Lee Berman>

I've been wondering if the inhum's secret isn't that, if once given consent to drink from a human, they then require consent to drink from a human. It's the only thing I've thought of thus far that seems to offer a practical threat to the inhum if revealed, but when I read BotSS it felt like an old secret, so unless it's something they discovered from interactions with the Neighbors than it wouldn't satisfy in that regard.

Nate.

Jeff Wilson — 26 Nov 2012, 20:24 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 11/26/2012 7:39 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

Jeff Wilson: And the secret is only that we torturers obey.

the badger: For some reason I want to believe that there's something else, something esoteric ...

I agree with badger that this is too broad and simplistic. I agree with Jeff that this is, in some fashion, "the secret" that Master Gurloes imparted but there is more to it that we are supposed to derive.

I think it's more about the contrariness of being the lowest of the low, that they purposefully put themselves at the bottom of the heap because they have no scruples about what they will do for the Autarch, which also makes them the most trusted and valued. This may be what is qualitatively different from the other guilds' mystery.

When talking to Dorcas, Severian provides an elaborate, well-thought out justification for why his job as torturer is necessary. Yet when given Autarchial powers, one of Severian's first acts is to abolish the guild.

Sev has also had a religious awakening about this time, and realizes that the party line that he presents to Dorcas makes perfect sense as a justification for a secular autocrat to ordain a guild of torturers, but such a thing is abhorrent to the Increate and anyone who truly follows Him.

I don't know that he literally abolishes the guild (he still speaks of the masters by title), or perhaps removes the license to perform torture from their charter, reducing them to jailers and executioners.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 26 Nov 2012, 21:12 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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All Severian says on the subject is that he "reforms" the Guild.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 27 Nov 2012, 20:21 · in reply to nate jarvis

From: nate jarvis <natejarv at gmail.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Monday, November 26, 2012 9:06 AM
Subject: Re: (urth) (no subject)

I think this torturer guild secret is in direct parallel with the

secret of the Inhumans. There also, we are told of a secret which will not be revealed. Later we apparently are told the secret but it seems so vague and general it seems there must be more to it.
</Lee Berman>

I've been wondering if the Inhumans' secret isn't that, if once given consent to drink from a human, they then require consent to drink from a human. It's the only thing I've thought of thus far that seems to offer a practical threat to the Inhumans if revealed, but when I read BotSS it felt like an old secret, so unless it's something they discovered from interactions with the Neighbors than it wouldn't satisfy in that regard.

Nate.

This reminds me of the way the torturers treat their "clients" as honored guests, giving them a tour of the torture chambers and so on. Of course the whole setup is staged for their own purposes and the whole point is that their victims are there against their will. (Similarly, in Tracking Song much is made of the respect the tribes have for those they kill and eat.) But Severian goes on about how people often trade scrolls to avoid their own fate and voluntarily take on another's; he also seems to imply that most people are in some sense brought there because of decisions they have made, although I don't think he goes so far as to propose any kind of "consent to be tortured." On the other hand, if there is a "consent to be governed," maybe there is a "consent to be governed badly," i.e., that we get the kind of government we deserve.

In short, not only does this sound very much like a concern of Wolfe's but it's also how he might approach it. And of course there is the idea that no vampire may enter your house until he is invited.

Jerry Friedman — 28 Nov 2012, 02:06 · in reply to nate jarvis

From: nate jarvis natejarv at gmail.com

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As far as I can tell, Wolfe's answer does offer a practical threat to the Inhumans. If the people on Blue and Green were non-parasitic, the Inhumans couldn't parasitize them, and if the people were honest, the Inhumans would be honest and couldn't deceive them. Then Inhumans preying on people would stop, and the next generation would have only animal intelligence, at which point people could wipe them out (or keep a few in parks and zoos).

Jerry Friedman

David Stockhoff — 28 Nov 2012, 02:46 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 11/27/2012 9:06 PM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

From: nate jarvis natejarv at gmail.com

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a human. It's the only thing I've thought of thus far that seems to offer a practical threat to the inhumans if revealed, but when I read BotSS it felt like `and_old_secret`, so unless it's something they discovered from interactions with the Neighbors than it wouldn't satisfy in that regard.

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On the other hand, is that really a threat to them? We already know that violence and addiction etc. harm us. Inhumans would hardly threaten us enough that we'd see such an advantage to wiping them out that we would stop being dishonest for even as long as it took to destroy the motherships in Independence Day. We're just a dishonest species. So I'd call it more of a theoretical threat.

Still, it's something they'd want to keep a secret.

nate jarvis — 28 Nov 2012, 03:40 · in reply to David Stockhoff

If everyone on Earth stops having sex or doing needle drugs for what? a year? then we all go and get AIDS tests, then AIDS is cured.

THAT sounds more likely than everyone being nice to one another to wipe out vampire-like monsters they'd rather lynch.

Horn seems to feel if he revealed the secret it would spell trouble for the inhumans as well.

Nate.

Jerry Friedman — 28 Nov 2012, 23:18 · in reply to nate jarvis

From: nate jarvis <natejarv at gmail.com>

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Thanks to Andrew Mason for pointing out the "too heavy for our hands" line, which I'd forgotten.

Also, even if one person or a few people start treating others better, it would be bad for the inhumans. And it would help others treat each other better, which in turn would help others. In particular, if people raised their children better, the children would grow into better people, and so forth--and I don't need to say that parents' effects on their children are an important theme of BotSS. I think Wolfe wants us to picture this and connect people's effect on the inhumans to parents' effect on their children.

(What would happen if an inhumu got the Rajan's personality or spirit or ka or whatever they get?)

On the subject of Wolfe recommending an impossible spreading transformation of society, let me quote some non-fiction, "The Best Introduction to the Mountains":

"He [Tolkien] uncovered a forgotten wisdom among the barbarian tribes who had proved (against all expectation) strong enough to overpower the glorious civilizations of Greece and Rome; and he had not only uncovered but understood it. He understood that their strength -- the irresistible strength that had smashed the legions -- had been the product of that wisdom, which has now been ebbing away bit by bit for a thousand years.

"Having learned that, he created in Middle-earth a means of displaying it in the clearest and most favourable possible light. Its reintroduction would be small -- just three books among the overwhelming flood of books published every year -- but as large as he could make it; and he was very conscious (no man has been more conscious of it than he) that an entire forest might spring from a handful of seed. What he did, then, was to plant in my consciousness and yours the truth that society need not be as we see it around us.

[Government chains us.]

"It need not be so. We might have a society in which the laws were few and just, simple, permanent, and familiar to everyone -- a society in which everyone stood shoulder-to-shoulder because everyone lived by the same changeless rules, and everyone knew what those rules were. When we had it, we would also have a society in which the lack of wealth was not reason for resentment but a spur to ambition, and in which wealth was not a cause for self-indulgence but a call to service. We had it once, and some time in this third millennium we shall have it again..."

Jerry Friedman

Daniel Petersen — 28 Nov 2012, 23:30 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

Very good. We need to see more application of his essay on Tolkien to his own works. It's easy to get so lost in his intricacies and tensions that we lose sight that the works do, in some fashion, 'argue' for certain moral and political beliefs and practices. I actually think Short Sun is one of the more 'obvious' examples, perhaps often missed because it is also one of the densest and most elliptical. (I would add that his parent-child dynamic is rich and poignant - not 'sermonic', in the negative sense - so whatever your politics you can *feel *some of the good familial pathos and be freshly 'sensitized' if nothing else.)

-DOJP

On Wed, Nov 28, 2012 at 11:18 PM, Jerry Friedman

<jerry_friedman at yahoo.com> wrote:

From: nate jarvis <natejarv at gmail.com>

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Jerry Friedman

David Stockhoff — 29 Nov 2012, 00:01 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

There is always that one particular example of the Best Human, whom I shall not name here. But as long as his example persists, there is hope. That's Wolfe's hidden point. (The unlikelihood of it is a separate point.)

On 11/28/2012 6:18 PM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

(What would happen if an inhumani got the Rajan's personality or spirit or ka or whatever they get?)

Jerry Friedman — 29 Nov 2012, 00:28 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

From: Jerry Friedman jerry_friedman at yahoo.com

...

(What would happen if an inhumu got the Rajan's personality or spirit or ka or whatever they get?)

...

Before anybody says anything, hasn't someone argued here that the Rajan was an inhumu at some point, and that's how his whatever got into Silk's body or something?

Jerry

António Pedro Marques — 29 Nov 2012, 02:31 · in reply to nate jarvis

About the only thing I think about the SoTH is that it must be something of relevance for the reader. It can't be just some nifty industrial secret.