

The Secret: how dangerous, really?

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 27 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1412>

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Adam Stephanides — 27 Apr 2001, 09:16

An apparently very strong objection to the Golden Rule as the means by which the Secret can be used against the inhumani (either by protection or conversion) is "how can the inhumani, knowing the humans as they do, believe that humans could ever love one another as themselves?" But nobody, afaik, has suggested any other theory which the inhumani would think practical but is actually impractical.

I can see two solutions to this dilemma, both relying upon Horn being mistaken.

1. Horn is mistaken in thinking that the inhumani fear that the Secret can be used to destroy them. He thinks that this is how he controlled the inhumani in Gaon. But Jahlee never says so, nor does any other inhumani, iirc. Rereading Jahlee's first appearance, it's quite possible that Jahlee promises to obey Horn because she is already in love with him. And the other inhumani might obey him because of his promise to free the other buried inhumani. In fact, he says as much: "Our inhumani do as I ask because I have continued to free others...I have promised over and over to give them the location of the remaining interments" (OBW, 344)

Moreover, if the inhumani are really so terrified of the Secret, why do the ones who follow Horn and Evensong refrain from killing Horn, as they apparently do (Horn's words to Hide to the contrary)? They could kill him at practically any time after he leaves Gaon, for that matter.

This idea had occurred to me before, but I rejected it on the grounds that Horn could not have gotten the idea that the Secret could destroy the inhumani without Krait having told him. But I now think this is not an insuperable objection. Horn tells Evensong: "He [Krait] didn't intend to give me power over them, you understand....For a long, long time I didn't realize what he had done either. If I'd understood the power of Krait's secret while Sinew and I were on Green, things might have gone differently." (OBW, 374) In light of this statement, it could well be that Krait had merely told Horn that it was a secret the inhumani didn't want known, without saying why; and that Horn, pondering on why the inhumani wanted it kept secret, had later concluded on his own that it was because the Secret could be used to destroy the inhumani.

If this is true, then why do the inhumani want the Secret kept secret? Here I return to an idea proposed earlier by someone else, that the inhumani wanted it kept Secret because of the shame it brought on them. (Apologies for not remembering who, but the latest volume of the archives is too big for me to access.) The original proposer argued that this was how to destroy the inhumani, which was wrong; but it may well be the reason why the inhumani don't want the Secret known.

2. Horn is mistaken in thinking that the Secret cannot be used. The key to applying the Secret is protecting everybody, and 100% protection is not necessary (see my previous post). Moreover, it may well be the case that the blood taken by an inhumani only preserves its spirit-conferring properties for a few months or less, and that the inhumani would have to return to Green to spawn within this time. If this is true, then it's not necessary to provide protection all the time,

only during conjunction and for a few months before. In this case, a strong ruler could enforce protective measures out of self-interest, without everybody having to love everybody else. Horn dismisses this possibility because of his pessimism over human nature, but that doesn't necessarily mean he's correct.

Horn's belief that the Secret cannot be used may also in part be another instance of avoiding looking at what is too painful. If the Secret can be used, then he has to either betray his "son" Krait by breaking his oath, or betray humanity by hiding the Secret. By convincing himself that the Secret can't be used, he avoids this dilemma.

--Adam

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