

The secret of the inhumu, again

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 06 Nov 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/710>

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William H. Ansley — 06 Nov 1999, 01:16

"Roberson, John" <RobersonJ at bek.com> wrote:

I'm new to the Whorl and would like to discuss OBW, but don't know whether everyone has read it yet, so SPOILER WARNING regarding the questions below.

Although it's really not my place to say so, welcome to the discussion.

Once again, Gene is playing identity games with us regarding Horn.

[a lot of stuff omitted]

There has been some discussion of this already. You might want to read the list archives, starting September 24, which is when the discussion of _On Blue's Water's_ really began. (You can use the URL <<http://www.moonmilk.com/whorl/>>, added to the end of every message posted to this list, to get to the archives.)

The discussion has died down to almost nothing recently for no particular reason (unless it is in protest to my recent attempt at humor).

Also, does anyone care to speculate about the secret of the inhumu? It would seem that their chameleon-like body-shaping goes even further to imitating the intelligence and anger/hatred of man for them and other men. There is a passage to the effect that if humans would only be more caring, then the inhumu would revert back to beasts in the jungle. Also, Krait becomes more like Horn and Horn's son as Horn begins relating to him as his son by proxy. If people only loved one another, does this mean that inhumu would be unable to prey on them and eventually slink back into the jungles of Green? It would appear in the Long Sun series that Quetzal absorbed some of the benign aspects of their religion while masquerading as a human and Prolocutor.

As a matter of fact, I would. There has been some discussion of this already, which you can find on the archives, too. I have been meaning to post about this, because I don't completely agree with what has already been said on the subject.

I will quote the relevant postings below (I have inserted an additional "Horn's hint" in among those in Dave Lebling's list. By the way Dave, thanks for all the work you put in on collecting the "Krait's secret" references.):

David_Lebling at avid.com (Dave Lebling) wrote:

As promised, these are hints Horn gives us about the inhumu's secret:

p. 217: The inhumu had told me that we human beings were the cattle of his kind.

They drink our blood in preference to the blood of animals merely because they prefer it (this is what he said) ...

[William Ansley] p. 241: ...I would cheerfully have burned or buried the inhumu that bit Sinew when we were living in the tent. They are vile creatures, exactly as Hari Mau says; but how can

they help it, when we are as we are? I wish sometimes that Krait had not told me.

p. 315: He [Mehman] and Evensong waited outside while I explained what I had learned from Krait on Green. ... "Will you do whatever we tell you, if I release you?" I asked the inhumani. "Or shall I make good on my threat?" ... "I warn you, if you will not I am going to spread my knowledge everywhere."

p. 317: "It's just occurred to me that you inhumi are rather like a kind of lizard I've noticed in my garden. It can change colors ... While I acknowledge that you inhumi are a much higher form of life, it seems to me that the principle is about the same." ... She only nodded. "You are correct, Rajan."

p. 350: "If only we protected one another, they would all be idiots or worse. As it is, they always get enough to keep them going."

p. 372: "I couldn't kill them here and now, if that's what you mean; but I know how they might be returned to the mere vermin that they once were -- mindless, hideous, blood-drinking animals seeking their prey in Green's jungles."

p. 374: "Krait told me why they have to have it as he lay dying. ... He was thinking of the thing that linked him to me, and me to him -- of the bond of blood between us."

p. 375: "That's the kind of thing the inhumi must have done before the Vanished People reached Green -- reshaped themselves to look like the animals they hunted ... "
"If only we cared about each other sufficiently. If only all of us loved all the others enough, they would go back to that. They would still think them horrible creatures, and they would still be dangerous, as the crocodiles in this lower river water are. But they would be no worse."

There may be others that I've missed, of course, particularly any that are early in the book.

I think the foregoing fits pretty well with the theory that it is only by drinking the blood of intelligent creatures that the inhumi established and maintain their own intelligence. In addition, the inhumi may get their attitude from humans as well -- that is, they are monsters because we are monsters.

If that is the secret, then we have a certain nice symmetry with parts of the Christian worldview. That is, we are threatened by evil, but the evil comes from ourselves. If we protected each other from it, it would disappear. In short, we should all follow the Golden Rule. I won't speculate on how this would fit with Catholic (or any other) theology, but it seems like too good a match.

This story is, first and foremost, about love. Not love as in sex or lust (though that's there, too), but love between father and son, son and father, husband and wife, even between pet and master. The secret of the inhumi is that

love will protect us from them.

--- Dave Lebling
(aka vizcacha)

Jim Jordan <jbjordan at gnt.net> (Nutria) wrote:

Well, that's what I was going to write, having finished the book last night and reading the posts today, but you beat me to it. Completely agree. I think we have all we need to know the secret now. Remember also that Wolfe discusses devils/fallen-angels in other stories, and calls them servants of God who are used to chastise/punish people. The inhumis have the same role here. It might be useful to consider how exorcisms are done, both those in the Gospels and in Acts, and the Roman Catholic rite.

I agree that drinking human blood is what makes the inhumis intelligent and human in their emotional/mental/moral structure. I find an interesting parallel between the inhumis and the nephilim in Tim Powers' *The Stress of Her Regard*, which I highly recommend to everyone here who hasn't read it. In Powers' book the nephilim use the pattern (presumably DNA) in human blood to take on human form. However, I have a problem with the way Dave phrased the final passages of his posting.

The threat contained in the secret that Horn uses to control the inhumis (Krait's secret) has to be something that they believe is possible to carry out. If the threat Horn is holding over them is, "I will tell people that they can defeat you by following the Golden Rule," I think they would have laughed in his face. The inhumis know human nature much too well to believe that, even with the survival of humanity at stake, all people, or even most of them will be able to do unto others only what they would have the others do unto them. While it seems possible to me that if all the people on Blue started to love one another then the inhumis would love them as well and no longer want to prey on them, I don't think that the precondition is possible. And, more importantly for my argument, I don't believe that the inhumis would believe it was possible, either.

I think that if we have enough information to know what the secret is already (and we may not) then it has to be something a good deal more specific than obeying the Golden Rule, although I don't think it's something entirely different. I think this quote is the key:

p 350: "If only we protected one another, they would all be idiots or worse. As it is, they always get enough to keep them going."

I think the secret is that ALL human beings must be protected from the bite of the inhumis. No one on Blue wants the inhumis to feed on themselves or their loved ones and they will usually go to great lengths to prevent it. But, even though most of them probably don't want the inhumis to feed on any human being, they won't risk themselves or even make much of an effort to protect anyone else. But, if everyone knew that if the inhumis were prevented from getting any human blood at all, they would become unintelligent and (more importantly) unable to pose as human, then they might be motivated to actually act on this knowledge.

I have to wonder how possible this complete protection would be, however. It doesn't seem entirely plausible to me, which makes me expect that there will turn out to be more than this to Krait's secret.

William Ansley

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