

Revealed at Last! What (Would Have) Killed the Inhumans !

The Whorl list — 7 messages, 4 voices, 11 Jan 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/747>

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Urash, Tom — 11 Jan 2000, 12:51

-----Original Message-----

From: Jim Henley [SMTP:jhenley at nas-corp.com]
Sent: Tuesday, January 11, 2000 12:42 PM
To: whorl at lists.best.com
Subject: (whorl) Revealed at Last! What (Would Have) Killed the Inhumans! (Maybe...)

They're cold-blooded. And they hibernate.

Best,

Jim

P.S. Do I need a Whorl name now? I'm thinking "Plasma"...

Great guess! Do you have any text to support it?

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

Urash, Tom — 11 Jan 2000, 16:21 · follows Urash, Tom

-----Original Message-----

From: Jim Henley [SMTP:jhenley at nas-corp.com]
Sent: Tuesday, January 11, 2000 3:19 PM
To: whorl at lists.best.com
Subject: RE: (whorl) Revealed at Last! What (Would Have) Killed the Inhumans! (Maybe...)

I think so, Tom. Happily, David Liebling already gathered most of it for me (<http://www.moonmilk.com/whorl/archives/#59>) so I hope I can be permitted to merely summarize.

1) all the reptilian imagery used to describe Krait et al. Not least, "It's just occurred to me that you inhumans are rather like a kind of lizard I've noticed in my garden..."

IIRC, the Rajan uses a lot of snake figuration to describe Krait at the pit.

2) It explains why the Rajan expects to find Jahlee alive under the stone

-

he knows that they can slow their metabolism in unfavorable conditions.

3) Green is full of jungles and dinosaurs. I infer that it is warmer than Blue. I'm inclined to think that the Rajan even describes it as warmer, but I could be misremembering. (One other thought: cross-reference jungles, dinosaurs, swamps and hot green planets in The Big Book of Science Fiction Tropes and you find the entry for - Venus.)

4) They must be able to essentially shut down their metabolism on the trajectory from Green to Blue. And it could be that it's the heat of early reentry that revives them.

5) It's a perhaps slightly more practical secret to have than, "Hey, if we start loving each other, you guys are dead meat!"

Thanks for the listing, Plasma! I couldn't agree with you more (#5, above): the "love your neighbor" angle always struck me as down right silly, naive and extremely over simple for Wolfe. Every time I see it I'm reminded of Rodney King's feeble "can't we all just get along?" plea during the L.A. riots. I'm curious to know if anyone recalls old Quetzal having any behaviors or allusions to support the cold-blooded/hibernation theory(?). Right or wrong, this theory is my favorite among all others espoused in this list so far.

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

Josh Levitan — 13 Jan 2000, 00:51 · follows Urash, Tom

Been lurking for a while. First post to the list. Hopefully it's not too moronic.

Thoughts on inhumis hibernating and whether or not this is The Secret --

Jim Henley wrote:

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Like Alga was saying, it's a good idea, and seems rather obvious. However, how would this translate into a secret that would destroy the inhumis? After all, when the Rajan begins telling the secret to the inhumis, they are afraid of him acting on it, including Jahlee who just came out of hibernation (and didn't seem that much worse for the wear after only getting a little cowblood in her system). And, the gardener and Evensong are there when she does come out of hibernation, and I believe that the Rajan sends them away before telling the secret. Also, this doesn't really work with the Rajan's comment that they would be nothing more than dumb animals, no more harmful than crocodiles... So that doesn't fit. I think a slightly better interpretation than this theory would be that they require a certain amount of warmth or

sunlight for energy, like dimetrodons or iguanas, however I don't really see how the colonists could act on that in response to the entire population of inhumi.

I have a feeling that Wolfe's given us enough info to figure out what the secret is currently. It reminds me of that Borges story, "The Mystery of The Phoenix(?)" (something like that) in Ficciones, where he talks around the secret rite of the cult of the Phoenix and supposedly gives enough info to figure out what the rite is (although I've always been too dense to figure it out). Anybody read OBW more than once yet and have another guess other than the hibernating/you-are-what-you-eat/do unto others guesses?

The Venus thing is an interesting guess. Perhaps, through the relativistic effects of vast interstellar travel over the three hundred years or so the ship was in transit (if I'm remembering correctly), it did manage to do a boomerang/Planet of the Apes deal and head back to Urth after the new sun arrived, encountering a flooded Urth (which fits with New Sun) and a green Venus. However, what happened to the remaining seven planets?

Josh, who hasn't thought of a Vironese name yet... Suggestions?

Jim Henley — 14 Jan 2000, 08:42 · follows Josh Levitan

-----Original Message-----

From: Josh Levitan [mailto:josh_levitan at hotmail.com]

Sent: Wednesday, January 12, 2000 7:52 PM

I have a feeling that Wolfe's given us enough info to figure out what the secret is currently. It reminds me of that Borges story, "The Mystery of The Phoenix(?)" (something like that) in Ficciones, where he talks around the secret rite of the cult of the Phoenix and supposedly gives enough info to figure out what the rite is (although I've always been too dense to figure it out).

Well, I haven't figured it out yet either, so if anyone wants to do a "Borges spoiler," I'm all for it.

More on the cold-blooded inhumi in another message. Meanwhile,

The Venus thing is an interesting guess. Perhaps, through the relativistic effects of vast interstellar travel over the three hundred years or so the ship was in transit (if I'm remembering correctly), it did manage to do a boomerang/Planet of the Apes deal and head back to Urth after the new sun arrived, encountering a flooded Urth (which fits with New Sun) and a green Venus. However, what happened to the remaining seven planets?

Ah. They're still there? I say this because the little glossary at the beginning of the book specifically refers to Blue as "the better of the _habitable_ planets of the Short Sun system" and Green as "the worse of the _habitable_ planets." My emphasis, but the word appears in each entry, strongly suggesting that the SS system includes _inhabitable_ planets as well.

The one I'm left wondering about is Mars/Verdanthi. Too far away to be noticed? No longer habitable? Kicked into too eccentric an orbit by the passing of the New Sun?

Or are Blue and Green not Ushas and Skuld after all?

Best,

Jim

Josh, who hasn't thought of a Vironese name yet... Suggestions?

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

Jim Henley — 18 Jan 2000, 08:57 · follows Jim Henley

-----Original Message-----

From: Jim Jordan [mailto:jbjordan at gnt.net]

Sent: Saturday, January 15, 2000 6:40 PM

I still say that the secret (probably) is that when humans learn to live with each other in love and charity (not enslaving one another, for instance), the inhumi will follow suit, being imitators of humanity. That's why Quetzal is ambiguous, because he learned from Patera Pike.

But if this is the secret, then why doesn't Jahlee burst out laughing when threatened with it? At that very minute she is being presented with _deeds_ showing just how far humans are from accomplishing such - the Rajan is preparing to use the inhumi to prey on his human enemies.

No, whatever "the secret" is, it's got to be a darn sight more - _do-able_, as they say.

Best,

Jim

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

William H. Ansley — 18 Jan 2000, 23:17 · follows Jim Henley

-----Original Message-----

From: Jim Jordan [mailto:jbjordan at gnt.net]

Sent: Saturday, January 15, 2000 6:40 PM

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Best,

Jim

I agree. In fact I posted a message along much the same lines last November. Although the message is long, I am going to quote almost all of it, because it contains most of the passages from OBW that are relevant to this discussion. My take on the secret of the inhumu is at the end of the quoted material, below.

----- From: "William H. Ansley" <wansley at warwick.net> Subject: (whorl) The secret of the inhumu, again Date: Sat, 6 Nov 1999 01:16:10 -0500

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

[...]

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 inhuma 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 inhumans. "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 inhumans are rather like a kind of lizard I've noticed in my garden. It can change colors ... While I acknowledge that you inhumans 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 inhumans 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 inhumans established and maintain their own intelligence. In addition, the inhumans 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 inhumans 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 inhumani 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 inhumani intelligent and human in their emotional/mental/moral structure. I find an interesting parallel between the inhumani 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 inhumani (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 inhumani 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 inhumani 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 inhumani 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 inhumani. No one on Blue wants the inhumani 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 inhumani 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 inhumani 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*.

-----Original Message-----

From: Jim Jordan [SMTP:bjordan at gnt.net]

Sent: Saturday, January 15, 2000 5:40 PM

To: whorl at lists.best.com

Subject: RE: (whorl) Revealed at Last! What (Would Have) Killed the Inhum!

I still say that the secret (probably) is that when humans learn to live with each other in love and charity (not enslaving one another, for instance), the inhum will follow suit, being imitators of humanity.

That's

why Quetzal is ambiguous, because he learned from Patera Pike.

Nutria

In other words, when Blue becomes a Utopian society the inhum will, after sufficient feeding on and exposure to the ways of happy humanity, become loving cohabitators on Blue? This seems so improbable to me; so much sweetness and light. Besides, how is this peaceful ending a threat to the inhum, so much so that they would actively seek the destruction of the one(?) man carrying the secret on Blue?

Tom

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