

IGJ, impressions, riddles, many spoilers! (of

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 30 Jul 2000

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Kevin J. Maroney — 30 Jul 2000, 14:05

At 12:04 PM 7/29/00 -0400, vizcacha wrote:

Second, and more importantly (and here we are getting close to the true secret), there are actually no inhum. There is only, poignantly, "a girl trapped in the body of a blood-drinking reptile." The inhum only have "spirits" because their victims have spirits, only have intelligence because their victims have intelligence, and so on.

I don't think this point has been made here: The inhum seem specifically to be telepathic reptiles tht developed their telepathy to enhance their predation. It seems likely that the assumption of human characteristics is a side-effect of this telepathic ability. I can't tell if they are capable of true shape-shifting; their ability to pose as humans is certainly enhanced by, and may be completely, telepathic projection. Note that this does **not** seem to be part of what Krait told Horn on Green, since Horn doesn't realize this until he sees the camouflaged hunters in Goan.

It seems that Incanto's travel between worlds is a combination of the inhum telepathic projection and the Vanished People's indeterminate reality.

Jahlee describes the pursuit of Horn at the end of OBW, and how the inhum all felt they should kill him, but each hoped that another would do it first. They feel this way out of gratitude and also, I think, because the people whose blood they have absorbed would not be quick to kill either. Few are eager to cast the first stone, sinful or not. Result, Horn escapes.

Well, also, the inhum are strongly biologically conditioned not to kill their prey. In "nature", they will feed on a victim repeatedly over the course of years rather than kill. If the inhum surrounding the Rajan at the end of Blue have not fed from killers, they will not have "learned" how to kill, themselves.

Perhaps the secret is that if the inhum are treated justly, treated as we would like to treat other human beings, they will gradually become less of a threat. ... Horn sees that as a possible future for humanity as well, and on Green it is coming true; the villages capture other humans to sell to the inhum as slaves.

I'd go a step further: If all the inhum are treated as human by all humans, they will **become** human. But I think there's one more twist to the secret coming, and I don't know what it is. So far, Wolfe has overdelivered on every promise of the narrative; I'd like to think he's capable of overdelivering on the promise of the secret of the inhum as well.

(The telepathic predator reminds me of a minor humorous Larry Niven short story, "The Nonesuch". Spoiler: The Nonesuch is so powerfully telepathic that when its human prey sees it and thinks, "The Nonesuch isn't real! It's a fairy-tale", the beast disappears.)

Horn pushes all the clues out, and lets Hide [figure it out] himself.
(There's a lot of this in the book. It happens with Mora, too. I wonder if

Wolfe does this a lot in his real life? Must have been very frustrating for his children.)

I don't know Wolfe well enough in person to judge that at all, but note how thoroughly he does it to his readers. :-)

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