

The inhumis's secret: another clue and a speculation

The Whorl list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 02 Aug 2000

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Adam Stephanides — 02 Aug 2000, 22:43

I had earlier posted a list of the clues regarding the inhumis's secret I had found in IGJ. I just came across one I'd overlooked. I also came up with a fairly wild speculation as to what the secret might be, at least in part. It's probably wrong, but it might at least spark some thought.

The new clue is on p. 21. The Neighbor, who is fetching Horn to have him clear the sewer on Green of human corpses, tells him that "'We want to wake all of you up....To your safety,'" at which Horn tells us: "Now that I understand Krait's secret, I understand his remark as well; but at the time I had no notion of what he meant." It could be that the Neighbor is simply alluding to the united-we-stand idea Horn had advanced in OBW, but it could also be he has something more specific in mind. What this might be I have no idea, but I can't help suspecting a connection with Horn's later talk with Hide in which he uses the corpse-filled tunnel as an example of how the inhumis's victories over humans make them weaker.

Now for the wild speculation. What if we take "inhumis are killers because humans are killers" a step further? What if the choice of specific victims is determined by humans' conscious or unconscious desires? That is, when an inhumus/a attacks a human, it's because some other human consciously or unconsciously wants the victim to die.

One advantage of this theory is that it's the only thing I can think of which could serve as a weapon against the inhumis (whether wieldable or no), explains why the inhumis drink human blood, *and* connects with Krait's mother feeding on Sinew. This last bit works out rather nicely, in fact. On p. 157 Horn has a "flashback" to Krait's death on Green, which leads him to recall that Krait's mother had nearly killed Sinew; he then, seemingly irrelevantly, tells Mora the story of how Nettle's being pregnant with Sinew cost her and Horn the animal they should have had, and so contributed to their extreme poverty; made worse by the need to buy milk for Sinew. In such circumstances, Horn may well have wished the baby Sinew dead. (One could go further and speculate that Horn's belief that Sinew wishes him dead is a projection of Horn's guilt over this.) My hypothesis also fits neatly with one of the themes of OBW and IGJ: that the inhumis are cruel, but no more so than humans are to each other.

I freely grant that there is no positive evidence for this speculation whatsoever, and that I have no clear idea of the mechanics. There are other problems too: it's dubious whether this passes the test of being a weapon the inhumis would think that humans could use (by not wishing each other dead). It doesn't fit Horn's remarks in OBW that if "the weapon" were used, the inhumis would be stupid but remain dangerous. It has no apparent relation to the new clue above. And if it's correct, it would make Krait's telling Horn the secret an act of sadism. Still, it seems worthwhile to explore all alternatives (after all, the obvious guesses have all proved fatally flawed). And I can't help thinking that it works too well in some respects for there not to be something in it.

--Adam

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

William Ansley — 02 Aug 2000, 23:23 · follows Adam Stephanides

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William Ansley

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Adam Stephanides — 02 Aug 2000, 23:44 · follows William Ansley

William Ansley wrote:

I think you may have something here. But surely, "not wishing each other dead" is included within the Golden Rule?

The Golden Rule includes it, true, but is more stringent. Not wishing your neighbor dead is sort of the minimal program to the Golden Rule's maximal program. (Although if unconscious wishes count, that complicates things.)

But yes, if this is the secret, then in giving all these hints about "if only we loved each other," Horn was coming awfully close to violating the spirit, if not the letter, of his oath. So that's another point against my hypothesis.

--Adam

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