

Ernie Cotha

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 22 Jul 1997

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m.driussi — 22 Jul 1997, 22:02

Reply: Item #5064841 from URTN at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET#

More about "The Changeling":

Ernie Cotha is the character who picks up the narrator while hitchhiking. He also appears in the fourth grade picture, standing in front of Peter Palmieri, who has taken Pete Palmer's place. Ernie is thus Pete's age but doesn't seem to have been in the army.

OTOH, Golgotha =does= appear in the story, since the Peter Pan island has a knobby hill on it where narrator and Paul find Peter and three boys, whose wooden swords with cross-pieces are stuck in the ground and nobody moves to get them. I.e., there are three, maybe four crosses stuck in the sand on top of the hill. FWIW.

If Peter Pan looks eight years old in 1964, then his year of birth would be 1956. Papa is worried that he will leave the Palmieris soon since the family fiction is becoming unsustainable--Mama has to claim to have given birth to Peter when she was in her fifties, now.

Maria plays the role of Wendy to Peter's Pan. When Pete Palmer hit Maria with a rock, it was Peter who attacked him, perhaps setting many things in motion.

If Peter Pan has determined that it is time to change families, it might be that he is going to set himself up as the son of crazy Pete--we can imagine the townsfolk saying, "Little Pete looks just like his dad at that age--look at this fourth grade photo from 1944." (Shades of "Suzanne Delage," oooo . . .) As a final bit of revenge.

These dates make me wonder if the Wolfe short "Houston, 1943" has any bearing on this? (In anthology TROPICAL CHILLS, fwiw.)

Is it significant that when Peter Pan first shows up in the Palmieri house he sleeps on an "army" cot? It certainly presages Pete Palmer's stint in the army. If Pete was in the army and in Korea before the war, he must have joined when he was younger than sixteen.

TIMELINE (revised)

1931 -- Maria Palmieri born in Chicago; birth of US soldiers who will be eighteen years old as Korean War begins.

1932 -- Palmieris move to Cassonsville, where 8 year old Peter appears and warps reality around him.

1935 -- fourth grade class of 1944 born (kindergarten for most at age five, fourth grade for most at age nine); narrator Pete born in Cassonsville?

1939 -- Peter is Maria's twin brother.

1940 -- Paul Palmieri born in Cassonsville. <Eight year mark>

1944 -- fourth grade photo (in spring); Pete wrestles with eternally eight-years-old Peter

Palmieri over fate of a frog (and Pete had hit Maria with a rock); Pete and family leave Cassonsville (change names?) (in summer).

1945 -- fire burned old newspapers.

1948 -- <Eight year mark>

1949 -- Pete's father dies in Buffalo while Pete in army in Korea before war, teaching demolitions. Pete would be age fourteen?

1950 -- Korean War begins. Pete would be age fifteen.

1953 -- War ends. POW exchange, Pete refuses and goes to China where he works in a textile mill. Birth year of Paul Palmieri's 1954 Chevy, which he will rebuild himself (just as Pete Palmer is built and rebuilt).

1956 -- <Eight year mark>

1959 -- Pete back in US, faces court martial.

1964 -- out of US prison, Pete (changes name?) goes to Cassonsville. Pete would be age twenty-nine. <Eight year mark>

The eight year marks are there because every eight years Peter Pan has to shift things a little. Also "twins" and "one mortal/one immortal" go very well with "eight years," according to Robert Graves at least. Sacred king/tanist stuff, tied to sun/moon cycles of eclipse. Since it seems likely that Pete has finally been usurped by the fourth cycle, I wanted to plot the other ones and see if anything might show up. Pete's father's death =might= be a year earlier than my guess--this would line it up. Year 1956 =might= be the point when commie Pete changes his mind again and begins attempts to return to USA.

(FWIW and if anybody couldn't tell, this really =is= one of my favorite stories!)

=mantis=

Jim Jordan — 22 Jul 1997, 23:53 · follows m.driussi

In terms of my other post, which suggests that "The Changeling" is largely about the Catholic Church, perhaps Ernie Cotha is supposed to be a Polish name, to go with the Italian Palmieris. Maybe someone can improve on that. I grew up in the South, and so am not super familiar with names like "Cotha" and where they might point.

Nutria