

Ziggurat "Maximum Delusion mode"

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 28 Jan 2000, 14:19

Well!

I don't sense much difference between the Kessel (was it?) reading and the Swanwick reading I was talking about: both use "Maximum Delusion" mode. That is, all the skiffy stuff is just delusion on the part of Emory. Ziggurat, laser weapon, all that stuff is just not real.

IIRC, the Swanwick model was saying that Emory killed the coyote, not by some passive way, but by Emory pulling the trigger of the rifle that put the lead bullet into the coyote and made him dead.

Likewise, the murder of the son. Quite active. "While Emory was =sleeping=," indeed.

As for "why don't we see it?" Well, look, I don't want to argue too strenuously for a theory that isn't mine, but the same questions were once applied to NULL-A: "When does hero Gilbert urinate or defecate? Throughout the whole novel we never see it happen." To which van Vogt replied: "Between chapters." <g> I think it is strongly in the suit of Maximum Delusion to suppose that Emory is largely unaware of what he is doing: part of the nature of the horror; you know, like how when Oedipus killed that old guy at the crossroads. Furthermore, I think one of the original hooks for Maximum Delusion was Emory's muted response to finding his dead son: there seemed to be something more happening here, something odd, something in a blindspot, something other than "men have no feelings, even for their own children."

I'm not sure where this "daughters from the future" angle crept in--in "Max Del" mode it is, of course, delusion: the "alien female from the ziggurat" is really and actually the very same girl from Emory's shattered family.

It ain't my theory. I'd read the story and liked it as a cold horror story. I hadn't formed much of an opinion other than that. I think the Maximum Delusion mode makes the story much closer to Wolfe's "Redbeard" than, say, "Try and Kill It" (which TZ has certain obvious similarities to). It seems like a "male Medea" kind of thing.

Re: the strategy of "hunt the wolf," please, let us make a distinction between the animal and a specific man. Neil Gaiman saw the alzado as a wolf, and further developed the concept: the alzado is a "gene" wolf. I won't belabor the difference.

Identifying Emory as a Wolfe-stand-in (because he is an old white guy engineer, and because he says Uncle Wolfey sorts of things) is probably the first stage of the process for most of the readers who were/are outraged about the story. Crafty Gene seems to slap certain readers in the face with this particular red herring, a herring that looks like a John Norman interview (where JN spouts all sorts of chauvinistic "Gor" things as being true on Earth) folded into a "barely disguised fiction"; here is the smoking gun, for readers primed or looking for such

readings. And then the herring, focus of hypnotic attention, is tossed into the hedge of Chase-Your-Tail, while the story itself dodges away.

Thus, the wife is evil for having done all this bad stuff (in a passive way--that is, she sets things into motion, like Pandora or the Evil Queen); and brave, heartfelt engineer (actively) tries hard to save all the pieces, making a few (passive) mistakes; all as mysterious external forces (actively) pick them off one by one.

And this is, as a matter of fact, the way that it was when Swanwick presented by stages the thing I'm calling "Maximum Delusion": one or three male persons were going on about the ugly portrayal of adult womyn in "The Ziggurat," buttressed with examples from "The Cat" and even, what synchronicity! "The Haunted Boardinghouse." Round and round and round they went! Then along came Swanwick and here was something different to think about, a reading that somehow managed to derail the train before the tigers turned into butter.

=mantis=