

The Wizard - do not read until Jan 1

The Urth list — 27 messages, 11 voices, 28 Dec 2004

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4282>

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Don Doggett — 28 Dec 2004, 16:39

Hey everyone,

I'm moving to a new apt. so I'm posting early. I'll probably check my mail at the library but I don't know how much I'll be posting for a few weeks. There's plenty to be touched on in these two books but I'm going to give a few general observations and then hit on a very specific point. First the generalities: I think Wolfe erred in making Able a modern kid from America. It's the single thing that keeps this book from being a great work. It constantly pulled me out of the book and it says a lot for the power of the story itself that I invested major effort in forgetting Able's origins whenever possible. Still IMO it's a major flaw. Maybe this is my problem, but I doubt I'm alone in this. Also the first part of the Wizard with Toug and Mani in Utgard threatened to bog down the whole book. The story hits its stride when Able appears again though, and it achieves some very high points. I love Wolfe's characterization of Skai and its inhabitants. I wasn't so keen on his hierarchy of beings. Too reductionist for me, but GW let's me get around it by having fallible narrators. I would like to ask an open question. Is it useful to look at this work as a source of answers for themes in Wolfe's other works, especially NS, LS, and SS? I personally think it is but I don't want to bother going down that path if we have to argue whether it is indeed useful first. Did anyone else see Severian in the Black Caan? Because this is technically a YA novel, it seems to me that Wolfe was a little more straightforward in his themes and maybe it will shed some light on other books that have been murkier. There are still space creatures, giants, clones, artificial intelligences, and composite beings.

Ok, the specific thing I want to post on is Able's real name, Arthur Ormsby. Anyone who has read GW knows that he doesn't hide a name for two books and reveal it in the utter last moment and not have it mean something. A big something I think. Someone (I think it was Marc) said that they wouldn't be surprised if Able and Arnthor turned out to be the same person in the end. I think this is essentially correct. In my last post (and thank you for the kind words Charles) I said that I felt that Silkhorn was the ideal Silk of Horn's book of Silk, a Silk that the man of that name fell short of. Able says that he was raised up by the Aelf to be a messenger to Arnthor and that in order to deliver this message he had to be a worthy messenger. Hence his trials. This is wrong. Able isn't the messenger, he's the message. Able is the Aelf's rebuke to Arnthor, rubbing his face into how far short he has fallen. He carries Eterne (excalibur) a sword Arnthor can't even draw. His coat of arms bears a dragon. Shame is what causes Arnthor to imprison Able. I think that Wolfe is riffing off the idea of many versions of Arthur in history and legend. This recalls to me the scene in "The Last Temptation of Christ" (I haven't read the book) where the Jesus who saved himself from the cross confronts Paul and calls him a fraud. And Paul says he doesn't care who Jesus is, the people need someone and he would happily make up the whole story if necessary. Able is sort of that Pauline Jesus (Silkhorn too, for that matter) Anyhow, on to the name. Arthur is evident. Orm means "elm" so essentially Ormsby means "of the elm". This brings up several interesting associations. The first is that the elm (or Ailm) is an Aleph symbol (at least according to Graves, and even though Wolfe has said he was a crackpot, which is true, I'm certain he finds him thematically useful). Another is that the elm is a symbol of death. Recall that Able's new puppy is a white dog with red ears, a dog of the Goddess in her death aspect and one of the hounds of Annwyn as well (I think, but clearly a death symbol- by

the way Farvan, as far as I can find, is another word for Pharaoh). Most interesting to me, one of the variants of the Death of Arthur has him being killed by a youth (who seems to be from faerie) on a horse wielding a spear made of the elm. I'm not sure why GW chose these associations, but I'm pretty sure they're not random.

Regards
Don

Andrew Bollen — 03 Jan 2005, 04:22 · in reply to Don Doggett

Don writes:

First the generalities: I think Wolfe erred in making Able a modern kid from America.

Arnthor is surely shamed by Able's knightly prowess (and presumably isn't totally thrilled that Able killed his brother). But I believe that Able's role as far as the Aelf were concerned was certainly to be a messenger, and for this role Able as modern American kid isn't completely arbitrary. The Aelf wished to deliver a message to the rulers of their "Gods" saying, "Rule better!" An American in the court of King Arnthor doesn't seem inappropriate for this, whereas a "local" kid would probably find criticizing a king inconceivable, not least because he would have no other model.

When Able delivers the message to Arnthor, the first part is from the Aelf, with rather naive and general adjurations towards justice and mercy. Then Able, speaking for himself, gives practical examples of better rule - fair taxation and self-determination. Well within the political background knowledge of a modern American kid who listened in class!

This might seem a bit hokey, but personally I didn't mind it. I was hoping for more flashes of the story of the "real" Able, in our world.

Questions Wizard left me with:

- Who rules after Arnthor? My guess: Beel (or perhaps Idnn). There is discussion towards the end of the book about why Gaynor, Morcaine and Marder are all unsuitable. Beel & Idnn are close to the line of succession and it would be a nice happy ending for Beel, to finally get what he has wanted for so long.

- What did Able say to Lothur to change the "sons of the Dragon" enemies to "Lothurling" allies? Presumably it had to do with a revelation of Able's slaying of Grengarm (the "Dragon") and Lothur taking over the role of tutelary deity.

- What did Kulili show to Able which he will only talk about with one "greater than the Valfather"?

- Like Able, I can't think of any reason why Berthold appeared as Ben when Able wore the magic helm at the end of the story. The Valfather as bright shadow seems more straightforward - there is one True God, and the powers between us and Him protect us from the full glare of His love etc etc. When Able breaks his oath and chooses Disiri over the Valfather, he is acting in accordance with a higher will (as the Valfather recognizes).

- The lowest God. Clearly he is the source of the theological inversion poisoning the worlds, and presumably the "great secret" of the heresies is the Highest = Lowest lie he tells Able, and the claim that God is Janus-faced. But is he your normal fallen angel, or another kind of being; and

why does he have wounds on his back? Plucked wings?

- We get creation stories down to Aelfrice, for worlds and inhabitants, but not for Muspel and Niflheim, as I recall. Are we supposed to make up our own? Perhaps the Dragons are discarded parts of Kulili, grown monstrous.

Nathan Spears — 03 Jan 2005, 07:22 · in reply to Andrew Bollen

Out of several thoughts on the Wizard, I tried to cull those which I think this group is likely to find most interesting. The first is a question that I will attempt an answer to.

Arnthor and Garsecg are brothers. Garsecg is the elder brother, and thus the rightful king of Mythgarthr, but he's (supposedly) not interested in being king. He'd rather be a dragon and conquer the Aelf. What's very confusing, however, is that Able says (in the intro pages) he suspects that Garsecg/Setr wanted to conquer Mythgarthr. Why didn't he assume his kingship instead of trying to conquer from Muspel? Then he could also have ruled the Aelf as their rightful god (which is what they wanted of Arnthor), instead of forcing them to worship him in an unholy usurping of the natural order.

I think the answer to this question is that Garsecg gives rein to his dragon nature, so that no matter how noble he is he still stands below the Aelf. Thus they cannot worship him truthfully. Arnthor has denied his dragon nature (even when he needed it most) and embraced his humanity, so that even though he is a petty king (at least with regard to Able and his queen) and uninterested in (or bitter toward) the Aelf he is still the only one who can be an image of The Valfather for them. I don't know if this is merely an exploration of the nature of this world by Wolfe, or if it has more significant implications.

* * *

Someone has mentioned on this list before that they believed that contact with the supernatural is most often damning in Wolfe's canon. I don't know if The Wizard Knight can be considered in the same context, because the supernatural seems a very different concept here. I feel that Wolfe created a world in which the theology differs from ours (by which I mean the Catholic/Christian theology that Wolfe professes), but the morality (by which I mean 'being good,' loosely) remains fairly constant. Able strives (esp. in the first book) to perfect each impulse and feeling (thus the 'High Heart'), bringing them into line with (at first) how he believes Sir Ravd would have behaved. Later he comes into his own understanding of what it means to attempt to behave lovingly or charitably toward everyone, and that it is important, perhaps most important, to behave that way when you don't wish to. Able's contact with the supernatural (if we consider his movement between worlds to be supernatural, which I concede might not be true) is not damning or damaging to Able in the lupine tradition. Able's contact with Disiri does threaten to derail him at some points, such as when he is ready to kill Toug at her command early on, but later Able is more rooted and pulls Disiri up to him instead of being dragged down to her. I mean 'up' and 'down' in both a moral and geographic sense, and I think those meanings are intertwined. When Able is taken to Skai it is both a recognition and a reinforcement of his knighthood.

In the second book, Able has achieved his knighthood to a large degree, especially in comparison to the other people around him, and becomes the model and inspiration for those he comes into contact with, as those in Skai were his models. This is also a Christian idea: trying to be like the Most High God, we often imitate those who are closer to Him than we are. This is why I think the Valfather is a bright shadow: he is an image of an image of the Most High God.

That's all I have to say; I do have some questions, but I'll add them to the ones already posed.

Nathan Spears — 03 Jan 2005, 07:47 · in reply to Andrew Bollen

- What did Able say to Lothur to change the "sons of the Dragon" enemies to "Lothurling" allies? Presumably it had to do with a revelation of Able's slaying of Grengarm (the "Dragon") and Lothur taking over the role of tutelary deity.

I'd like to know this as well, but I also feel that Smiler was a little too *deus ex machina*. Is there something about that character that I don't know? Why is it significant that he is The Dragon Prince, and that The Dragon is Grengarm?

How does Parka fit into the Norse scheme? Parcae is the Roman name for the Fates; is Wolfe just shoehorning her in as an amalgam of the three? Does she share characteristics with anyone else (i.e., the Virgin Mary) that I didn't pick up on?

How many times, and in which worlds, does Able die? It's already been said that Able dies fighting Grengarm, and that the Valkyrie coming to get him is proof. In what sense does he die, though, and what affect does this have on him? He's not disembodied, and he's not invincible. Morcaine can't control him. What's going on with that ambulance?

Speaking of Morcaine, why isn't there any explanation for why she was naked in a cave in the mountains?

Why does Able tell Org to eat any man he doesn't know?

And, of course, I'd like to know what the last three or so paragraphs are all about.

StoneOx17 at aol.com — 03 Jan 2005, 07:54 · follows Andrew Bollen

In a message dated 1/3/2005 7:22:55 AM Eastern Standard Time, abollen at internode.on.net writes:

When Able delivers the message to Arnthor, the first part is from the Aelf, with rather naive and general adjurations towards justice and mercy. Then Able, speaking for himself, gives practical examples of better rule - fair taxation and self-determination. Well within the political background knowledge of a modern American kid who listened in class!

Very nice point.

This might seem a bit hokey, but personally I didn't mind it. I was hoping for more flashes of the story of the "real" Able, in our world.

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- Who rules after Arnthor? My guess: Beel (or perhaps Idnn). There is discussion towards the end of the book about why Gaynor, Morcaine and Marder are all unsuitable. Beel & Idnn are close to the line of succession and it would be a nice happy ending for Beel, to finally get what he has wanted for so long.

Beel is only a baron, not even a duke. Wouldn't that make it hard for him to claim the throne?

How about Smiler? It seems that if he married Gaynor (or Morcaine), then he would have a good claim to the throne, and his dragon soldiers would make it difficult for any of the dukes to challenge him.

- What did Able say to Lothur to change the "sons of the Dragon" enemies to "Lothurling" allies? Presumably it had to do with a revelation of Able's slaying of Grengarm (the "Dragon") and Lothur taking over the role of tutelary deity.

I thought he rode down on Cloud, kidnapped Smiler, and threatened to kill him if he didn't cooperate. There's a throwaway remark (I'd find it but I don't have my copy at hand) later that made me assume this was the case. Able might also have mentioned that the throne would be vacant soon, with no reasonable claimants in sight, and that it might easily be gained by an appropriate marriage.

- What did Kulili show to Able which he will only talk about with one "greater than the Valfather"?

- Like Able, I can't think of any reason why Berthold appeared as Ben when Able wore the magic helm at the end of the story. The Valfather as bright shadow seems more straightforward - there is one True God, and the powers between us and Him protect us from the full glare of His love etc etc. When Able breaks his oath and chooses Disiri over the Valfather, he is acting in accordance with a higher will (as the Valfather recognizes).

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- We get creation stories down to Aelfrice, for worlds and inhabitants, but not for Muspel and Niflheim, as I recall. Are we supposed to make up our own? Perhaps the Dragons are discarded parts of Kulili, grown monstrous.

Good questions. I'll add one of my own. Able's mother and brother both show up in Mythgarthr, but how about his father? Is there any mention of him? Has he somehow been incorporated into the Valfather?

- Stone Ox (Peter)

David Lebling — 03 Jan 2005, 08:27 · in reply to Nathan Spears

How does Parka fit into the Norse scheme? Parcae is the Roman name for the Fates; is Wolfe just shoehorning her in as an amalgam of the three? Does she share characteristics with anyone else (i.e., the Virgin Mary) that I didn't pick up on?

I believe Parka is referred to in the second book as coming from a higher plane than Skai. The only other being we meet from a higher plane is Michael, who is from the Christian (i.e., Greco-Roman influenced) tradition. So Parcae as a Roman Fate isn't too outlandish.

-- Dave, aka Vizcacha

Russell Wodell — 03 Jan 2005, 08:52 · in reply to Andrew Bollen

First the generalities: I think Wolfe erred in making Able a modern kid from America.

No, no. I agree that the tonal effect is (intentionally) jarring. But you have only to turn to Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" to see what Wolfe is up to in this regard....

Russell

Andy Robertson — 03 Jan 2005, 09:00 · in reply to David Lebling

David Lebling writes:

How does Parka fit into the Norse scheme?

The Norse tradition also has the three Norns, called Urd, Skuld, and Verdandi, which are more-or-less congruent with the Fates in the Greco-Roman branch of Yggdrasil.

I suggest that Wolfe avoided calling the old woman Urd (Urth) for obvious reasons and picked the Roman name instead.

hartshorn (glad, very glad, to be back on-list)

James Wynn — 03 Jan 2005, 09:35 · in reply to Nathan Spears

How many times, and in which worlds, does Able die? It's already been said that

Able dies fighting Grengarm, and that the Valkyrie coming to get him is proof. In

what sense does he die, though, and what affect does this have on him?

He's not

disembodied, and he's not invincible. Morcaine can't control him. What's going on with that ambulance?

Parka's roll as norn (which were associated with valkyries) suggests Able probably died in Aelfrice prior his encounter in her cave. This also fits with the references to him as Disiri's "playmate" since it evokes Athena and her killed playmate Pallas.

He definitely dies in Mythgarthr during his battle with Grengarm, since a valkyrie comes and takes him.

In each case he returns from "heaven" to battle for those in the world he has left.

The ambulance? That's Arthur Ormsby being taken to the hospital of course! They found him in a coma possibly near death from hypothermia in that valley where the Moss Aelf took him. Presumably, when he reaches the Most High God, he will awake.

Speaking of Morcaine, why isn't there any explanation for why she was naked in a cave in the mountains?

She was being offered as a sacrifice to Grengarm by the Aelf. How did she fall into their hands? She no doubt moves about a lot in Aelfrice.

Why does Able tell Org to eat any man he doesn't know?

Org has to eat. Those who he has met through Able are under Able's protection.

I think it was neat the way Wolfe incorporated the Pendragon (son of the dragon) motif from the Arthur legend and made Arnthor *truely* the "son of the dragon". Arnthor is the King Arthur of Wolfe's imagined history...Arthur was not universally heroic in the Welsh stories, and Mordred was not universally villainous. He was surely not actually the beatific King of the Romances. Able is the King Arthur of the Romances and ascends to skies where Mythgarthr's mythology lives. This is not the ending I expected, btw. I figured Able would become Merlin. He didn't.

~ Crush

stilskin — 03 Jan 2005, 09:47 · in reply to James Wynn

Actually, Able doesn't ascend . . . at least not at the end of the novel. Following his disobedience of the Valfather, Able (with Disiri) descends to Aelfrice, which is where Michael comes to get him for some mission we do not know. I'm very curious about this mission and where it takes place. I half-suspect we're supposed to think it takes place in America.

Paul

--- James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net> wrote:
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~ Crush

David Lebling — 03 Jan 2005, 10:08 · in reply to stilskin

Who attacked King Gilling? Was it the same person (or being) both times?

As with many Wolfe mysteries, I suppose he put all the information there and if one is appropriately Sherlockian one can figure out who it was, but I am unsure of the answer.

My guesses are (1) Baki or Uri (I have trouble telling them apart) and (2) Svon, not necessarily in that order. The Fire Aelf would do it to help move the expedition along and get Able back to what they consider his main mission, fighting Kulili. Svon would do it to save Idnn from a fate worse than death. (Who else thought the witch's graphic description of how a human woman makes love to a giant a bit out of place in an ostensibly YA novel?)

-- Dave, aka Vizcacha

stilskin — 03 Jan 2005, 10:18 · in reply to David Lebling

Gilling was attacked both times by Sir Garvaon.

Paul

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James Wynn — 03 Jan 2005, 11:02 · follows David Lebling

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Since Michael has been sent from Kleos, that is surely to where they are going. The "great knight", Sir Able of the High Heart, did not yet exist when Able first met Michael. First Able had to win his sword, spend 20 years in Skai, and free Mythgarthr and Aelfrice from the tyranny of their "lower dragons".

~ Crush

stilskin — 03 Jan 2005, 11:26 · in reply to James Wynn

I'm afraid I can't agree. I think you are overhasty
to assume that Able is bound for Kleos simply because
Michael comes from there, although I don't say you are
wrong either. I'd like to see more evidence in the
text of where he is bound. Also, if you look back to
The Knight, you will find that Michael goes to

Aelfrice in quest of "that far-famed knight, Sir Able of the High Heart." At the end of The Wizard, when Sir Able reports that Michael has come for him, that is the end of the journey that Michael interrupted briefly beside the pool in Mythgarthr. It is clear from the beginning of The Wizard Knight that the book (letter to Ben) is being written from Aelfrice.

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~ Crush

Nathan Spears — 03 Jan 2005, 11:30 · in reply to stilskin

Gilling was attacked both times by Sir Garvaon.

I second that. Able spells it out a little bit at one point, when he mentions that the archers who marched out to the battle before the gates of the giants' castle (can't remember the name) were white-faced not because of their terror of battle, but because Sir Garvaon had just killed King Gilling (who attempted to get outside when he heard Idnn but fell down in the inner courtyard) in front of them.

Also, Able refused to tell . . . Arnthor, I think, when pressed, but when Able was asked if it was because he was afraid for that person's safety, Able said no. Garvaon was already dead at this point and Able was preserving his honor and memory (esp with Idnn).

I thought of a couple more questions that I think I need to reread the books to frame properly. Here goes anyway:

Several people have mentioned that they thought the green knight Able sees on the Isle of Glass in The Knight was Arnthor. I only buy this if you also subscribe to the 'Able is Arnthor' theory, because Parka said fairly clearly that the only person on that isle was Able himself. So, I think the knight was Able after he slew Grengarm; the description fits, right? But at what point does he see himself? He only visits the Isle once in The Wizard, when he goes to rescue Pouk

and them, if I remember correctly, but there's no mention of the previous episode. Thoughts?

I have this mind-tickling recollection of Able (in *The Knight*, referring to a 'future' event) saying he fought a man who was so strong that he nearly broke (or did break?) Able's ribs during a fight, bear-hugging him. I thought the reference was to a fight Able was going to have trying to guard the mountain pass. Does anyone else remember this?

Lastly, I thought I remembered Able (again, in *The Knight*) describing Toug on the walls of the giants' castle, much as Able himself climbed from window to window. Of course, at that point I was envisioning a daring rescue, but even so I don't remember Toug climbing the walls of Utgard (! I finally remembered the name) at any point during *The Wizard*.

Nate

David Lebling — 03 Jan 2005, 11:52 · in reply to Nathan Spears

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Toug climbs the walls following after Mani, with the (somewhat) help of Baki. This is when they are first in Utgard.

-- Dave, aka Vizcacha

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 03 Jan 2005, 11:56 · in reply to Don Doggett

Actually I read Ormsby as "Of the Worm," i.e., Pendragon.

On Tue, 28 Dec 2004 17:38:51 -0800, Don Doggett <harlekin at earthlink.net> wrote:
Hey everyone,

I'm moving to a new apt. so I'm posting early. I'll probably check my mail at the library but I don't know how much I'll be posting for a few weeks. There's plenty to be touched on in these two books but I'm going to give a few general observations and then hit on a very specific point. First the generalities: I think Wolfe erred in making Able a modern kid from America. It's the single thing that keeps this book from being a great work. It constantly pulled me out of the book and it says a lot for the power of the story itself that I invested major effort in forgetting Able's origins whenever possible. Still IMO it's a major flaw. Maybe this is my problem, but I doubt I'm alone in this. Also the first part of the *Wizard* with Toug and Mani in Utgard threatened to bog down the whole book. The story hits its stride when Able appears again though, and it achieves some very high points. I love Wolfe's characterization of Skai and its inhabitants. I wasn't so keen on his hierarchy of beings. Too reductionist for me, but GW let's me get around it by having fallible narrators. I would like to ask an open question. Is it useful to look at this work as a source of answers for themes in Wolfe's other works, especially NS, LS, and SS? I personally think it is but I don't want to bother going down that

path if we have to argue whether it is indeed useful first. Did anyone else see Severian in the Black Caan? Because this is technically a YA novel, it seems to me that Wolfe was a little more straightforward in his themes and maybe it will shed some light on other books that have been murkier. There are still space creatures, giants, clones, artificial intelligences, and composite beings.

Ok, the specific thing I want to post on is Able's real name, Arthur Ormsby. Anyone who has read GW knows that he doesn't hide a name for two books and reveal it in the utter last moment and not have it mean something. A big something I think. Someone (I think it was Marc) said that they wouldn't be surprised if Able and Arnthor turned out to be the same person in the end. I Think this is essentially correct. In my last post (and thank you for the kind words Charles) I said that I felt that Silkhorn was the ideal Silk of Horn's book of Silk, a Silk that the man of that name fell short of. Able says that he was raised up by the Aelf to be a messenger to Arnthor and that in order to deliver this message he had to be a worthy messenger. Hence his trials. This is wrong. Able isn't the messenger, he's the message. Able is the Aelf's rebuke to Arnthor, rubbing his face into how far short he has fallen. He carries Eterne (excalibur) a sword Arnthor can't even draw. His coat of arms bears a dragon. Shame is what causes Arnthor to imprison Able. I think that Wolfe is riffing off the idea of many versions of Arthur in history and legend. This recalls to me the scene in "The Last Temptation of Christ" (I haven't read the book) where the Jesus who saved himself from the cross confronts Paul and calls him a fraud. And Paul says he doesn't care who Jesus is, the people need someone and he would happily make up the whole story if necessary. Able is sort of that Pauline Jesus (Silkhorn too, for that matter) Anyhow, on to the name. Arthur is evident. Orm means "elm" so essentially Ormsby means "of the elm". This brings up several interesting associations. The first is that the elm (or Ailm) is an Aleph symbol (at least according to Graves, and even though Wolfe has said he was a crackpot, which is true, I'm certain he finds him thematically useful). Another is that the elm is a symbol of death. Recall that Able's new puppy is a white dog with red ears, a dog of the Goddess in her death aspect and one of the hounds of Annwyn as well (I think, but clearly a death symbol- by the way Farvan, as far as I can find, is another word for Pharaoh). Most interesting to me, one of the variants of the Death of Arthur has him being killed by a youth (who seems to be from faerie) on a horse wielding a spear made of the elm. I'm not sure why GW chose these associations, but I'm pretty sure they're not random.

Regards
Don

James Wynn — 03 Jan 2005, 12:35 · in reply to stilskin

Also, if you look back to The Knight, you will find that Michael goes to Aelfrice in quest of "that far-famed knight, Sir Able of the High Heart." At the end of The Wizard, when Sir Able reports that Michael has come for him, that is the end of the journey that Michael interrupted

briefly beside the pool in Mythgarthr. It is clear from the beginning of The Wizard Knight that the book (letter to Ben) is being written from Aelfrice.

Umm...yes, I agree. Michael goes to Aelfrice to find Able of the High Heart and that is where he finds him...at the end of the story. He goes in search of him there even though He is talking to Able at the pool...ergo, the Able that Michael is seeking does not exist until the end of the novel. I think we agree on this, no?

It seemed obvious to me that Able and Disiri were on their way to Kleo when Michael arrives to fetch them. But if you can point out a more likely location, I'd be interested to hear of it.

~ Crush

stilskin — 03 Jan 2005, 12:54 · in reply to James Wynn

Yes, I see we do agree. Able is in Aelfrice at the end of The Wizard Knight (and indeed, at its beginning). But where he is bound after the close of the book is, I think, open to question.

It's certainly possible that Michael has come to fetch Able in order to serve the Valfather in his Ragnarok-like battle against the Frost giants. I don't find this a satisfying conclusion.

It's possible that Able is being returned to Mythgarthr. This seems thematically pointless.

It's possible that Michael is bringing Able to Kleos, but I'm not sure what battle he would be fighting there, and against whom. Is there a Lucifer-like rebellion against the Most High God taking place?

I was never sure if Michael, once having left Kleos, was able to return to it. He mentions being cast out, or an exile, like Able, and implies that he has been exiled for the sin of pride.

Wolfe's system of rising to the levels above one's "home" level seems to break down above Skai; at least, we never hear of anyone rising to Kleos, though we hear of many falling from that height (i.e., the Valfather and others).

Parka's bowstring provides a link back to our world (of America, Macs, etc.). Able dreams of this world, and of himself in it (in an ambulance, among other things). There is clearly a lot of back and forth between America and Mythgarthr; it's probably significant that Able never looks at himself while wearing the helmet.

In any case, I don't understand why Wolfe would stress so many links to America if it didn't play an important part in the novel, and moreover in the resolution of the novel. That's why I'm trying to decide whether it's possible that Michael is fetching Able to serve some knightly function in America -- the America of today. I think it is possible, based on the text. But I don't have any proof that's what Wolfe intends.

Paul

--- James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net> wrote:

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~ Crush

Nathan Spears — 03 Jan 2005, 13:14 · in reply to stilskin

James Wynn said:

The ambulance? That's Arthur Ormsby being taken to the hospital of course!
They found him in a coma possibly near death from hypothermia in that valley
where the Moss Aelf took him. Presumably, when he reaches the Most High God,
he will awake.

I've been mulling on this, and I think you're saying that he's going to wake up in America to discover that he's still a young boy, similar to King Peter and the rest in Narnia reverting to children after their adventures. Honestly, if this is what Wolfe intends then I feel cheated. Is this guesswork on your part or are there more clues pointing that direction in the text? It feels a little small somehow.

Then again, it does point to a Christian interpretation of the text in small ways: "a great lord requires service from a knight," or however that went.

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significant that Able never looks at himself while
wearing the helmet.

I thought it was very significant that he did look at himself while wearing the helmet. He looked at his reflection in the water (seeing Disiri as a human woman next to him) just before he cast the helmet far out into it. He sees himself as a knight and not a small boy, which was what he expected to see.

stilskin — 03 Jan 2005, 13:21 · in reply to Nathan Spears

Damn -- my apologies for missing that. Something more to think about . . .

P

--- Nathan Spears <spearofsolomon at yahoo.com> wrote:
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James Wynn — 03 Jan 2005, 13:45 · in reply to Nathan Spears

The ambulance? That's Arthur Ormsby being taken to the hospital of course! They found him in a coma possibly near death from hypothermia in that valley where the Moss Aelf took him. Presumably, when he reaches the Most High God, he will awake.

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Honestly, if

this is what Wolfe intends then I feel cheated. Is this guesswork on your part or are there more clues pointing that direction in the text? It feels a little small somehow.

My only real evidence is that Able says HE is in that ambulance. IIRC.

As for it being small, I think this is a small part of Wolfe's intent in the novel. I was pretty sure that this world was internal in THE KNIGHT when Able learned he could not drown and that he *was* the sea in some sense. This is all very standard fair for the fantasy/kidnap novel genre.

What's vital about the novel to me is what Wolfe is saying about honor, about loss, about existence, and about sin.

High points? 1) Valfather coming to Iddn to bestow his favor having won great honor in her dealings as King Gilling's wife. 2) The conversation with the Thiazi when he reveals that Giants love but are never loved. 3) Able's discussion with Mani about the soul.

Personally, I'm more distressed by the fact that this is the second Wolfe novel in a row in which being blinded is a key narrative element. Any reason?

~Crush

Russell Wodell — 03 Jan 2005, 19:18 · in reply to Nathan Spears

What would be Sir Garvaon's motive for killing Gilling? (Rhyme unintentional) And why would Wolfe conceal this for so long?

For this and other reasons, I am fairly certain that Iddn is the murderer. She agreed to marry

Gilling to achieve power, which she maintains with her army of giantesses, but killed him because sexual congress would mean her death either in coitus or in giving birth to a giant, as Wolfe makes gruesomely explicit.

If I'm right, this further underlines the increasing strain of misogyny in late Wolfe...

Russell

mournings glory — 03 Jan 2005, 22:01 · in reply to Russell Wodell

From: "Russell Wodell" <wrustle at telus.net>

What would be Sir Garvaon's motive for killing Gilling? (Rhyme unintentional) And why would Wolfe conceal this for so long?>

Garvaon is in love with Iddn--so kills Gilling out of jealousy or to spare Iddn the painful coitus/childbirth you mention. Able presages all this early in _The Knight_ when he writes, "All the time we were talking, I was thinking about what Iddn had said about Beel giving her to King Gilling, but I could not tell Garvaon and I would have been afraid of what he might do if I did."

If I'm right, this further underlines the increasing strain of misogyny in late Wolfe..>

But even if your Iddn-as-murderess hypothesis were true, I'm not sure how protecting yourself against sexual mutilation and/or death-due-to-childbirth is misogynistic.

I rather liked Iddn as a character and believe her agreeing to marry King Gilling is every bit as noble, selfless and dutiful as anything Able, Svon or Toug do in their various undertakings as knights aspirant.

msg

stilskin — 04 Jan 2005, 05:22 · in reply to Russell Wodell

Wolfe is pretty explicit (for Wolfe!) about Garvaon being the murderer. This occurs after his death, when Abel is answering various questions put to him by Beel and others about the attack and the murder. His motive is that he is in love with Iddn and can't bear to see her honor (as he perceives it) besmirched by the forced marriage to Gilling. His murder of Gilling, in knightly terms, is a deeply selfish and dishonorable act -- thus it's interesting that he is "raised" to Skai. But then again, Abel himself goes against the knightly code many times, and is rewarded for it.

Paul

--- Russell Wodell <wrustle at telus.net> wrote:

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late Wolfe...

Russell

harlekin at earthlink.net — 04 Jan 2005, 11:10 · follows stilskin

This is a paradox. Garvaon sacrifices his knightly honor to benefit Iddn, something not even
Able is willing to do.

Don

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late Wolfe...

Russell

stilskin — 04 Jan 2005, 11:49 · in reply to harlekin at earthlink.net

I'm not sure that Garvaon's sacrifice would have been appreciated by Iddn had she known of it. In fact, I'm pretty confident she would find it reprehensible and offensive. Garvaon's motivation is selfish. He redeems himself in battling Setr. Had he died in almost any other way, I doubt he would have been raised to Skai. One interesting theme that runs throughout the Wizard Knight is that of redemption, of second (and sometimes even third and fourth) chances.

Paul

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