

TWK: Mag's sons and stuff

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Roy C. Lackey — 23 Feb 2005, 00:25

Well, Kieran wanted to discuss TWK, so here goes.

Andrew Bollen, back on Jan. 7&9, wrote about Mag and her sons; those interested might want to look back at those posts. I agree with him that Mag is in some sense the mother of Ben and Art, as well as the natural mother of Berthold and Able, but I see some things a bit differently. Actually, I believe she was also the natural mother of Ben and Art. More on that later.

First, I want to establish Art's mother's age at the time she disappeared from his life. It goes like this:

Idnn was "about sixteen". (K, 296)

Art said to Beel that he was "about your daughter's age". (K, 297)

Art said Scaur was "not a lot older than me". (K, 25) Late teens?

Sha, Scaur's wife, was probably about the same age as her husband.

Following a dream in which his mother figured, Art wrote of her: "She was still a young girl, not a great deal older than Sha, when she went away." (K, 319) Early twenties?

Mag doesn't get much ink, but I think she is the key to unlocking the Art/Able/Ben/Berthold confusion. Those were her bones on the island, of course, and she committed suicide by poison rather than be killed and eaten by the Khimairae when she got too old to lure sailors. So how long was she there, and how old was she when she got there?

She was of child-bearing age, obviously, when she arrived. Able was an infant and Berthold was old enough to walk and talk, so he was just a few years older. Nowhere is it stated or even implied that those were the only children she gave birth to. She took (or was given) the name Mag "here", meaning Mythgarthr. She was taught the script of Mythgarthr and her note was written in that script because she hoped her note would be seen by her sons Berthold and Able, her most reasonable choice of language under the circumstances. But she already knew how to write. She could have written the note in American English. She spoke to "Able" through Lynnet about her girlhood in America and how she met and wed Art's father. (W, 335)

Forgive me if I'm stating the obvious, and I haven't worked out the details, but this is how I see her role, in outline:

Mag (what was her American name?) was born and raised and wed and gave birth to Ben and Art in America. Still young, she (like Art) wandered into Aelfrice (or was abducted). She became wife to Berthold the Black and gave birth to Bold Berthold and Able before being taken to Glas.

Each set of brothers was the same age relative to each other.

What still needs to be worked out is the 30-40 year difference in age between "Able" and Berthold. Art was a teen in America, say sixteen. When Disiri made him 'grow up' he became maybe ten years older. (K, 162) That makes Berthold about sixty years old.

And the Able that Berthold remembered wandered off when he was about the same age that Art had been. Where did that Able go, and what happened to him?

We know what happened to Berthold and Able's mother Mag. Their father, Berthold the Black, seems to have died or disappeared before the brothers were grown. Likewise, Ben and Art's mother was out of the picture while they were still kids, as well as their father.

Mag chose to name her first-born in Mythgarthr after his father; it seems reasonable to assume that she did the same back in America. If correct, that would mean that Art's father was likely named Ben Ormsby, fwiw.

I don't know what to make of Kulili. She destroyed a statue of The Lady on Glas and erected another of herself. That has to be bad, given Wolfe's pecking order of worlds, but . . .

Speaking of worlds; there are two main traditions Wolfe is using in TWK, Norse and Arthurian. That seven-level business belongs to the Norse, as do most of the names and other trappings. But the world of Faerie is more Celtic, and I think of Aelfrice more in terms of its connection with the Arthurian stuff. This may be relevant. Art mentions computers and TV and such; he comes from our modern Earth. Our modern Earth also has airplanes and rocket ships; our sky is indisputably not Skai, as seems to be the literal case in Mythgarthr, nor is Aelfrice to be found beneath our feet--at least not so easily. We don't live in a seven-level cosmos, clearly, but we do have a tradition of visits to Faerie. What I'm saying is, the world of Faerie, aka Aelfrice, may be the only connection between our Earth and the worlds of TWK. That and Dream, maybe.

-Roy