

TWK: Mag & Stuff I Don't Understand About Dragons

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 27 Mar 2005

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 27 Mar 2005, 01:04

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Andrew here, digging himself out of a spam deluge as Thalassocrat ...

I see from the archives that Roy a while back had some comments about Mag and the question of whether or not she is the physical mother of Art and Ben.

Roy thinks that she is; I still don't, mainly because of what Mag- in-Lynnet says towards the end of Wizard.

On pp458-9, she says: "Good evening, Sir Able. I had a son of that name once. You aren't my son, I know, but I'd like to think of you as a son." Then: "You've always been my boy, because I love the boy you were before I met you." And finally: "My son Able came to [the Isle of Glas], Sir Able, not you."

After the final battle, before Art heals her, she says this (p474):

"You are not my son, and yet you are."

I think there is also some telling negative evidence. If Mag really

were his mother, would Art not seek to destroy Setr as soon as he found out that she had been enslaved as sailor-bait?

But of course there is definitely some kind of connection between Mag and Art's mother, and Mag's girlhood was spent in America. Originally I concocted a baroque story where Art's mom visited Dream and Aelfrice, leaving behind a copy of herself which became Mag. But I guess it's simpler to suppose that she was like Art, with an American version and a Mythgathr version, and that somehow they swapped, like Art and Able, when they were young.

So Art had a mother from Mythgathr, and Able a mother from America.

Art says of himself that he always preferred being outdoors when he

was a kid. I wonder if Able was troubled by strange visions of shopping malls?

I think there's a slight possibility the Mag/Ma swap happened after

the birth of Berthold/Ben. Evidence, if you can call it that: Mag is willing to be tricked into going with Setr-as-Garsec to check out a place of refuge, even though she knows it is probably "too small" for Berthold. Ben and Berthold seem to be firmly rooted in their contexts, on track to

settle down with girls and stuff, but I

get the impression that Art/Able are "different".

Roy also noted the time issue: Art thinks he spent something less than 10 years in Aelfrice before emerging though Parka's cave, whereas 30-40 years seem to have passed in Mythgarthr, judging from Berthold's age. Presumably this is explained by the time differential between the two places.

But it does raise an interesting point: it seems that Art/Able's birth must have occurred 40-50 years before the story starts, in Mythgarthr terms - so around the same time as Arnthor's?

That leads in a tenuous kind of way to Stuff I Don't Understand About Dragons, viz:

1. Why does Grengarm reappear in Mythgarthr after escaping from Art in the cave? The dragon as pitiable dwarf (presumably because he's not strong in Mythgarthr) jumps into the pool which leads to Aelfrice. Shortly afterwards, he reappears riding a storm-front. Art says later that Grengarm was seeking to escape to Aelfrice during Art's pursuit. But why did the dragon come back at all? A tentative story: Grengarm could not reach Muspel from Aelfrice, because Kulili blocked the portal associated with the pool in the cave, confronting him as monstrous white dragon. So he had to return to Mythgarthr to try to find another way.

2. Why doesn't Setr keep women on Glas as sailor-bait any more?

3. Why do Art and Setr have to battle their way up the stairs of the Tower of Glas? Why doesn't Setr simply reveal himself to the Khimarae and tell them to scram?

4. Art asks Uri towards the end of Knight how Setr expects him to kill Kulili, when Setr + a host of Aelf couldn't do it? (How would you go about killing Kulili anyway?) He says he knows the answer to

his question, but I don't. Setr is terrified of Art after his healing; so why did he heal him? Even if Art did kill her, wouldn't

it be a net loss for Setr - replacing one threat by a stronger one?

Why didn't he just eat Art when he was weak?

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Alan Lewis — 27 Mar 2005, 07:33 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

I agree with Andrew that Mag is not Art's mother, for the same reasons he gives.

That leads in a tenuous kind of way to Stuff I Don't Understand

2. Why doesn't Setr keep women on Glas as sailor-bait any more?

My guess on this one is Setr stopped the practice because he trapped Mag up there, which in the future will lead to a scenario where he has Art discover her remains up there. I think it

possible Setr was thinking that far ahead to try to manipulate Art, but Art gets much bigger than Setr anticipates and winds up much harder to control.

3. Why do Art and Setr have to battle their way up the stairs of the Tower of Glas? Why doesn't Setr simply reveal himself to the Khimarae and tell them to scram?

This answer I'm almost sure of -- because he doesn't want Art to know who he is. In the form of Garsceg he's got a pretty good chance of manipulating Art into helping him take over Aelfrice. With his cover blown, it becomes much harder, as we see.

4. Art asks Uri towards the end of Knight how Setr expects him to kill Kulili, when Setr + a host of Aelf couldn't do it? (How would you go about killing Kulili anyway?) He says he knows the answer to his question, but I don't. Setr is terrified of Art after his healing; so why did he heal him? Even if Art did kill her, wouldn't it be a net loss for Setr - replacing one threat by a stronger one? Why didn't he just eat Art when he was weak?

Only in retrospect does it become obvious that Art would become a threat to Setr. Keep in mind Setr seems to be locked into a stand-off with Kulili for a long time, and bringing in Art is his attempt to tip the balance with a wild card. Of course he wants Art to be as strong as possible, and it helps that Art is coming from Mythgathr also. I don't know for sure how Art thinks he can kill Kulili, but my guess is it would involve him using his power as an Overcyn and becoming as big as Kulili before he fights her. As we know, he doesn't defeat her, and we know he doesn't break his promise to the Valfather at that time, so I think that supports the case also, since he didn't want to win.

Alan

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 27 Mar 2005, 08:19 · follows Alan Lewis

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Alan answers my questions:

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I agree this is pretty likely, but I still feel there might be something else going on. Why not eg just tell Art to wait somewhere, go to the tower & tell the K. to scram, and then come back and get him? As it is, Setr goes a long way to blowing his cover by changing into a kind of mini-dragon thing on the stairs. Apart from anything else, it's really dangerous - Art almost get killed - and I would have expected Setr to take a little bit more care of things.

But maybe Setr's idea was to put Art in a position where Setr would save his life, and so strengthen his hold over him. Art saving himself would fit with the idea that Setr didn't realize just how strong Art would become.

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But Art's conversation with Uri happens before he goes to Skai - he doesn't know he's going to be an Overcyn at that point. I'm still stuck on how you kill something that can decompose into a huge swarm of worms and scatter; as Art says in the name-list at the beginning of Wizard, this makes her "pretty hard to catch".

I have a hare-brained idea that maybe Setr intended Art to fail. Having sworn to kill her, and failed, Art would be in Setr's debt. Setr could then use him to help take over Mythgarthr. Recall the offers he makes later - to be emperor of Mythgarthr etc. Art himself wonders if he might be able to get out of his promise by doing a few other favors for Setr, after his first meeting with Kulili. Perhaps Setr never thought that the Aelf could defeat her, either. Maybe his intention all along was for them to be decimated and demoralized, and thus more easily ruled.

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