

more Idnn

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 26 Oct 2005

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David DiGiacomo — 26 Oct 2005, 17:15

Idnn was an opportunist who cared only about becoming queen.

This seems fairly absurd to me. Beel wanted her to be queen, and she did feel a strong sense of duty to her father. But every indication was that she was frightened of what was going to happen, and was really hoping for a way to avoid it. A significant portion of The Knight makes no sense at all if you assume she "cared only about becoming queen".

She was frightened and hesitant before the fact, but once she saw the wealth and power that came with the position, she seemed to become enthusiastic.

I'll take a crack at it myself, though perhaps others can do better. Through most of the novel the giant women are nowhere to be found. They are bigger and stronger than the men, and yet they are absolutely absent from the political landscape and pretty much have no say in matters. [Might there be a little bit of a message here?] Their rallying to the queen and fighting against the men was a sharp and defining act of **autonomy**. I don't see how their involvement can be seen as a failure from any angle.

Couldn't they exercise their autonomy by living a good life in their own land, instead of joining the futile war in the south?

What **did** Garvaon die for, again?

Partly to expiate his guilt over killing Gilling without orders, but I think mostly out of petulance because Idnn chose Svon over him.

But in general, what do knights die for?

To impress the Valfather, in hope of a job promotion to Knight of Skai.

I do think that the younger Berthold is meant as a contrast to the knightly ideal. And we are thus led to be a bit more conscious of the fact that from our own (modern) subjective perspective, our heroes are more like Berthold than Ravd or Garvaon or Able. And also that we know a little less about the knightly ideal than we unreflectively assume we do.

I certainly agree with this. However, we don't know what ideal a resident of Skai would need to follow in order to ascend to Kleos. I think Able is wondering about that while he is sulking in the dungeon.

Chris — 26 Oct 2005, 19:01 · in reply to David DiGiacomo

David said:

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you assume she "cared only about becoming queen".

She was frightened and hesitant before the fact, but once she saw the wealth and power that came with the position, she seemed to become enthusiastic.

Well it seems like you have already backtracked from your original position that all she ever wanted from the start was to become queen. But even so, it seems like you are judging your entire assessment of Idnn based on her embrace of the role *after it was thrust upon her* and downplaying as much as possible everything that happened before that.

Idnn's embrace of the queenly role is certainly jarring. On the other hand bear in mind that she is not exactly unfamiliar with what is expected of her in that role - she was a friend of Arnthor's queen. And she was placed in a situation in which failure to live up to expectations would likely result in the messy demise of everyone who came with her to Utgard. Now it's true that by our standards, we would naturally drop the royal role and adopt a more casual style among friends. But let's be clear that, like the world of knights, the world of kings and queens is less immediately accessible than we unreflectively assume. We think we are as familiar with Idnn as with the girl next door, and this is a rather jarring reminder that her background, ideals, and perception of her own duty are quite different.

Couldn't they exercise their autonomy by living a good life in their own land, instead of joining the futile war in the south?

And why do women need to vote, or go out in the workplace anyway? Couldn't they exercise their autonomy by living a good life in their own house, instead of joining the futile ratrace of the modern world?

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Partly to expiate his guilt over killing Gilling without orders, but I think mostly out of petulance because Idnn chose Svon over him.

The key concept that you leave out is that of honor, and I don't think you're going to get a good impression of what's going on in the terms you've chosen.

But in general, you portray Garvaon is a fairly contemptible little worm - a petulant, murderous child. Is that really how you think of him? And if so then why did you lament that he "died for nothing"?

But in general, what do knights die for?

To impress the Valfather, in hope of a job promotion to Knight of Skai.

I'm not sure how you come to this belief. Most knights seem only vaguely aware of how things stand in Skai, and only the best of them seem particularly devout. Able also routinely has to explain the valkyrie to his listeners, they appear not to be a matter of common knowledge.

When Ravd explains that a knight doesn't fight for the reasons Berthold did, do you really think he'd follow that up with a "No, what knights really fight for is a job promotion"? To be honest if I had gotten the same impression you did about what was going on, I probably wouldn't have bothered to finish these books.

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I certainly agree with this. However, we don't know what ideal a resident of Skai would need to follow in order to ascend to Kleos. I think Able is wondering about that while he is sulking in the dungeon.

I find the portion of the story with Able in the dungeon to be more than a little disconcerting. It seems like he regresses, badly, during this period. Able, from the beginning, has a rabid hatred of jailers. And it seems like even after coming back from Skai, he considers jailers to be outright subhuman, for lack of a better word. But if this is saying something about the prison dynamic, I can't quite connect it fully with the rest of the story. It seems a bit shallow to suggest the jailer as the antithesis of the knight.

aramini1 at cox.net — 27 Oct 2005, 18:55 · follows Chris

This whole discussion of Idnn's change in character is pretty interesting. I think Wolfe makes it pretty clear that all of the characters except perhaps Ravd start off as contemptible in some way: Toug a highwayman, Svon a contemptible brat because he is denied his title, Able a bully posing as a knight because he got bigger, Idnn a scared child, Garvaon a jealous man, Uns living a lie to grant himself importance by using Org, Beel an opportunist, Morcaine an alcoholic evil wench, Arthnor a petty tyrant who doesn't understand honor, etc.

But by the end, every one of them has changed significantly to become an ideal. Arthnor dies "nobly". I'm not sure if Morcaine does, but she enters into an alliance with Arthnor's wife. Indeed, one of the nicest characters the first time through is Garsecg, probably the villain of the tale.

The big question is: what changes all of them? Is it Able's example? Is it the interference/noninterference of the Valfather? The intangible idea of honor? Or is it just that the natural order is being restored, and the aelf are starting to worship them as gods instead of the other way around. (caveat: in the normal scheme of things, people of Mythgarthr are really the god of kullili, because kullili is the natural inhabitant of Aelfrice. The aelf are the equivalent of Mani: a created being made from meshing leftover elements of that level with bits of "spirit".) Marc Aramini