

TWK: Not being Able

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 19 Dec 2005

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Roy C. Lackey — 19 Dec 2005, 07:37

There are several things about the last few pages of TWK that puzzle me, things that may or may not be related, but which are too convoluted to tackle at one time, so I'll stick with this for now.

When the Valfather made his first appearance in the story (with Idnn), he refused to call Able by that name. "I will not name him, because the name he bears here is not the name he bears among us, where he is Drakoritter [sic]." (W, 235) I thought that was a bit odd, by itself, because he was asking her to help Able and Able was still operating largely incognito.

At the end of the story, the Valfather showed up before Able had finished performing his miracles of healing, but waited until Able had exhausted himself before coming forward. He said, "You have done, Dragonritter." Moments later he asked, "Are you coming back?" When Able didn't answer, he prompted, "Few have been asked -- Sir Able. Even once."

The punctuation, the dash, indicates a belated emphasis on the title and name. Why did he choose to call him Sir Able at that point? Able answered him with, "I am not Able."

That is the most puzzling part of the ending for me. Why did Able answer that way? What did he mean? The Valfather's next words leave open the possibility that he *heard* Able's words as, "I am not able", meaning that he thought Able had reason to believe that he would not be able to return to Skai, perhaps not *permitted* to return, for whatever reason. But since Able both spoke and *wrote* the line, I have to assume that he wrote it as he intended it be understood. In what sense is he not Able, the man Parka named and punished for contradicting her in the matter, the man he spent so much of the book trying to become?

-Roy

James Wynn — 19 Dec 2005, 14:44 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy asks:

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I'll take a shot at these, and we'll see.

He meant he was not Able, he was Arthur. Having completely succeeded at being Able, a heroic figure of his desire, he now only wanted to be Arthur Ormsby again. He had no need for honors from Skai, let alone for ship captains or townspeople to *treat* him as a knight. He knew he *was* one.

Parka insisted that he play at being Able until he was....able. I don't think she would punish him for denying it now.

And even though you didn't ask it, I'll note that Valfather's calling him "Sir Able" (a title only a knight may bear) means that in causing Disiri and her people to come at his command, and in sacrificing himself for his (at last) worshipper in selfless love, he had become, not just a brave man, but the knight he pretended to be throughout the book.

J

Fernando Q. Gouvea — 23 Dec 2005, 22:00 · in reply to James Wynn

I remember, long long ago, a fanzine (perhaps called "Book of Gold") that published a few issues in which they went through the Latro books (or perhaps only "Soldier of the Mist") sorting out references and commenting on source material. A search through my many piles of old stuff wasn't successful. Does anyone else remember these? I'd love to see those again.

Thanks,

Fernando

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===== Fernando Q. Gouvea Dept. of Mathematics Editor, FOCUS and FOCUS Online Colby College <http://www.maa.org> 5836 Mayflower Hill Editor, MAA Reviews Waterville, ME 04901 <http://www.colby.edu/~fqgouvea>

Among the mail that comes unbidden to my door is the very extensive catalog of a Christian bookseller... The front portion was given over largely to what appeared to be method books for achieving comfortable intimacy with God. I wonder which God these titles referred to, and whether the object of their religion might be more efficiently accomplished by eliminating the byway of Christianity in favor of a strong drug and a friendly pet.

-- S. M. Hutchens, in Touchstone, December 2001