

An Evil Guest: is

The Urth list — 5 messages, 2 voices, 15 Mar 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5557>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Gwern Branwen — 15 Mar 2010, 13:10

Working off the wiki page summarizing the various bits of evidence that Margaret is a major player:

<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/pmwiki.php?n=AnEvilGuest.MysteriousMargaret>

As I re-read AEG with an eye to Margaret, I'm just not convinced that Margaret is either a werewolf or a time-traveling Cassie.

- Besides the initials, why should we think Margaret is misleading about her dry-as-dust conservative church-going background? She doesn't talk like Cassie either.
- The straw example is more questionable because of Margaret's years of experience with the stage & dressing & makeup, not because of color-blindness!
- And if Margaret is really mistaken about the dress color, wouldn't Cassie call her on it? I can't be confident of ascribing this to color-blindness when the reason for Reis's color mistake is uncertain as well.
- The Shirley 'Ladydog' thing is far more consistent with Margaret's churchly prudery than with werewolf sensibilities. (This is one of many double-edged bits of evidence; wouldn't it make *more* sense for a werewolf to casually use 'bitch' with minimal negative overtones than to avoid the word?)
- The morality is double-edged, like the fruit. So, if she is excessively moral and vegetarian, that's evidence *for* her being a werewolf? Presumably, if she freely cursed and got into fights and liked her steaks raw, that'd be evidence for her being a werewolf too...

And some of the bits seem rather opposite.

- When Margaret fails to recognize Cassie, this is a major sign, isn't it? Margaret must remember that scene and what Cassie now looks like, since that is how Margaret has looked her entire post-Cassie life (in this scenario). What purpose is served by faking non-recognition?
- Margaret getting a sandwich fast isn't very convincing either. Look at that scene again; there are multiple long conversations between Margaret arriving and returning, and the sandwich is hot & fresh. The theater would be in the town's downtown area; there must be fastfood joints all over the place (and notice Cassie doesn't comment on the speed and orders with great assurance, things consistent with a restaurant next door or down the street). So the time is just fine for Margaret to jog/run out, grab something, and return. The conversations take easily 10 or 15 minutes - ain't none of them in a hurry.
- Likewise for the answering machines. Really, how long does it take to phone two numbers and leave a message? A minute?
- Telling from how she sings is not silly at all. 'When two thieves meet, they need no introduction / they recognize each other without question.' Dancers & martial artists can recognize each other just by how they move; are voices any less revealing? And Cassie has her star-power at this point: it could just be that a star like Cassie *of course* knows how to sing. The kids at the cafe ask for her autograph just like they would for a real star, after all.
- The braiding hair is also explained by prudery; loose hair is indecent and lascivious, you know.

Women's hair should be up or braided, and men should have as little as possible.

Further points that came to me as I read:

- if Margaret/Cassie is doing all this to see Reis again and do something for him, then why on earth is she frightened of him when he comes to retrieve the gold bracelet? She's worked years, decades, in humiliating menial jobs, just for this moment - and she acts exactly as not-Cassie-Margaret would? I don't buy that.

- During the dinner date, Reis seems pretty confident that he knows the gungel who attacked Chase, but doesn't know who he works for. The gender is wrong, the gungel is not described as small, and besides, didn't Reis say he looked into Margaret's background and knows she wouldn't steal the bracelet? That's not very consistent with her attempted murder of Chase.

- This is even more true of Gideon Chase's description of his attacker. He speaks always of a man, and implies that the man was on the large side (because he takes the time to specify that it was not the large FBI man, John). Chase further implies later on, at the Silent Woman IIRC, that the attacker was working for the ATF, and that clumsy, ineffective attacks are a staple of the ATF (here as well as elsewhere I hear allusions to Waco); which works for his attack. The FBI wouldn't attack him like that, the Squiddies have no reason to, Reis wants Chase on his side, leaving the ATF. Chase is a man of rare perception everywhere else in the book; are we to think he is triply fooled by his attacker? (Gender, size, and employer.) I don't think so. And if we can't connect Margaret to the attack on Chase, the argument begins to fall apart.

- And how to reconcile the dirt-poor Margaret with the arch-spy who can fabricate a new identity solid enough to last and withstand the full assault of billionaire Reis's world-class investigators? Would Reis *really* tell them 'don't bother investigating anything other than her honesty, even if she mysteriously appears one year with no previous records of her existence, because I don't care that she might be a Squiddy spy or ATF plant or agent of Chase'? He spares no expense where Cassie is concerned, and Margaret seems to spend even more time with Cassie than does Reis or Chase.

- If the horror story is that Margaret's quest is futile, then why would Chase's survival bother her? Either the storyline is fixed, in which case despair should've set in the moment she came back, or it's mutable at *any* point, in which case Chase escaped *that* time in the hotel, but Margaret has many more opportunities to try. (When Chase is clumsily dancing around on a peg leg, eg.)

- Why would Cassie never remark that she now looks like Margaret at the end? (And one would think Margaret would be struck by passing her twin on the street. I know I would.) For that matter, if Cassie really is so drab and ugly now, why would she still receive compliments (from Klauser, iirc) about being attractive? I think we may have over-played her fall; Cassie hasn't fallen below her old self, she's fallen *back* to her old self, just with bleached hair.

- And I know I've hashed this out before, but by most reasonable statistics, the 'wealthiest woman' in an American state is a billionaire, and such people can buy the most sophisticated vessels around and have enough left over to never need work again. (Suppose a hopper that can make it to Woldercan costs Cassie's *entire* fortune, unlikely as that sounds, and she has \$1 billion. She needs only put her money into bonds and wait a month or two, and at 5% annually, she's made 5-10 million dollars, enough to live on or invest later. And don't forget, she can sell the hopper later on. Logically, a highly-advanced hopper ought to be worth even more in the past. Cassie knows how to sell difficult objects, like her bracelet; I don't think a hopper would be much more difficult.) Given the multiple avenues to wealth Cassie-Margaret has, I don't see any workable explanation except deliberate camouflage.

gvern

Gvern Branwen — 15 Mar 2010, 20:22 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Mon, Mar 15, 2010 at 5:02 PM, Roy C. Lackey <rlackey at stic.net> wrote:

Gvern wrote:

As I re-read AEG with an eye to Margaret, I'm just not convinced that Margaret is either a werewolf or a time-traveling Cassie.

FWIW, I am largely in agreement with you, given that I raised many of the same objections. The only point I would quibble over is this one:

[snip]

I think we may have over-played her fall; Cassie hasn't fallen below her old self, she's fallen **back** to her old self, just with bleached hair.

I don't think Cassie reverted to quite her old self after her long ordeal on that island. It seems to be a rule of "magic" that a price must be paid for its use, and she is the one who paid it.

But this isn't really magic, and in magic payment is usually to 'outside' entities; the powers are like a loan. Cassie isn't borrowing anything from anyone; the star power, as Gideon explains thoroughly, was always in Cassie, she just didn't have access. If someone helps you find a 5\$ bill in your messy room, it might be **nice** of you to give them 1\$ or something, but there's no genuine price to pay. (What, you have to give them 5\$? That'd be silly.) Chase is involved, but he's amply repaid by her assistance; the Manbats are involved, but they seem to be altruistic - hence the talk about 'cub' and 'friend'. The rest is Cassie.

If you think of the star power/mojo as acting or a skill, reverting to normality (minus the real effects of being marooned) is what one would expect. When you go bicycling around, stop, and years later have forgotten, you don't suddenly get crushed by the fatigue of running around n miles. You simply can no longer bicycle.

She didn't just lose her "mojo"; she seems to have suffered a blow to her general health that "aged" her more than she would have naturally in that span of time, so much so that she would never again be the pretty but ordinary young woman that Gideon first saw on the stage. Margaret had also known pre-mojo Cassie, but failed to recognize the haggard woman who passed her by on the street near the bank.

-Roy

'pretty young woman'? Hold on, isn't Cassie's age late thirties-early forties? She can still be attractive, but by that age the adjectives have usually dropped the 'young' bit and replaced 'pretty' with 'beautiful' or 'handsome'. We can only describe her - as Ambassador Klauser does - as a 'young woman' and 'luscious' because of the mojo. (We expect sex idol stars who wear 3-square inch bikinis to be in their 20s, after all.)

By the time Cassie has, months later, recovered from the island and consulted beauticians (who would do much, but not 'enough'; presumably 'enough' would be Cassie mojo level of beauty), and go to Klauser, who is scrutinizing her, hazards a guess that Cassie is her mother. Going by the usual ~20 age bracket, and remembering that Cassie is ~40, it works perfectly. But if Cassie is washed out and dry as dust and has dirty pale hair - looks like Margaret - then who would guess that she was Cassie's mother? The circumstances don't make 'mother' the overwhelmingly obvious guess. If Cassie is back to her usual self, though...

Margaret seems only to have known Cassie pre-mojo in passing - as someone she saw occasionally from a distant and heard a reasonable bit about. She then spends **months** with Cassie post-mojo, and like everyone else, seems to forget about ordinary pre-mojo Cassie.

gvern

Gwern wrote:

As I re-read AEG with an eye to Margaret, I'm just not convinced that Margaret is either a werewolf or a time-traveling Cassie.

FWIW, I am largely in agreement with you, given that I raised many of the same objections. The only point I would quibble over is this one:

[snip]

I think we may have over-played her fall; Cassie hasn't fallen below her old self, she's fallen **back** to her old self, just with bleached hair.

I don't think Cassie reverted to quite her old self after her long ordeal on that island. It seems to be a rule of "magic" that a price must be paid for its use, and she is the one who paid it. She didn't just lose her "mojo"; she seems to have suffered a blow to her general health that "aged" her more than she would have naturally in that span of time, so much so that she would never again be the pretty but ordinary young woman that Gideon first saw on the stage. Margaret had also known pre-mojo Cassie, but failed to recognize the haggard woman who passed her by on the street near the bank.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 16 Mar 2010, 06:02 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Gwern wrote:

'pretty young woman'? Hold on, isn't Cassie's age late thirties-early forties?

No. She was "thirtyish" (207).

She can still be attractive, but by that age the adjectives have usually dropped the 'young' bit and replaced 'pretty' with 'beautiful' or 'handsome'. We can only describe her - as Ambassador Klauser does - as a 'young woman' and 'luscious' because of the mojo. (We expect sex idol stars who wear 3-square inch bikinis to be in their 20s, after all.)

Pretty and young were my terms. Merely pretty, as she was pre-mojo, as distinguished from mojo beautiful. Young as seen from the perspective of someone my age -- or Klauser's. As you point out below, the Cassie who came to see Klauser looked so much older than the Cassie he had seen on video that he thought she might be beautiful Cassie's mother.

By the time Cassie has, months later, recovered from the island and consulted beauticians (who would do much, but not 'enough'; presumably 'enough' would be Cassie mojo level of beauty), and go to Klauser, who is scrutinizing her, hazards a guess that Cassie is her mother. Going by the usual ~20 age bracket, and remembering that Cassie is ~40, it works perfectly. But if Cassie is washed out and dry as dust and has dirty pale hair - looks like Margaret - then who would guess that she was Cassie's mother? The circumstances don't make 'mother' the overwhelmingly obvious guess. If Cassie is back to her usual self, though...

Cassie's usual self was thirtyish. Margaret, iirc, was said to be in her fifties. The woman Klauser was looking at had obviously aged so much that he could think of her as old enough to be Cassie's mother. In my experience, I have never seen a thirtyish woman in modern times who looked old enough to be her own mother. <g> I don't think that even Gideon could have transformed a talented woman who looked anything like Margaret into the most beautiful and desirable woman in the world.

Margaret seems only to have known Cassie pre-mojo in passing - as someone she saw occasionally from a distant and heard a reasonable bit about. She then spends *months* with Cassie post-mojo, and like everyone else, seems to forget about ordinary pre-mojo Cassie.

Margaret had worked backstage for another actress in "The Red Spot"; she knew perfectly well what pre-mojo Cassie looked like.

-Roy

Gwern Branwen — 17 Mar 2010, 16:25 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Tue, Mar 16, 2010 at 2:02 AM, Roy C. Lackey <rlackey at stic.net> wrote:
Gwern wrote:

'pretty young woman'? Hold on, isn't Cassie's age late thirties-early forties?

No. She was "thirtyish" (207).

Well, even if we take Cassie at her word - I knew a woman who was in her 40s for an awful long time - we can do better than that; the cop who picks up Cassie guesses (pg 29) 'Forty?' 'Not quite.' (And I'd argue that Cassie felt obliged to smile because the cop was actually low, making it a compliment by someone she didn't want compliments from.) 'Not quite' fits best with 39, 38 at the lowest.

Not to mention, early 30s doesn't really seem to me to give Cassie time for all her husbands.

Cassie's usual self was thirtyish. Margaret, iirc, was said to be in her fifties. The woman Klauser was looking at had obviously aged so much that he could think of her as old enough to be Cassie's mother. In my experience, I have never seen a thirtyish woman in modern times who looked old enough to be her own mother. <g>

Cassie is more like 40ish. As I said, the expectation of sex starlets is 20s, and mojo Cassie is consistently treated as such (cf. the 3 square inch bikini); add 5 or 10 years to get Damaged Normal Cassie, and that's a difference of 30 years - giving us the entire gap necessary and even some left over time.

I don't think that even Gideon could have transformed
a talented woman who looked anything like Margaret into the most beautiful
and desirable woman in the world.

Well, he manages to disguise himself very well, and one of the classic uses for 'glamour' is beautifying ugly people, no? He can learn invisibility in a year; I'd wager given a year or two he can learn how to put a good glamour on someone if he doesn't already know how.

Margaret seems only to have known Cassie pre-mojo in passing - as someone she saw occasionally from a distant and heard a reasonable bit about. She then spends *months* with Cassie post-mojo, and like everyone else, seems to forget about ordinary pre-mojo Cassie.

Margaret had worked backstage for another actress in "The Red Spot"; she knew perfectly well what pre-mojo Cassie looked like.

-Roy

And why do we think Margaret is exempt from the mojo's rewriting of peoples' memories & expectations? Remember that Cassie was thought to be famous even before she gave the last performance.

gwern