

5HX

The Urth list — 9 messages, 3 voices, 24 Aug 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6642>

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Lee — 24 Aug 2014, 13:29

Gerry Quinn: The diary has more than one function. He is, in a sense, trying to convince himself he is human, as Wolfe has noted. But one does not try to convince oneself of something one believes to be true.

You recognize that Victor is trying to convince himself he is human but do not recognize that Victor often succeeds in doing so.

When Marsch first meets Victor he notes Victor's dark hair, green eyes and pale skin. Physical characteristics Marsch himself possesses. The imitation had started immediately.

Victor starts the adventure unable even to open a jar according to his father. But he gets progressively better with tools, the longer he spends with Marsch. His speech also becomes progressively better and Marsch eventually recognizes his is copying Marsch's own speech patterns.

It is clear (to me and others) that during the course of the VRT story that the narrator is having an identity crisis. He truly doesn't know who he is. In one entry he is speaking as Marsch, in another he is discussing his shape-shifting mother. This would not happen if Victor's actions were entirely a conscious attempt to pretend he is Marsch.

As for whether he killed Marsch or Marsch met with an accident, we are not actually told. Possibly there was an altercation initiated by Marsch in which Marsch got killed.

We are not "actually told" much of anything. That's kind of the point of this story. But since "the boy" (Marsch really) was killed right after Marsch had shot the cat (which is implied to have been a shapeshifting lover to Victor), and because the boy was becoming proficient with a gun, we are given both the means and motive for Victor to have killed Marsch.

All we know is that Marsch did not return from the wilderness, while Victor did.

We do not "know" this, if knowledge is bestowed upon the reader only by what is "actually told", then Victor replacing Marsch is merely a deduction which can be made. And, as I noted in a previous post, there are some very devoted and skeptical Wolfe fans who DID find this replacement to be a false assumption until Wolfe revealed it to be true in an interview.

Gerry Quinn — 24 Aug 2014, 15:22 · in reply to Lee

On 24/08/2014 14:29, Lee wrote:

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You recognize that Victor is trying to convince himself he is human but do not recognize that Victor often succeeds in doing so.

I don't see anywhere it is indicated that he outright believes he is factually the original Marsch.

When Marsch first meets Victor he notes Victor's dark hair, green eyes and pale skin. Physical characteristics Marsch himself possesses. The imitation had started immediately.

No. We are never told of Marsch's appearance, but from his references to Victor's particular characteristics without any comment as to his own, we may surely infer that they were different.

If you are thinking of Marsch's first visit to Saltimbanque Street, that was Victor. The original Marsch never visited Sainte Croix.

Victor starts the adventure unable even to open a jar according to his father. But he gets progressively better with tools, the longer he spends with Marsch. His speech also becomes progressively better and Marsch eventually recognizes his is copying Marsch's own speech patterns.

I see no indication that he gets better. From the start he is skillful at building fires, pitching tents, etc. He learned to write at school with great difficulty (he spends some time reminiscing on the matter in his cell). Certainly he learns something of anthropology and Marsch's speech patterns as time goes on.

It is clear (to me and others) that during the course of the VRT story that the narrator is having an identity crisis. He truly doesn't know who he is. In one entry he is speaking as Marsch, in another he is discussing his shape-shifting mother. This would not happen if Victor's actions were entirely a conscious attempt to pretend he is Marsch.

In what entry does he speak as Marsch (not counting the diary entries that were actually written by Marsch)? The closest I could think of is when he speaks of long-legged women etc., and on close examination the details of events mentioned in this passage stem from his time at the University of Roncevaux, which came after Victor replaced the original Marsch.

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We are not "actually told" much of anything. That's kind of the point of this story. But since "the boy" (Marsch really) was killed right after Marsch had shot the cat (which is implied to have been a shapeshifting lover to Victor), and because the boy was becoming proficient with a gun, we are given both the means and motive for Victor to have killed Marsch.

We are told a lot of things which you choose to ignore. But as to the circumstances of the death of Marsch and the cat, we know little, as the entries in the notebook after "I think I would shoot them both" are in Victor's hand, and substantially false. This includes the story of the cat biting Marsch, which may be a total fabrication in order to explain the change in handwriting, or may be true. Victor writes later that he broke the cat's neck and laid her at 'the boy's' dead feet,

So, we have Marsch's strangely jealous comment, and then no more from Marsch. He goes back to the camp, and some kind of confrontation ensues. Maybe Victor was waiting for an opportunity, or maybe the opportunity created the event. Maybe Marsch shot the cat, maybe Victor killed her as a sacrifice of some kind. Maybe the cat really did bite Marsch and he became sick and Victor killed him. We are not told the details; all we know is that Marsch died and Victor took his place.

All we know is that Marsch did not return from the wilderness, while Victor did.

We do not "know" this, if knowledge is bestowed upon the reader only by what is "actually told", then Victor replacing Marsch is merely a deduction which can be made.

It is a deduction for which the evidence is more than ample, from the clear indication that the final journal entries are written in Victor's (bad) hand, to the prisoner's memories of his mother on Sainte Anne, to his green aboriginal eyes.

And, as I noted in a previous post, there are some very devoted and skeptical Wolfe fans who DID find this replacement to be a false assumption until Wolfe revealed it to be true in an interview.

Perhaps indicating that devotion and scepticism can be carried to excess.

- Gerry Quinn

Marc Aramini — 24 Aug 2014, 16:26 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Marsch the infected kills his own eventual killer, the cat, who had an empathetic association with Victor (and passed this to Marsch), and places the cat at Victor's dead feet. That stuff happened just as Wolfe wrote it, no fabrication necessary. The boy fell to his death, VRT is "variance reduction techniques".

The bite is definitely not a fabrication, but you guys can believe whatever you want. There's actually extremely little fabrication in Fifth Head of Cerberus, but no overt explanation of mechanisms.

On Sun, Aug 24, 2014 at 8:22 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

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Marc Aramini — 24 Aug 2014, 16:52 · in reply to Marc Aramini

It takes about three days for Marsch to be reborn on Easter Sunday from the bite as something different - his body undergoes a harrowing over that period of time. The existence of two alien races is simple: it creates a means for "Other" to be persecuted - abo incarcerated by humans or shadow child incarcerated by abos who believe themselves to be human. Abo incarcerated by abo makes no sense. The officer making a slave open the document with a knife and then showering prophylactically shows a strange unhandiness and a fear of saliva. This multiplication of species must serve a narrative purpose. The switch of Sandwalker to Eastwind and the human landers suddenly not knowing what open hands mean shows the climactic switch when humans are replaced by abos who now believe themselves to be humans. Why bring up Liev's postulate at all if it isn't even a possibility? It is present in the text. So are meta statements like "don't ask me how big a child is". The details of A Story honestly don't make much sense unless they are pointing to a symbolic representation of Marsch's fate to elucidate the two life cycles at work - larval, adult, sessile carapace/tree and an infectious empathic one.

On Sun, Aug 24, 2014 at 9:26 AM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:
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On Sun, Aug 24, 2014 at 8:22 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

Gerry Quinn — 24 Aug 2014, 18:28 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 24/08/2014 17:52, Marc Aramini wrote:
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We *have* a means for 'Other' to be persecuted: abos persecuted by humans (and of course plenty of intra-human persecution, particularly on Sainte Croix).

Why can't the officer simply fear spirochaetes of the ordinary kind? He shares the girl with the other officers. If people on Sainte Croix are terrified of being infected by alien mind-controlling parasites (or by the wrong sort of alien mind-controlling parasites) why don't we hear more about it than a passing reference to an officer who likes to wash after sex?

The French landers hold up open hands - it is Sandwalker who doesn't understand the significance because his people don't use weapons.

The major advantage of the interpretation, boring as it might seem, in which nearly everyone in normal society (now) is human apart from a few abos who slip under the radar, is that no character in any of the three novellas is required to be completely delusional about concrete matters.

- Gerry Quinn

Marc Aramini — 24 Aug 2014, 18:58 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

You have to explain away the death of the cat, the death of the boy, the presence of two alien species, the presence of Veil's hypothesis, believe that number five dreams of abos by coincidence the day after he meets his aunt, the name of the city, the weird lack of new buildings in the last 140 years ... prophylactic has a nice double meaning, I admit, but the bite of the abo that switches Eastwind and Sandwalker symbolizes all that confusion of identity as well - Eastwind, Sandwalker, the abos, the shadow children, the humans - they are all confused about who they are, and if that confusion ISN'T in the text, you haven't been reading the same book. The main cast outside of a story are confused about who they are as well. The story is about being confused about who you are. But if we know the life cycle of the abos and their imitative properties, a street named after larva and mention of at least one of the species being long and living between the branches of trees actually resonates a bit.

My life cycle schema makes the narrative you **MUST** dismiss as a lie and fabrication (the murder of the cat, the death of Victor) literally true and also gives it narrative reason (at least, the slaying of the cat).

Yes, we have one plausible means of persecution. I mentioned it already, Gerry - humans on abo. Do you see that below? It's the same thing you reiterated. see that there? "abo incarcerated by humans OR" That OR implies there are two plausible scenarios given the species we have been introduced to. The first is the first logical conclusion we can come to before we understand the life cycles at work.

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On Sun, Aug 24, 2014 at 11:28 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

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Gerry Quinn — 24 Aug 2014, 20:56 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 24/08/2014 19:58, Marc Aramini wrote:

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My answers:

Cat: unknown causes, though Victor said he broke its neck, maybe true

Death of the boy: a lie, it was Marsch who died

Presence of two alien species: not postulated by me (the Shadow Children are degenerate humans).

Veil's Hypothesis: wrong (and in fact the aunt made another great point against it, which is that a species able to mimic well enough to lose the power of mimicry would have died out before humans landed).

No. 5's dream: he had been talking to his aunt about abos

Name of the city: of no significance

Lack of new buildings: Port-Mimizon is a city and its population has been falling. Conversely, though, Frenchman's Landing on Sainte Anne is described by Marsch as something like a newly-built shanty town. And weather control satellites have been installed on Sainte Anne only in the last decade or two, leading to the replacement of nuclear-powered ships by sailing ships like those used on Earth. Perhaps the Kafka-esque fascism of Sainte Croix is starting to hold it back, even if the officer thinks otherwise.

Bite symbolism: I don't consider the bite symbolic

Confusion of identity, both personal and racial: certainly it's a major theme, but in a much more realistic and naturalistic form than you propose. Its naturalism, in my opinion, gives it stronger resonances with real-world issues of identity and colonisation than a more highly-coloured confection of parasites and pod people, all delusional regarding their true nature.

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"I simply had to make my voice like his and look older". Talking about his mother in the cell. The writing in the school composition book and in the last part of Marsch's notebook. Green eyes. It is evidently Victor in the cell, and he has become Marsch by means of imitation and imposture, not by some sort of infection process mediated by the cat, a process which is never postulated in the story (while we are repeatedly informed that the abos are capable of imitation).

- Gerry Quinn

Marc Aramini — 25 Aug 2014, 00:20 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Cool, you can believe whatever you want. If you want to view the final scenes as outright lies that's fine, but there are textual hints that explain them as something beyond lies. Certainly Wolfe wanted Victor's replacement of Marsch to look like the solution, but I think it fails to explain many things that are lurking in the background. I am convinced of my reading; you are convinced of yours. Yes, abos imitate. No, Marsch isn't really Victor, nor an abo. The switching of personalities via a bite IS postulated in the story via "A Story" when Sandwalker and Eastwind become "confused" after a bite and the survivor's arm hurts, but you don't read it that way so that's cool too.

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Marc Aramini — 25 Aug 2014, 00:23 · in reply to Marc Aramini

And no, you don't need to come back with the drug saliva bit confusing the guy and having nothing to do with microorganisms. Like I said, believe whatever you want.

On Sun, Aug 24, 2014 at 5:20 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:

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