

Pink Lady's Age; VRT's Mother

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 28 May 1998

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Robert Borski — 28 May 1998, 02:28

Tony Ellis has written about my lady in pink theory:

surely Mlle Etienne is too young to be David's mother. Marsch judges her to be 27 or 28; Gene he judged to be 18, and David is at least as old as his "brother". Mlle Etienne would have been about 10 when David was born!

I'm not sure I necessarily agree with several of your points. At least I'm going to argue that way.

The difference in David's and Gene's ages is never stated, but Gene has no difficulty accepting the notion that he is older when he is told he is going to be made heir. They appear to be about the same age, but at the same time Gene has suffered more physically from the pharmacological abuse wreaked upon by him by Maitre, perhaps delaying puberty. Children also mature at different rates, both mentally and physically; when I was a youth a million years ago, many of my same-aged friends started shaving years before me, and unlike other of my friends who performed recitals in elementary school I still can't play the piano (and not for lack of trying) or write a poem.

The years on Sainte Croix are also longer by 42 extra days, which means that 28 would correspond to nearly 31. Marsch is a highly unreliable narrator as well ("I want my mommy"), thinking most Croixians look alike, and is too thoroughly libidinized to accurately judge a pretty woman's age. Consider his prison thoughts about why men desire the women they do, and for all we know he may have barely glanced at Celestine's face--the best indicator of age, although in a skilled prostitute, even this might be difficult to ascertain--ever see your wife/girlfriend without makeup? (The Marsch were talking about here is actually VRT, but the original Marsch himself had trouble assigning ages, thinking first Victor looked 15 or 16, then a few pages later stating he thought he looked "at least seventeen.") Also to be considered is the rough nature of life on a planet such as Sainte Croix, where people are much likelier to reproduce earlier, and the fact that there would be few prohibitions in a society that allowed slavery and child-brokering against child prostitution (cf. PRETTY BABY or the problem with sexual exploitation of children in countries like Thailand). Besides that, given Wolfe's extensive vocabulary and all the colors in the rainbow, why would Wolfe, a writer of enormous subtlety and diligence, give Celestine Etienne a plain pink dress? I also maintain the eye color link is valid--why not make her eyes hazel or grey? And I disagree with your lankiness point: Wolfe describes Celestine in almost exactly the same terms as the demimondaines of Cerberus House. But for another take on the lady in pink, see my soon-to-be-announced CAVE CANEM, where I theorize Nerissa may have been the original lady-in-pink.

Now have a crack at my theory, Robert. I say that we meet - well, almost meet - VRT's mother. She's the prisoner in the next cell.

This is an interesting theory and one I've never considered before, but I'd like to see something that supports it from text. If true, it would be highly ironic, but also highly coincidental. (Why would VRT's mere come to Port-Mimizon and not go to the Capital or somewhere else? Why would her arrest take so long {she's apparently been gone at least three years minimum from

Sainte Anne, and probably much longer, maybe even as long as 6, 7 years}? Why hasn't she used her famed "acting" ability to appear younger or more beautiful, and thereby snared a decent beau by now? How is it she's arrested and jailed in a prison that mainly seems to confine political prisoners and is placed with access to her son, a suspected spy/murderer? {Myself, I think she's a plant, hoping to ensnare VRT's confidences.} Why would the military government of Sainte Croix even waste time arresting mendicants as opposed to letting them fester in the streets or disappearing them? {Amnesty Interplanetary would have a field day on Sainte Croix.} Is it even likely she's on Sainte Croix--despite her wishes to go there what resources did she have, and wouldn't these same resources, if they were personal or sexual, avail her after she arrived? { I also maintain she'd be the first abo ever to make such a journey.}) I think the odds are astronomical against what you propose--but if you are right, and you might be, I'd like to see something that supports it other than the neatness of the idea. In other words, gospel, chapter and verse from the text itself, with maybe a little sound exegesis.

My theories about VRT's mother are less extensive, and come from my own CAVE CANEM, which I'm almost finished with and will probably be announcing in my next post. To wit:

Three Faces in a tale told by VRT imitating Dr. Hagsmith, an abo woman who paints in clay yes! and no! faces on her right and left breasts, respectively. She sleeps with a cattle-drover, and the faces transfer via body heat to the drover, but are reversed. The abo woman rejects the drover's love and flees, but the drover has the faces tattooed over, so he'll keep them forever (III, 225). Commentary: Three Faces may be the true name of VRT's absentee abo mother. Victor calls her "a fine actress," but his father has been prostituting her. As a shape-changer, with the ability to change her appearance (Victor says she could look like a young girl or an old woman if she wanted), she would be appositely named as Three Faces. We never learn her fatal fate, though Victor believes she migrated to Sainte Croix and goes looking for her there.

Robert Borski