

more on abos

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 19 Jun 1998

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Alice Turner — 19 Jun 1998, 15:58

Neal,

I had mentioned in passing the addictive substances that the Shadow Children used in "A Story", in response to a post of Alga's. Later, this made me think: how much significance should we attach to this substance? I seem to remember a passage, perhaps the same one, where use of the drug is linked to not being able to use tools. (I'm not completely certain of this, not having the book in front of me at the moment).

Exploring this, would this indicate that the factors causing the abos to not be able to use tools are more environmental? Perhaps the abos are capable of using tools, if they can recover sufficiently, but the "humans" (non-abos?) aren't used to seeing them that way. Is this related to Roy T. being a drunkard? Is it stated that he drinks, or that he's intoxicated - possibly on something else? (I think it is stated he drinks, but I'm going to have to go back and look now).

The reason this takes on any significance, is that most of the arguments for or against abos or half-abos still being around, or not, seem to focus on just how much tool use some of the characters demonstrate.

I think the tool use is important because (1) in Marsch's interviews it is brought up again and again (2) it's a kind of clue for us supplied by Wolfe. As for the "substance abuse"--well, according to "A Story," and as Mr. Broski has neatly outlined, there are three kinds of abos, the hill people (VRT and mom are pretty definitely hill people, as is Sandwalker), the marshmen, who must be physically nearly identical to them as they adopt Eastwind, the twin, and the physically dissimilar, much spookier, Shadow Children. It is only the last, I believe, who smoke. And yes, RT drinks.

Adam,

I'm morally certain ["A Story"] was written by V.R.T. (See below on the "amalgam.")

As you and others have pointed out, Marsch is far too insensitive, especially regarding the Annese, to write anything like it. The only problem is that I recall reading an interview with Wolfe in which he says Marsch wrote it. I don't remember where but I remember him saying this distinctly, because I already thought at the time that V.R.T. wrote "A Story." Maybe Wolfe meant only that the person calling himself Marsch wrote V.R.T. Or maybe he'd briefly forgotten that V.R.T. wrote "A Story." If all other lines of defense failed, I would have to say that while Wolfe may have meant to have Marsch write "A Story," in the story Wolfe wrote V.R.T. wrote "A Story." (I keep meaning to read the famous essay by Wimsatt and somebody attacking the "intentional fallacy.")

I'm inclined to think that too, was keeping the options open.

I hadn't seen this theory of V.R.T. merging with Marsch before, but I have to stick to my belief that V.R.T. is just impersonating Marsch in the ordinary way, perhaps aided by his shape-shifting abilities if he has them. I don't find it implausible that he learned all his anthropology from books on Ste. Anne and St. Croix; he had three years in the wilderness to study Marsch's books, and could read more in the libraries. In particular, his knowledge of "anthropological relaxation," which another poster had cited, could have been picked up in the local library after he's realized what the Wolfes are. His learning doesn't have to be very deep. Who does he have to convince? A dilettante who may have ceased following the literature years ago, some moderately-informed laymen who have access to the same sources he does, and the anthropological faculties on the sisterworlds, which are bad (this is by V.R.T.'s own testimony, but there's no reason to doubt it) and are no doubt already predisposed to be impressed by the visiting professor from Earth. And IIRC it was never claimed that Annese couldn't intellectually comprehend machines and tools, just that they couldn't make or use them.

What convinces me that V.R.T. has not merged with Marsch, aside from the lack of any indication that any Annese have this ability, is the drastic change in personality evident between Marsch's real journal entries and V.R.T.'s entries. It's so great that, with the benefit of hindsight, it's hard to see how anyone could have doubted that V.R.T. replace Marsch.

Yes, that is a good and convincing argument. But still, but still, there is that certainty among the Ste. Anne interviewees that the abos were "man-shaped animals," there is the evidence of "A Story," there is JVM/ART's own writing from his cell that seem to indicate something more. Perhaps, as someone earlier indicated, we are meant never to know for sure.

And see below from William Ansley:

I am "another poster". I agree that VRT could have learned enough anthropology from books so he could impersonate Marsch under the conditions he found himself. But I find it impossible to accept that he could just look at #5 and guess he's a clone by means of knowledge picked up this way. It seems to me we run into a chicken and egg problem here. How could he figure out the Wolfes are clones without knowing about anthropological relaxation (AR) very well. And why would he bone up on AR unless he knew the Wolfes were clones. Of course he could have some other source of knowledge about the Wolfes that we don't know about as you almost seem to imply, but, from the text, this seems unlikely and having to rely on events totally unsupported by the text is unsatisfying, at best.

5HC is full of people making guesses (spinning theories, telling "A Story", etc.) most of them seemingly wild. We know that in two cases at least (VRT as Marsch guessing that #5 is a clone and #5 guessing that Marsch is an abo) the guesses are true. I am beginning to think that we are supposed to accept that these are just guesses that do happen to be true. Perhaps there is supposed to be some "higher order" reason for this, but the outcome is that the guesses are right. I would like to build a grand theory on the idea that ALL the guesses in 5HC are true. It's too bad they are so contradictory.

That's why we're worrying at them so. Sigh. I don't like "guesses" and "coincidences" in fiction. I do like sly clues.

A *lot* has been said about Aunt Jeannine's withered legs. Well, where else do we find withered legs in 5HC?

In the dark Sandwalker climbed, climbed on hands and feet like a beast,
holding the feign-pheasant in his teeth until his fingers found the
priest's feet and his hands the withered legs. [p. 80, Scribners]

We have Sandwalker (an abo, maybe) going on a quest for reasons that are not clear (it seems that he is sent to the priest because of his dreams) to a priest with withered legs who apparently is dead. What good it is supposed to do is also unclear; Sandwalker seems to expect advice or council from the priests ghost. The priest lives in a cave, which is hard to find unless you have directions.

We have VRT as Marsch (an abo, probably?) going on quest for reasons that are not clear? (Wouldn't you think he'd want to avoid other anthropologists who might see through his charade, even if he found the scholars from the local universities easy to fool?) to a doctor of anthropology with withered legs, who isn't real (well is using a false name, anyway). This makes her hard to find. And what do Phaedria's friends ("the kids") call the house where Aunt Jeannine lives? The Cave!

I noticed the dead priest too, but left it out because I couldn't find a scintilla of connection with Aunt J. Very ingenious! (If somewhat wierd.)

Finally, thank you, Pedro Jorge, for the Borges/Ultan quote.

-alga-