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The Urth list — 2 messages, 1 voices, 22 Jun 1998

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Peter Cash — 22 Jun 1998, 11:56

I've been wondering: why does everyone buy into the notion that Marsch was killed by V.R.T. It seems to me that in 5th Head, everything is possible, and here one obvious possibility has been overlooked: Marsch is, precisely as his Kafkaesque captors insist, a spy and assassin. (Consider Wolfe's fascination with spies in, e.g. the Long Sun books. There is a positive abundance of spies in the Whorl.) The clues that he is an abo have been deliberately planted by Marsch to mislead his interrogators. In particular, his writings are full of disinformation designed to create doubt about his identity and intentions.

In fact, Marsch has a double cover story: first, that he is an anthropologist from earth. This primary cover is the one he used when moving about Port-Mimizon. He activated his secondary cover when he was arrested: hoping to take advantage of the Sainte Croix natives' ignorance of "abos", he began to pretend that he was an abo trying to pass as an anthropologist from Earth.

How much of Marsch's journal is fabrication? I think it's essentially true (but full of lies by omission) up to the point where the reader is supposed to think that V.R.T. killed Marsch. The reason why I think it's true to this point is that there are Sainte Croix agents on Sainte Anne who could refute a completely false story. For example, one of his interrogators makes reference to the "new" boots Marsch sold on Sainte Anne. If Marsch had never gone on his expedition with an abo guide at all, his captors would know it. At the point where the killing occurs, Marsch changes his handwriting and style to make it appear as though V.R.T. is making the entries--though it is Marsch who has shot V.R.T.

Why did Marsch do this? Two obvious reasons occur to me. First, he was doing what any good spy would--creating the background for a cover story he might have to use later. Second, there may be sexual jealousy involved--at one point, Marsch writes that he would "kill them both" if he caught V.R.T. and the native girl in flagrante delicto.

What was Marsch's mission on Sainte Croix? I'm not certain--and he seems to have hidden this successfully from his captors as well. But I do suspect that he is guilty of the crime of which the authorities accuse him: killing Maitre. It may be that this was, in fact, his mission. (Someone on this list has speculated that Maitre may be the secret ruler of Sainte Croix; if so, the Annese may have known it.)

Consider the complete absence of any narrative of the actual killing. We have Maitre, Number 5, and Marsch in the same room. Suddenly, Number 5 accuses Marsch of being from Sainte Anne--thus blowing his cover. Number 5's accusation, "You are an abo, and not from Earth" must be seen in this context: Number 5 is not accusing Marsch of being a shape-shifter, but simply of being a native Annese, and not an Earthman. Then we have one more sentence: "And in a short time, my father and I were alone."

What happened in that "short time"? I think either Marsch or Number 5 killed Maitre. Perhaps there was a pre-arrangement whereby the two would act together when Number 5 voiced his

accusation. In either case, they parted in agreement: Number 5 would take "credit" for the crime, do his time, and inherit.

I will close with the obligatory note on names: "Marsch" is German for "march", and thus has military connotations. It's interesting that it sounds exactly like the English "marsh", which makes one think of the boonies of Sainte Anne...

Sgt. Rock

Peter Cash — 22 Jun 1998, 12:07 · follows Peter Cash

I've been poring over 5th head lately (after getting out of a lengthy stay in sick bay), and my attention was caught by the following words, uttered by one of Marsch's interrogators:

"I have examined your papers, and letters follow your name. I shall call you:

'A Polish Count, a Knight Grand Cross,
Rx. and Q.E.D.;
Grand Master of the Blood Red Dirk,
and R.O.G.U.E.'

You seem to me very young."

This is a real head-banger. What does it mean? First of all, it's in quotes. Does that mean it is a quote from somewhere? If so, can anyone identify it?

I can only make vague guesses about the meaning of this doggerel. "Knight Grand Cross" is in fact a rank in various orders of knighthood--and in Masonic orders. "Grand Master" is certainly a Masonic title. But what means the reference to "A Polish Count"? I had first thought of "Count" Cagliostro, who was a Mason--and one of the greatest mountebanks of all time. But...my brief research could turn up no reference that the infamous "Count" ever made pretensions to being anything but Italian.

Any ideas welcome.

Sgt. Rock