

Marsch as spy?

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 24 Jun 1998

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adam louis stephanides — 24 Jun 1998, 10:34

On Mon, 22 Jun 1998 Sgt. Rock wrote:

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.

My main objection to this theory is that it makes for a worse book, IMO. But apart from that, I see two major problems:

1) Pretending to be an abo impersonating an Earthman would hardly free him from suspicion of being a spy. There's no reason why such an impersonator couldn't also be carrying out a mission from the Annese government. In fact, given the Ste.Croix regime's paranoia, Marsch's being an Annese visiting Ste. Croix in the guise of an Earthman would probably be regarded as tantamount in itself to being a spy.

2) How do you account for the three years Marsch spends in the wilderness (or at any rate on St. Anne) after he has supposedly established his secondary cover story of being an abo? His mission on Ste. Croix must not have been very urgent.

The first problem can be gotten round if we assume that Marsch is a spy *from Earth*, and that his concern is not to avoid being arrested, but to avoid having it realized that he is acting for Earth. Then the pretense of being an Annese would be a red herring designed to pander to the Ste. Croix authorities' preconceptions and lead them down a false trail. This might also explain his three years on St. Anne: he's spying for Earth there. I still don't like this theory, but I think it works better than your original proposal. And I have to admit that I can't quite dismiss it out of hand, because of the little mysteries surrounding Marsch that mantis and Robert Borski have pointed out mean that I

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.

This theory can be disposed of more easily, on two grounds:

1) Why would Number Five agree to take "credit" for the crime? It won't help him inherit. On the contrary, "A criminal may not profit by his crime" and that Number Five does wind up with the house couldn't have been foreseen at the time (76, Ace edition). In any case, there's no pre-arrangement, because Number Five only develops his plan to kill Maitre on the night of the murder, and he is surprised to see Marsch with his father. (68-69). Of course, it could be that Number Five is lying about this, and that he accepts blame for the murder because he himself is a partisan or agent of Earth, but this is going far afield from the text, with no reason.

2) For somebody with as much foresight as you posit Marsch as having, his postulated plan to kill Maitre is remarkably bad: be seen publicly entering the house, kill Maitre or be there when the murder is committed, and then return to his apartment where he can easily be arrested.

--Adam

Peter Cash — 24 Jun 1998, 15:57 · follows adam louis stephanides

adam louis stephanides <astephan at students.uiuc.edu> wrote:

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Of course. That's why Marsch only activates the second cover when he has good reason to think his first one is blown (when the authorities arrest him and accuse him of being an Annese spy). Marsch is using the time-honored tactic of "confessing" to a lesser crime (murder) to draw suspicion from his true activities (spying). No, I don't think that Marsch believed this pretense would get him off, but he was still presumably acting out of loyalty to his employers.

2) How do you account for the three years Marsch spends in the wilderness (or at any rate on St. Anne) after he has supposedly established his secondary cover story of being an abo? His mission on Ste. Croix must not have been very urgent.

Perhaps he was going to advanced spy school. Or maybe waiting for the right time.

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Ah, but then there's alga's green eyes, which can only be found on Annese! Still, it's an interesting theory...at least you agree that it's not entirely out of the question that Herr Marsch is a spy of some sort!

This theory can be disposed of more easily, on two grounds:

It's weak, I agree, and your reasons are good. Still, Wolfe never shows us the actual crime, and this fires the Sergeant's febrile imagination further...

Furthermore, isn't it odd that the St. Croix authorities not only accuse Marsch of being a spy,

but also of murdering Maitre? After all, they've already convicted Number 5 for the same crime. Is there perhaps some reason for thinking that the two were acting in collusion?

Bringing you the best in deviant thinking,
Sgt. Rock