

Student Name
Anderson Alford
ENGL 2307-011
August 29, 2013

Sibling Relationships in *Battleborn*

In *Battleborn*, the stories “The Archivist” and “The Diggings” feature prominent sibling relationships. While at first glance these relationships appear dissimilar, upon closer examination they are extremely comparable; each relationship has a caretaker, blatant manipulation, and heartbreak as essential elements. Through these relationships, the author highlights the intricacies of sibling bonds.

In “The Archivist,” both Carly and Joshua feel the need to take care of their siblings at various points in their relationships. When Nat is left heartbroken by her breakup with Ezra, Carly immediately comes to her sister’s aide and attempts to pick up the pieces of her sisters shattered dreams. During her visit, Carly tells Nat that she “know[s] [she] miss[es] [Ezra]” but she cannot simply “stay in the bath smoking pot for the rest of [her] life” (Watkins 156). By including this exchange, the author highlights Carly’s desire to improve her sister’s quality of life and to take on the role of a mother figure. Carly believes without her help, Nat may simply fall into despair and never recover and that it is still her responsibility to take care of her sister, even though they are both now adults. Later in the conversation, Carly adds that she knows of a “volunteer docent program at the museum that would be perfect for [Nat]” (Watkins 156). By allowing Carly to take on a mothering role, Watkins increases the scope of their relationship from solely a sibling relationship to a pseudo-parental relationship. In doing so, the author adds

depth to their relationship and shows the reader how their mother's death has affected each sister differently; Nat has become less responsible, while Carly has become more.

Similarly, in "The Diggings," Joshua feels the need to take care of his brother after his heart is broken by Marjorie because he feels he is responsible for Errol's misfortune. Joshua admits that he "could have warned Errol of the heartbreak" he saw in his future and possibly prevented Errol from going "down the dark path he was on" (Watkins 229). By including this admittance, the author gives the reader insight into Joshua's true motivation—guilt—for helping his brother above and beyond their brotherly bond. Without this moment of honesty from Joshua, the reader may have not understood why Joshua feels "the whole world of Errol's collapse [is his] to bear" (Watkins 235-6). Here, Watkins highlights the imperfections of human relationships and the necessity to atone for past mistakes, both as a mechanism to undo the damage done to the person wronged, but also to clean one's own conscious.

Watkins also uses manipulation as a powerful force in the relationships of both Nat and Carly, and Joshua and Errol. By doing this, the author establishes who actually wields the power in the relationship. For example, upon learning Nat is pregnant, Carly encourages her sister to keep the baby. When Nat expresses a desire to terminate the pregnancy, Carly attempts to use her own child, whom she knows Nat loves dearly, to influence her sister. Soon, Nat understands this to be the reason behind why her "sister [comes] every night, and why she [brings] the Miracle" with her (Watkins 169). Here, the author gives the power in the relationship to Nat because Watkins allows her to identify Carly's attempt to influence her decision, and therefore see through to her sister's true intentions.

In Joshua and Errol's relationship, Errol appears to have all of the power, but Errol's "reverence for [Joshua's] visions" ultimately gives the power to Joshua (Watkins 201). Without these auguries, Errol would be the ultimate authority in this relationship due to his commanding demeanor and physical power, but by allowing Joshua to have supernatural abilities, the author gives the power to Joshua, who ultimately abuses this power and his brother's trust. By allowing Errol to be manipulated by his brother, Watkins makes him a more sympathetic character to the readers. Indeed, if Errol had not been manipulated by his own brother, the reader may have felt he deserved to have his heartbroken.

Finally, Watkins uses heartbreak as a way to offer deeper insight into the true nature of the characters. Through heartbreak, the author shows the reader the inner turmoil of the characters and allows them to be truly vulnerable. When Ezra leaves Nat, she feels as though "there [is] no salve for the space he left" and that even "if science developed a pill for the lovelorn [she would not] have used it" because she "want[s] cataclysmic anguish" (Watkins 153). Here, the author allows the reader into Nat's profound anguish and indicates that Nat is perhaps slightly emotionally unstable. By introducing us to Nat through her heartache, the author allows her to become a more relatable character, so that later when the author shows us Nat's imperfections, we do not judge her for them as much as we might have had we not experienced her heartache.

Likewise, when Errol's heart is broken by Marjorie, he turns from a man on a mission to win her heart into a man haunted by his own failures, a man driven to insanity. Now when Joshua looks at his brother, he does not see a strong young man. He sees man who's "face ha[s] gone gaunt and grim and socket-hollow" (Watkins 235). By allowing Errol to lose his way completely in the face of trials and tribulations, the author highlights that perhaps Errol was

never completely in command of his emotions and was always just one disappointment away from utter self-destruction. If Errol had not reacted so volatily, the reader may not have understood how central a figure Marjorie was to Errol's life plan. Moreover, through Errol's insanity, we see more clearly the bond between Errol and Joshua: as Joshua's worry intensifies, so does his brotherly love for Errol.