

On Track

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 08 Aug 1997

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Alice Turner — 08 Aug 1997, 12:59

mantis,

How about a collaboration? Once we figure out the approach.

Re wound: well, yeah, I thought about that, even thought to twit Nutria about it, but it's mostly described as in the chest (the Min, who seems to know, says it may be a punctured lung), and only once in the side. But that would go along with the Gnostic interpretation; a heavenly being sent down to an imperfect earth to bring knowledge (gnosis) to the chosen.

Your readings are excellent. I'd reject the Changeling reading, however; Occam's razor (here used to trim whiskers!) is against it, given the behavior of the robots (who serve only true men), the clothing evidence, his unfamiliarity with the language (taught rather than learned as a baby), his discomfort with the food, his understanding of space food and many other small things. Cim certainly is not trustworthy on anything.

Oh, re that. I read Joan Gordon on "Traveler's Song" (64-66) and while she is almost comically wrong on the specifics of the story---she gets almost every one of the animals wrong, a batting average of about .100---she does include this quote from an interview with Wolfe:

"The protagonist gets his original orientation from a wolf tribe, then lives in a world in which the roles of moose, lion, deer, mink and so on are taken by semi-human beings. Wolves are winter symbols, of course, and birds symbols of spring."

Thus Gordon sees the winged figure on the Great Sleigh as bird rather than angel. She also, puzzlingly to me, does not seem to think of the Great Sleigh-ers as off-worlders. Well, they are, so there. She does have a very good paragraph which goes over some of your points about the theme of the story being the nature of humanity (66)

But this indicates, pretty clearly to me, that Cim is a mink. Cutthroat speaks of her beautiful furs and teeth, then the fish and lakes and rivers are explained, also her inconstancy, and even her murdering her mate---minks are known to be sort of crazy, and may well go in for spousal abuse (Fishcatcher has apparently abused her). What I don't quite understand, then, is her doglike aspects, her groveling to the Sleigh-ers, her desire to be with them, her saying "I love you" to Cutthroat. I know that ferrets, which are related, are often tamed. Are minks? I mean really tamed, not just farmed for furs.

One little point I'd like to make from my glancing through Jack London---one thing you've emphasized here is the violence, and you compare that to Lindsay, not without reason. But science fiction as a branch of fantasy/children's literature is usually both bloodless in any real sense and sentimental (see Buffalo Gals as opposed to Traveler's Song). London, on the other hand, is uncompromising and even brutal in his descriptions of the harsh lives of his dogs and wolves, and if, as I suspect, Wolfe went back to him for some research on this story, he may

have decided to go beyond Kipling and get tough. The reactions of readers (us anyway) suggest that it worked.

-alga-

m.driussi — 08 Aug 1997, 20:45 · follows Alice Turner

Reply: Item #4596281 from URTN at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET03#

alga,

Since Joan Gordon wrote that stuff and I read it years ago, even though I didn't remember it at the time, I also owe a nod to her work in deciphering "Tracking Song." But yeah, aside from mink (which is a very interesting blend of bear/dog attributes, as well as adding a ton of "sex appeal" associated with minks) the other animal guesses seem off. (Since sexual relations between minks is so brutal as to render female pelts not usable for fur, this nails down the issue of "brutality" re: comparing Mantru and Fishcatcher.)

Back to the Changeling reading being destroyed by the robots' endorsement of Cutthroat as true human. Maybe, maybe not. Why favor the robots without doubts? Mantru says they can't tell the diff, which is why they are always bringing him beast females. Though Mantru seems to be the dwarf king under the hill, we wonder if he has any real power at all, since the robots have so much autonomy that they behave in contrarian ways with impunity. Is Mantru more than a living idol? Nevermind his dreams, what do the robots want? It appears that they want to pit creature against creature (Cutthroat, Cim, and Ketin), either for vicarious bloodjoy of combat or perhaps as initiation for Cutthroat (who will then see the world as human/animal) whom they then pit against Mantru. "Survival of the fittest" as experiments administered by robots.

(There might be a hint that if Mantru did try to mate with a beast woman, the robots would take this as a sign that he could no longer tell the difference and they would kill him. The robots have a vested interest in the difference between human and animal.)

Robots who want what, exactly? Maybe they just want human masters to serve again? (Or is this too much like the whole Hierogrammate "the-created-create-the-creators" thing?) Or are they making a religion out of "humanity" which they aspire to become (Jonas-wise evolution), making Mantru a sort of sacred cow until such time as a better stronger cow comes along? (If valid, this is both obviously flawed as a church yet still touching in its own way.)

On to the names. Here are a few stray thoughts I had: "Ketin" reminds me of "etin," which is another word for "giant," and made sense because Ketin was described as a giant; "Cim" would be pronounced "Kim" on one side of the dividing line and "Sim" on the other, but seeing it as "Cim Glowing" (based upon a plant or clouds or something other than snow?) made me think of "Cimmeria," making me wonder if "Cim" might be taken as "dark"; "Flashing Aa" (another wolf female) well, "Aa" is consort to Shamash, fwiw.

Not to put too much into this, but "Red Kluy" (red) ("Cloe"?), "Flashing Aa" (white), "Cim Glowing" (black).

Re: London's wolf and dog stories, yep, I agree with you. And Gene Wolfe merges that animal savagry with the all-to-human Lindsay savagry to come up with something that says, at one level ala Kafka, that nature's savagry is an absurd bureaucracy of pointless pain, suffering, and death. Crossing circuits, making readers say "Yow."

=mantis=