

Tracqing Song

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 09 Aug 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/139>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Jim Jordan — 09 Aug 1997, 10:52

Okay, Okay! This is Nutria, at last. My server has been broken, and only today have I read all of Alga's challenges to me!

Now I have all these posts to respond to! I'll try to enumerate my comments in some rational way.

1. Cordo Smith. Yeah, I read Smith, and wrote a long analytical essay on him, years ago, and then I read "Fifth Head" and "Island Etc." as my first two Lupine reads. (Yep, I have a beatup copy of the original "Island Etc." Anybody want to offer me \$500.00 for it? <humr>) Looking at Wolfe's themes, perspectives, etc., I saw him as a new Smith, and assumed a strong Linebargerianesque influence; but he has always denied such. So, I think we have a case of two men with very similar beliefs and interests writing on very similar things.
2. Mantis, I think you have to pay attention to the dates of writing and publication. "Tracking Song" fits nicely with the themes of "Fifth Head." Trying to relate it to the Severian Quintet may be quixotic; at least in the wrong order. Like "Fifth Head," "Tracking Song" is about the question What Is Man?, a very Linebargerianesque concern. To be sure, TS (Tracking Song) does anticipate lots of stuff in Severian, but the latter does not, I submit, interpret the former.
3. Let's see. Oh, Christian themes. I'm not sure that this story has such a concern/structure. Maybe I've missed something, but it does not appear so, even in a "vague" way, as in Pandora.
4. The Min: Well, as Holmes used to say, "When you have eliminated the probable, go with the improbable" (or words to that effect). The Min are Jonases, except that Jonas despised the flesh, while the Min covet it. That is, they are robots trying to be men. They are perverted versions of the older robots that Cutthroat finds, who exist to serve man.
5. The Vamps and the Winged Man: Here does seem to be a parallel. We encounter the Vampires on the way to the dead city and the evil palace of an evil man. We encounter the Winged Man on the way to the benevolent Great Sleigh that is seeking to help the underpeople. (See 13 below; so much for keeping these in decent order.)
6. Cim's love for Cutthroat. I can see that this might be doglike, but the mink is better. Read carefully, and see that ALL the underpeople "love" Cutthroat. The wolves love him and send him away so they won't lose control and eat him. The pigs love him from the start. Etc.
7. Giants: I assume they are all big because over time the lesser gravity of this place has caused them to get bigger. That is, ALL the underpeople seem to be big, except for the little bear (baby) at the end.
8. Mars? This world seems too small for Mars. Yet it has more gravity than an asteroid would have. Somehow we have not yet determined how the Great Sleigh has circumnavigated the

globe, if it be Mars (and there are good indications that it is). I think we have to assume that once the thaw began, the Sleigh stopped travelling and interviewing underpeople, and just booked it around the globe to pick up Cutthroat.

9. The scar on Cutthroat's neck seems important. I suggest we look and see what race might have cut his throat, say in an initial encounter. His associates on the Great Sleigh have healed him, but have decided to leave him behind to record impressions for them. OR, they left him behind for this purpose, and after a while he was attacked and his throat was cut and he lost his memory. Being a future man with future resources in his body, his throat healed and he did not die. We pick up the story at this point. Whaddaya think?

10. Cim's rod. Electric? Future science? My guess is not. Cutthroat calls it poison, and we know that his memory does work when it comes to identifying artifacts. This does not explain how they can eat poisoned fish, but it seems the best explanation to me anyway, at this point. I assume Cim and her people just make these things out of the plants in their area. If it were electric it would have short-circuited the robot parts of the Min.

11. The horned staff. Well, the horns might be a Satanic allusion. Only true men can hold it? Well, Cim holds it. What does that mean? Perhaps that the underpeople have become true men, or in essence are true men. As Alga said, they are humanity if not descendents of Adam.

12. Let me see if I can tease out a bit more. Originally, Mars was ruled by men, served by robots, who raised up animals to be underpeople. At some point, the men fell into evil and began to exploit and harm the underpeople. Such depraved men killed themselves off eventually, so that only an appropriately dwarfed and twisted representative of their race remains. (But is he really a man? See 16 below.) As a result of human self-destruction, the terraforming machines have worn out, so now good, kindly humans come from space to set things back up again.

13. If we want to know about the Great Sleigh (and who doesn't), I suggest we simply invert what we see in the underground city. Cutthroat has the feeling that he is approaching the Great Sleigh as he approaches the city. To wit:

Underground city // Sleigh on Ground

Underground machines // New "sun" in sky

Caricature palace with turrets // Sleigh as "building with buildings on it" Vampires at entrance //

Winged man at front Evil dwarf // Kindly men Evil rod to kill underpeople // Good healing for Fishcatcher

14. Cim's suggestion that Cutthroat is not a human. Alga has proved that he is. I suggest she raises the question because of the similarity to "Fifth Head," where it is initially unclear whether VRT is human or not. Cutthroat is; VRT is not. The proof is not necessarily the word and actions of the Min, but the fact that Cutthroat recalls all kinds of details that indicate he comes from a technological society.

15. The days. I cannot help but think of creation week, but it only fits in a few places. On the sixth day, God brought Eve to Adam, and on the sixth day, Cutthroat picks up Cim Glowing. The 14th day is "significant." Howso? It is a second sabbath. It is also the day of Passover. Probably not. Rather, it is the day the solar mirror is to be set up, which Cutthroat knows in the back of his darkened mind.

16. Is Mantru really a man? I suggest this may be the explanation for his fury when Cutthroat says that his statement is false. I note that Cutthroat's staff kills him. Mantru seems to me

perhaps to be an underperson passing himself off as a man. As we know from Cim's holding the staff, underpeople can indeed hold it.

Nutria

m.driussi — 09 Aug 1997, 22:44 · follows Jim Jordan

Reply: Item #5721678 from URTN at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET#

Nutria,

Ah, there you are!

Re: "Tracking Song" and FIFTH HEAD. While I'm really =not= trying to paint TS as a miniature to TBOTNS (as, say, "A Cabin on the Coast" stands to CASTLEVIEW, or "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" stands to THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS <g>), still, I'll take your statement as a challenge. And imho, nope, there are no famous scenes from FIFTH HEAD that jump into my mind as I read TS.

"My grandfather is a robot and my aunt is myself"--nope.

"I stuck my head through the library window"--nope.

"Nearly the whole city was related to me"--nope.

"So I killed my `father' and took his place"--nope.

"The most enigmatic of the `aliens' are actually from Earth"--nope.

"So I killed my employer, an anthropologist, and took his place"--nope. "The mast of the ship grows down like a tree root, the ship doesn't move"--nope.

And so on.

I agree with you that =thematically= TS has some similarities with FHC. (Perhaps strongest with the abo centered middle tale. Then again, FHC has no terraforming whatsoever; nor is there a shift from a "dying world" to a "reborn world"; and the FHC issue is, imho, more alien/human rather than animal/human, if one cares to make such distinctions--clearly I do!) I was relating the scenes that reminded me of the later work--if there are specific scenes in TS that remind you of exact scenes in FHC, by all means mention them!

alga,

I left off another reading, the Shaman's Death Quest. Keep an eye out (but not like Odin!) for Lap or Scandinavian tales of a Santa-like sleigh--this Great Sleigh business sounds so familiar, but I can't find the fingerhold.

=mantis=

Jim Jordan — 09 Aug 1997, 18:37 · follows m.driussi

Mantoid,

All I meant was that the theme of "what is man" is at the core of both. Nothing more specific. Narrative-wise, they are radically different.

Nutroid