

# Track on

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 13 Aug 1997

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Alice Turner — 13 Aug 1997, 10:27

Rock (that makes you a chem; sure you don't want to be Roc?)

In regard to "Tracking Song": are the "underpeople" animals that are evolving toward humanity, or humans who are devolving to an animal state? The cave city is clear evidence of an ancient and technologically sophisticated civilization existing on the planet. We are led to believe that the builders of the city simply died out. But perhaps they genetically altered themselves to better adapt to the changing climate? If so, then their plans went astray at some point, of course.

That's a perfectly plausible scenario, though at this point I think all we can do is accept Wolfe's own designation of the different tribes as "half-men." That would go for the Min too.

I'm going to make one last attempt at nailing "Tracking Song," and then move on. Unlike Nutria, I do think it's a religious story, on one level almost an allegory. A man is thrown (or falls) into an imperfect world which holds many pitfalls. As innocent as a child at first, he still, according to his understanding, nearly always behaves with courage, honor and decency, and these increase as he grows more knowing. He never condescends to the half-men; instead he treats them as (as he says to the Min) "perfect of your kind." He grows to understand that he is different, but he rejects both the colonial and the imperial attitude. (An example of the first: the Panigaku beg him for wisdom, but he demurs; also when Eggseeker fears that he may have retrospectively sinned, Cutthroat roundly reassures him---I like that moment. Also he never judges the others by what they eat; his squeamishness is personal. The second is evident throughout the Mantru and Min episode, and by his casting away the staff.) He stays on the path, or the way---the symbolism is obvious---until what may be the moment of his death, at which time the sought-for home appears. One may somewhat deplore the appearance of a winged being but, in a story by a practicing Catholic, one can hardly ignore it.

My initial thought was that the story was oddly Protestant, that the Great Sleigh's appearance is a sign of grace, which has very little to do with Cutthroat's behavior---i.e. he's in its way in a non-symbolic sense. But the more I thought about it, it did seem as though his journey could be construed as a test, and one that, in my opinion, he passed. At the end, he could be defined as a human being in the best possible (non-Mantru) sense. Is he dead or dying and is this an angelic being, or will he be cured on a real-live Sleigh? I don't think it matters. Either way, he will be reborn, together with this planet, into springtime. (I know it was me speculating on his being squashed by the Sleigh instead, but I was only joshing.)

-alga-