

Digest 4.13

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 29 Aug 1997

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Ron Crown — 29 Aug 1997, 15:07

Alga, no I'm not cephalo, I'm not anything Vironese (yet, anyway.)

Wolfe interview: the full question and answer from which Gordon took the quote is as follows:

Gordon: You marked a bibliography of your stories for me with checks to indicate which ones were "pivotal." What do you mean by "pivotal?"

Wolfe: A pivotal story for me is one in which I feel I have succeeded in doing well something I have never really done well before--fairy material in "Thag," a certain religious viewpoint in "Westwind," the use of second and third person in "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories," the progression from realism to fantasy in "The Eyeflash Miracles," even the primitive inventions no one ever actually invented (and which no one now notices) in "Tracking Song." Just as "Tracking Song" is about uninvented inventions of the stone age, "Straw" is about (partly, of course) uninvented inventions of the middle ages.

"Tracking Song" is a wolf totem story, by the way. 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.

End of interview excerpt. The whole interview is 5 pages long and thus too long to post here (too long for me to type in, I mean) but if I find some interesting snippets, I'll post those, too.

I didn't express myself well re the robots outside, what I meant was that they could not survive outside in _current conditions_ and thus could not have learned the finger to chin gesture from the other "tribes" in the story. Of course, they in all likelihood lived on the surface prior to the "ice age;" perhaps the underground city was a last-ditch effort on the part of their makers (at least, those not genetically altered, if we opt for that scenario) to survive?

Alga, maybe I missed something in an earlier post but why are you so adamantly opposed to the winged creature as bird interpretation? Hey, here's a sudden thought (or maybe a blood vessel just burst), how about the winged creature at the end as a sort of ironic counterpoint, ala Robert Frost's "ice will suffice", to the Phoenix legend (is there a native american Phoenix legend or is this ancient mediterranean?). Instead of Phoenix rising from the ashes, we've got a bird of some type rising from melting ice!

Something I just found out about Jack London's "The Call of the Wild;" the working title was "The Wolf" or "The Sleeping Wolf."

I'm not so sure about the Fisher-King analogy in T.S. myself; Crooked Leg is not that major of a character; nevertheless, he is there at the end when no one else from the wolf tribe is.

No luck with the dictionaries yet but in researching gestures, I did discover that a common feature of native american sign language (found in several tribes, I suppose all those that had dealings with the Sioux) was the hand or finger(s) drawn across the throat from one ear to the other signifying the Sioux (Dakotas) as "cutthroats." [!]

Re gestures, I came across an interesting comment, not particularly pertinent to Wolfe per se, but certainly to science fiction. The author of *A Cultural History of Gesture* points out that not only do gestures evolve but that the same gesture can have radically different meanings in different times. For example, slapping the thigh is usually associated with a guffaw in our culture, in ancient Rome it meant anger. The author concludes "The time traveller would be well advised to learn, amongst much else, the ancient art of gesticulation." Reminds me of L. Sprague de Camp's famous essay on "Language for Time Travellers" which dealt wholly (as I remember it) with spoken language; but how many science fiction writers have thought to apply notions of change to unspoken language as well?

Finally, I have an Iranian colleague at work; I asked her about the name "Nadan Jaffarzadeh" in SAN. "Jaffarzadeh" is a perfectly normal last name; the "zadeh" component is found frequently. But "Nadan" in Farsi is not a name, but a noun/adjective meaning "ignorant," "unaware;" it can even be used as a polite way of saying that someone is stupid. Whatever else it may imply in SAN, it certainly implies a fallible narrator (but we knew that already, didn't we?)

BTW, (forget that "finally" above) since we're broadening the parameters of the list and Dan Simmons has been mentioned in that connection, y'all might be interested in John Clute's online review of Simmons' latest entry in the Hyperion series. It's at: <http://www.scifi.com/sfw/current/excess.html>. He has some interesting comments comparing Simmons and Wolfe. Indeed, I've been reading Clute's *Look at the Evidence* and it seems he can hardly mention Wolfe without mentioning Simmons and vice versa.

Ron Crown