

BackTrack

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Sep 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/199>

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.

Alice Turner — 08 Sep 1997, 14:17

mantis----you're back! I missed you.

Re your thoughts about Cutthroat's not being from the Great Sleigh: My kneejerk reaction is that this is wrong. My second reaction is that Wolfe wants us to have a kneejerk reaction and then second thoughts. I've been doing so much reading about Native Americans in my (so far vain) effort to find the language cognate (I still think Athabaskan, of which I have not been able to find one word, is the key), that I am more inclined to be open-minded.

For example, there's the issue of cannibalism. If you take these tribes as simply animals, well, there's no question that in hard times a vulnerable animal will have to be sacrificed to the needs of the (meat-eating) tribe. But there's a vigorous debate among anthropologists about NA cannibalism too, focussing on the Anazazi tribes of the Southwest.

And in the Northwest, where I'm sort of focussed, there are three distinct racial groups--the Indians (this is where the Athabascans are; that's the language name--there are several tribes), the Eskimos or Inuits, and the Aleuts (not many of the last left when the Russians got through with them). Needless to say, they all despise each other and were actively at war with one another when circumstances permitted (not as often as in more moderate climes). The Eskimos and Aleuts are much more recent than the Indians, and are thought to have arrived from the Old World (Mongolia, Siberia) after the landbridge was already submerged (we're talking about 4000 years ago, not too recently) in their skin boats and kayaks.

I realize this is sort of beside the point, and probably pretty boring to most of the group (I never worry about boring you, mantis--you're interested in everything!). But for someone who knew as little about NA culture as I, it opens up all sorts of possibilities. I don't for a minute think that Wolfe literally followed any kind of "real" Indian setup for this story, but he happens to live quite near one of the most important anthropological digs in the country of the Mississippi mound culture of about 3000 years ago (far more sophisticated than any of the North American tribal cultures in the 16th century), and it very probably caught his imagination, at least at the time he was planning this story.

I am completely perplexed by the wand, to get back to the subject. It reads to me like a super-cattleprod, and what a mink would be doing with it is beyond me. It's the reason I thought Cim was a dog at first, to have a man-made object that she uses so carelessly (kills her mate).

And the winged figure. Well, Great Raven is important to the Eskimos as well as the NW Indians, a little cross-fertilization there. And, get this, from a description of frequent enigmatic figures on Mississippi Mound art--"Thus we have not a man disguised as a bird, but another case of a shaman having

become a supernatural being...we see portrayed the god himself." I wish I could send a picture.

-alga-