

Artifacts of the Dogs?

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 15 Sep 1997

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m.driussi — 15 Sep 1997, 19:12

Reply: Item #9051512 from URTN at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET02#

Gene Wolfe may have put inventive thought into these uninvented stone age tools, but due to the narrative structure of the story we have precious few clues to go on to determine their "real science" origins. The same sort of "retrovention" is at work in TBOTNS, and since Severian has a basic training in Science, we can (for example) recognize the factual basis for the natrium slug gun used at Lake Diuturna and we sense that the ubiquitous pyrotechnic polearms are supertech refinements of "Greek fire" chemical weaponry developed in the middle ages. (Laser pistols being such a sfnal off-the-shelf item, we don't even worry about the hows and whys of the power source, etc.) The fallen state of Science is a similar element to both TS and TBOTNS.

Wand of the Mink. Alga and I came up with two possibilities: poison or electricity. If poison, this is hardly an innovation for stone age technology, since stone age peoples routinely use poisons. Unless the wand somehow generates the poison itself, i.e., it doesn't require recoating--shades of the living tools in Harry Harrison's WEST OF EDEN novel, we can imagine the poison glands of a fugu grafted onto a stick. Just be sure to feed it so it doesn't die off!

Electricity is tricky. Amber, well known to stone age folk, can generate a bit of electricity, but hardly enough for cattleprod effects. Lodestones as natural magnets, hmmm. Capacitors (to hold a big charge built by trickle feeding and release it all at once); lead and acid based batteries (to hold a charge and release it slowly); electro-magnetic generators (to turn magnetism into electricity and electricity into magnetism); etc., all in a compact baton. Since elaborate designs have evolved showing how the ark of the covenant is/was a surface to orbit radio set, then we can suppose that Wolfe has done a similar von Danekin engineering stunt. (Two lodestones, some amber, two copper wires--now =that= sounds like a real whirlygig!)

But yeah, that's about all one can say on the subject, isn't it? There just isn't enough text and speculation quickly runs rampant.

=mantis=