

a dog's life for the stars

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 26 Mar 1998

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Damien Broderick — 26 Mar 1998, 23:34

Greetings -

I've recently subscribed to this list but have been lurking, struck with awe by the richness of the group's exegetical laminations. Guess I'll just have to go thoughtfully through the archives when I have the time. For now, I just thought I'd throw in some (tardy and perhaps redundant) comments on `Tracking Song'.

I liked the notion that Cutthroat might be a dog, if only allegorically, cast among wolves. But reading the story, I was instantly set snuffling after a different scent, ears pricked forward. The ordering by days enumerated suggested to this ex-Catholic that Wolfe might be rehearsing (perhaps in mirrored or inverted form) the 14 Stations of the Cross. I was dashed to see that the tale goes on for 19 stanzas, but revived by this curious comment: `This is the fourteenth day. I do not know why that number should seem significant to me, but it does.'

Other correspondences can be found, but fewer than I'd hoped. E.g., on the third day (Jesus falls the first time), it is Nashhwonk who falls, his Achilles tendon hacked through by Cutthroat. On the 7th day (Jesus falls the second time), the narrator is himself pierced and falls at the hands of the cyborgs, if that's what they are. On the 11th day (Jesus is nailed to the cross), `the sleeve - where the vampires slit it with their teeth... let the cold into the whole suit.' Nailed it! I thought. But perhaps not.

David_Lebling at avid.com asked:

<* Does anyone else agree that the locale may not be Earth (or even Urth)? It's a world with two moons and trees that are very non-earthlike (unless I'm misreading Wolfe's description). The narrator thinks they are odd, as well. If it isn't Mars it's a world with two moons orbiting another star than the Sun, or perhaps a very far-future Earth, I concede.>

It seems to me obvious that the locale is a minor moon or asteroid which can be circumnavigated by a wind-speed device in 19 or 20 days, with or without stopping. (Diameter 200 - 1000 km? But on such a world, a `day' might have any length.) Of course, the sledge we see at the close might not be the same one; perhaps it is in pursuit of the one from which our hero has been ejected or escaped?

The silver `concave mirror' in the sky is actually a convex primary planet. The locale is in a locked resonant orbit. Presumably it's also terraformed and actively sustained far from equilibrium, to prevent loss of air and water. Cutthroat, as he speculates, is native to a more massive world; hence his powerful leaps. The other two moons might perhaps be additional moons of the primary.

On the other hand, perhaps everyone is reduced in scale (despite the explicit use of the metric system; the cyborgs are three meters tall). As an urban Australian, I have no great experience

of snow or ice. How small would one need to be in order to leap across snow without breaking through its crust? (I assume these humans or hominids do not have ludicrous feet like snowshoes.)

If they are quite small, might the underground buildings without walls be no more than ancient, discarded storage racks inside an equipment store? (I didn't think so.)

The beings on the sledge as big as a hill are not all angels; only the tall man has wings. Is his name E-telekeli? (Surely not.)

Is it too late for me to revive this thread?

All best, Damien Broderick

Michael Straight — 27 Mar 1998, 09:31 · follows Damien Broderick

On Thu, 26 Mar 1998, Damien Broderick wrote:

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The idea that the sledge at the end is the same one Cutthroat has been chasing seems pretty popular, and I agree it has a certain closure to it, but I can't picture it.

Even if the planet is small enough, or they are close enough to the poles, that you can circumnavigate in a few days, you still have to explain the burst of speed that takes the sled from only a day or two ahead of Cutthroat to 14-20 days ahead. (Perhaps the warmer weather allowed them to use technology that wouldn't work in the cold?)

And if you're assuming such a great increase in speed is possible, why limit it? Perhaps the planet is big enough to take 6 months to wind-ski around, but the sledge just put on a huge burst of speed and circled it.

I don't know, somehow the "burst of speed" thing just doesn't sit right. I think it's a different sledge at the end (or even a different kind of vehicle altogether).

-Rostrum