

"Tracking Song" (and other stories)

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 05 Jun 2007

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Matthew Groves — 05 Jun 2007, 22:44

"Tracking Song" questions

I've recently read "Tracking Song" (_The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories_), along with Borski's blurb in _The Long and Short of It_ and an enlightening discussion in the old archives (does Alice "alga" Turner still subscribe?), and I wanted to throw out a few questions in hope of stimulating some discussion.

Like Latro, Cutthroat is (literally) a little dog lost. What happened to Cutthroat's memory? No head wound. Psychological fugue? Or somehow part of his punishment -- exile even in memory?

What happened to Ketin's son? The off-handedness of Red Kluy's statement ("[Y]ou should see Ketin. They used to have a son, but he's gone away.") makes it seem like Wolfe is being sly and the statement is significant.

Wolfe's underworld type-scene: Where does it come from, and what is its significance? We have it in "Tracking Song" (with the Min), in the mine at Saltus in BotNS (with the ape men), in "The Eyeflash Miracles" (Little Tib dreams of a cave with gnomes and a Gnome King. Here, the reference is also to Munchkinland from _The Wizard of Oz_, but they are in a *cave*, and the Gnome King made me think of Mantru from "Tracking Song".) I'm sure shows up in other places I haven't noticed or don't remember.

What's up with Roller, Dragon, and Bug? The names have to mean something.

Why does the number fourteen seem significant to Cutthroat? (After he records the fourteenth day's log, Cim leaves her recorded parting message to him, which he apparently never listens to.)

Any thoughts on these?

Matthew

Roy C. Lackey — 08 Jun 2007, 07:22 · follows Matthew Groves

Matthew Groves wrote:

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I don't remember what I may have said about this story in the past, but I read it again, along with Borski's comments. It's hard to argue against his interpretation of a bastardized rehash of the Fall, and if not everything matches up with _Genesis_, that's not necessarily a mark against his theory; Wolfe always changes things when he retells something. Cutthroat's "birthmark" is

otherwise hard to account for, as is the tall winged being at the end.

Still, it's also hard to see that cold planet as Edenic, and it is Man who is returning to it to make it more paradisiacal. And the little we learn about the men of the Great Sleigh seems to make them out to be do-gooder, holier-than-thou types out to transform not just the planet but the beastmen, to make them over according to a moral code they brought with them. If they aren't 'bad guys' (in the eyes of the jealous, vengeful God of the O.T.), then how is it that they have usurped the role of God in this little drama?

If the Great Sleigh represents a type of Eden, and if Cutthroat was cast out of it for some reason, then we have a reversal of the _Genesis_ situation. Adam sinned and gained knowledge; Cutthroat sinned and lost knowledge -- his memory.

Cutthroat made a sort of moral progress during his brief sojourn. He came to regard the beastmen as too near human to be killed and eaten. Was he rewarded for that change by being healed of his wound? Or was he rewarded by being allowed to die after less than three weeks of exile? Or was he further punished by being healed but left in exile?

If his "birthmark" was a mark like Cain's, then it did him little good. He was mortally wounded (in the dark!) by one of the "Min" from the cave, who should not have been able to harm a true man. But maybe their prime directive was corrupted by their bits of flesh. (Poor Jonas.)

Why does the number fourteen seem significant to Cutthroat? (After he records the fourteenth day's log, Cim leaves her recorded parting message to him, which he apparently never listens to.)

Best I can tell, it was an almost-remembered bit of knowledge, like bears and plastic and other planets with higher gravity. I think that, deep down, he understood that if he had simply stayed where he was on day one, that the Sleigh would complete its leisurely circumnavigation of the small planet in two weeks.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 08 Jun 2007, 21:04 · follows Roy C. Lackey

I wrote:

I don't remember what I may have said about this story in the past, but I read it again, along with Borski's comments. It's hard to argue against his interpretation of a bastardized rehash of the Fall,

Looking at that again, that's a misrepresentation of his theory, which is not so much about the Fall as it is about the Cain and Abel story. Just to clarify.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 18 Jun 2007, 00:14 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

FWIW, I read it (as I do a number of Wolfe's pieces) as a darkening of the Bible story. Yes, it replays Cain and Abel with humans in the role of God -- but that's the point; humans _can't_ take God's role and have it work out well. The humans in the story are no more God than is Typhon/Pas, and their efforts are no better motivated, and will have no better outcome, than his.

On 6/8/07, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:
I wrote:

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