

Tracking Song

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 08 Jun 2007

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4844>

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Matthew Groves — 08 Jun 2007, 23:02

Thanks, Roy for taking the time to reread and post on "Tracking Song."

Roy wrote:

"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."

...which I had failed to notice. (But why is "in the dark" significant?) It's true that the "three laws" or something analogous should have prevented the Min from wounding him (*if* Cutthroat is a true man), but Cain's mark would not prevent it; it merely signifies that "whoever kills Cain shall suffer sevenfold vengeance." No-one killed Cutthroat, but if the Min Cutthroat killed in the undercity was the same that wounded him when they took Cim, then Cutthroat was avenged.

And Cutthroat's birthmark does help him a little like the way Cain's mark protects him: it prevents the Wiggikki from harming Cutthroat by causing them to suspect he is under an enchantment that will seek a new home in anyone who kills him. But I don't think Cutthroat got his "birthmark" from the Great Sleigh, since they don't seem the type to use leashes. That's more of a Mantru thing.

About the winged man at the end: It seems clear to me that, even if he represents one of the cherubim guarding the entrance to Eden, he is also bird-man -- a beast-man like the Wiggikki, the Pamigaka, and all the rest. Here is what Robert Alter says about "cherubim" in a footnote at the end of his translation of Genesis 3: "The root of the term either means "hybrid" or, by an inversion of consonants, "mount," "steed," and they are the winged beasts, probably of awesome aspect, on which the sky god of the old Canaanite myths and of the poetry of Psalms goes riding through the air."

About the fourteenth day, Roy wrote:

"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." This sounds like a plausible explanation to me, and its better than anything I have (which is nothing). However, note that Cutthroat says it is the *number* fourteen that seems significant.

Matt G.

P.S.: When first reading "TS," I believed that Cutthroat's wound resulted from him having tried to hang himself, or having been hanged. This belief persisted even after reading the scene where Mantru has Cim Glowing chained by her neck. It took reading through the old archives for

me to realize Cutthroat's true nature, and the actual source of his "birthmark." The crux (as it were) of Wolfe's story is always eluding me.

Roy C. Lackey — 09 Jun 2007, 07:30 · follows Matthew Groves

Matthew Groves wrote:

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I don't buy the Cutthroat-as-dog theory. This story smacks of moral and religious overtones that have no relevance to a dog. Even granting genetic manipulation that transformed animals into human-like beings with intelligence comparable to a man, it happened so long ago that the only extant artifacts of that ancient race of men have fallen largely to rust and dust inside a hollow mound. The tribes of animal species have fire and language and simple tools, but they are little better off than the natural animals. Most of their waking hours and energies are consumed in the basic daily task of staying alive. If they ever had a greater store of abstract knowledge, it is not evident in the story; presumably it was lost long ago.

Cutthroat has knowledge of things that are unknown to the beastmen. He understands the reflective metallic dust that begins warming the planet. He knows of other planets with varying gravity. He wears a high-tech thermal suit, with boots, that came from off-world. He has a pocket knife, firestarter and voice recorder. Those material objects must have come from the people on the Great Sleigh.

It can be argued that those objects were taken from the Sleigh by a beastman who came to be called Cutthroat, but the people on the Sleigh don't seem to let the natives come aboard. If he killed a crewman and stole his stuff, the Sleigh people should have missed the crewman and turned back to find him, which didn't happen. And if Cutthroat were not truly a man, the machines in the cave would not have obeyed him.

At the end of the story the Sleigh was moving rapidly, and it had already exceeded a complete revolution of the planet. The recorder was also a transmitter, and it was during that last broadcast that Cutthroat mentioned he was dying. I don't think there is any doubt that the Sleigh was coming for him. That being the case, I don't think that the winged man was simply another variety of beastman. I think it was an angel of some sort, whether come to bar him from the Sleigh or to carry him off to wherever.

-Roy

Matthew Groves — 13 Jun 2007, 00:30 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Just one more observation, and I hope it won't get me in trouble:

It's just my opinion, but...

I think Wolfe does LeGuin better than LeGuin. Way better.

runs away

Tony Ellis — 19 Jun 2007, 22:09 · follows Matthew Groves

1) Cutthroat's amnesia doesn't seem to be the result of a head injury - he has none. The implication is that the people on the Sleigh have deliberately wiped or suppressed it.

If this is the case, there was nothing accidental about his leaving the Sleigh: it was orchestrated. If it was orchestrated, it was done so in the full knowledge that the Sleigh would be back in a couple of weeks.

2) "This is the fourteenth day. I do not know why that number should seem significant to me, but it does." The Great Sleigh catches up with Cutthroat after 19 days, but only because he has spent days unwittingly putting more distance between himself and it. Could the fourteenth day seem significant to Cutthroat because that's when the Sleigh was scheduled to pick him up again?

Tying this together: climatic engineering is about to change the way of life of the peoples of this world dramatically, and forever. Suppose one of the people on the Sleigh wanted to experience this way of life, to actually live among these people, while there was still a little time. Perhaps he's an anthropologist, perhaps he's just someone who wants to shrug off the burden of civilised life for a few days. A tourist zoanthrop.

"Blank my memory," he tells his friends, "I want to go there with a clean slate, not as one of us. And don't talk to me on the damn radio."

Just a thought.