

Tracking Song and The Call of the Wild

The Urth list — 55 messages, 23 voices, 09 Jun 2007

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4846>

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Matthew Groves — 09 Jun 2007, 15:31

Roy wrote:

I don't buy the Cutthroat-as-dog theory.

No, Cutthroat isn't simply a dog; but Cutthroat is to a dog as the Wiggikki are to wolves. You can even speculate on his breed....

Those material objects must have come from the people on the Great Sleigh.

Yes, Cutthroat has knowledge and devices from the Great Sleigh. He is a *Sleigh dog*. (Which may be the source of his "birthmark.") Whatever may be its biblical significance, "Tracking Song" is above all an homage to Jack London's The Call of the Wild. Does that illuminate Cutthroat's crime?

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.

Right, a *cherub*. Not one of the winged, apple-cheeked babies of the Renaissance, but one of the mighty winged beast-men of Canaanite myth.

Matt G.

Roy C. Lackey — 10 Jun 2007, 06:37 · follows Matthew Groves

Matthew Groves wrote:

Yes, Cutthroat has knowledge and devices from the Great Sleigh. He is a *Sleigh dog*. (Which may be the source of his "birthmark.") Whatever may be its biblical significance, "Tracking Song" is above all an homage to Jack London's The Call of the Wild. Does that illuminate Cutthroat's crime?

Disclaimer: I have not read The Call of the Wild, and I'm not going to just to analyze this story.

But I've read a synopsis, and that was more than enough to convince me that whomever first made the connection between it and TS is absolutely right. I'm a bit surprised that so much ink was expended on this story here in the past without an early consensus being reached on at least that much. I even learned the significance of the number fourteen -- it was the original number of dogs in a sled team of which only five survived.

Of course, knowing that TS was inspired by The Call of the Wild doesn't explain Wolfe's spin on it -- and it's been spun all to hell. And there ain't no one gonna convince me that Cutthroat was ever pulling the Great Sleigh. <g> My ignorance of the original inspiration prevents me from carrying this exposition any further, but I look forward to someone who has read it to expound on TS mightily.

-Roy

Matthew Groves — 10 Jun 2007, 19:02 · follows Roy C. Lackey

R.C.L. wrote:

I have not read The Call of the Wild

It's online (if you can bear to read it on the screen), it's a quick read (straight, no puzzles), and it's very illuminating. It's easy to see why Wolfe responded to it, with its image of dogs as "ill-tamed wolves."

White Fang is also online, as is The Sea-Wolf. Apparently London (whose nickname was "Wolf") was nearly as obsessed with wolves as Wolfe.

http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=The_Call_of_the_Wild_%28London%29&oldid=386076

I am tempted to expound upon the correspondences between "Tracking Song" and The Call of the Wild (beginning with their titles), but I don't want to be a bore. I will say that the first chapter is suggestive as to the significance of Cutthroat's "birthmark," the last chapter as to his murderous nickname, and in the penultimate chapter, I think we find which sled is the Great Sleigh, and what it represents.

Matt G.

Roy C. Lackey — 11 Jun 2007, 04:41 · follows Matthew Groves

Matthew Groves wrote:

I am tempted to expound upon the correspondences between "Tracking Song"

and

The Call of the Wild (beginning with their titles), but I don't want to be a bore.

I won't be bored, and anyone who would be shouldn't be reading this stuff anyway.

-Roy

Nigel Price — 12 Jun 2007, 14:52 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Matthew Groves wrote:

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I'm feeling very stupid at the moment. I've read "The Call of the Wild", and even read it within the last couple of years, but at the moment its connection to "Tracking Song" entirely eludes me, even though "Tracking Song" is one of my favourite Lupine tales. Far from being bored, I should be deeply fascinated, Matthew, if you would expound upon the correspondences.

Please, I should really like to hear about this!

Nigel

Matthew Groves — 13 Jun 2007, 00:21 · follows Nigel Price

Nigel writes:

I'm feeling very stupid at the moment. I've read "The Call of the Wild", and even read it within the last couple of years, but at the moment its connection to "Tracking Song" entirely eludes me, even though "Tracking Song" is one of my favourite Lupine tales. Far from being bored, I should be deeply fascinated, Matthew, if you would expound upon the correspondences.

Well I'm having trouble being coherent, so please bear with me through some tangled reasoning. But the big clues are:

- the frozen wasteland setting (referencing CotW's Alaska and northern Canada). (We even have a possible analog for CotW's aurora borealis in TS's mirror dust that reflects the sun and warms the planet.)
- the Great Sleigh (referencing the dog sleds in CotW)
- the animal tribes, corresponding mostly to North American species, especially the Wiggikki (wolves), the Lenizee (deer) and Nashhwonk (moose). (Though the Pamigaka (boars) and Ketin (lion) are problematic in this respect.)

So The Call of the Wild is a story of a civilized dog rediscovering the dormant "primordial beast" -- the wolf within. Buck learns "The Law of Club and Fang," which says that Man is the master and cannot be overcome, but that the other dogs can be mastered through brutality. Finally, Buck learns to kill Man -- learns that it is all too easy. "Tracking Song" is a little like the reverse of this, or rather it is a sort of postlude to CotW. Cutthroat struggles away from brutality towards something like grace. At the end of CotW, Buck is among wolves; Cutthroat begins among the wolves (the Wiggikki), and returns to the Great Sleigh, which also turns out to be a church/spaceship/eden. TS is a "Pilgrim's Progress." The "tracking song" is the song of the Wiggikki hunters, "a rising and falling wail," which is a wolf's song, which is the "call of the wild."

The beginning of CotW suggests the meaning of Cutthroat's "birthmark." Na ve California dog Buck is abducted by the laborer Manuel ("man-well," source of Mantru ("man-true")?) to be sold and shipped north to pull sleds for greedy prospectors in Alaska and Canada. Manuel slips a rope around Buck's neck that is used to choke him. So I think Cutthroat's mark means he has been taken against his will. Wolfe's familiar theme of Freedom is in play.

The nickname "Cutthroat" suggests that he is a murderer, and that his exile from the Great Sleigh is punishment. (Hence Borski's interpretation of Cutthroat as Cain.) At the end of CotW, in a rage over the death of John Thornton, Buck kills the Yeehats by tearing open their jugular veins, i.e. he becomes a cutthroat. So I think Cutthroat's crime is that he is a murderer, but that has killed out of revenge.

Unlike Buck in CotW, who becomes increasingly ruthless and brutal, Cutthroat becomes increasingly reluctant to kill and squeamish about eating the flesh of the animal tribes. He doesn't want to eat the Lenizee doe; he gives away his share of the meat from the moose-man Nashhwonk (cf. Buck's ruthless pursuit of the wounded moose); and he refuses to kill the lion-man Ketin. Repeatedly coming into possession of increasingly powerful weapons (the clubbow, the endieva wand, and the horned staff), leaves them behind one by one.

If the "Great Sleigh" is present as a single sled in CotW, then I think it is the one-ton sled, locked in ice, that Buck pulls for John Thornton's bet ("As you love me, Buck."). Taking this interpretation, the Great Sleigh reflects Wolf's theme of the redeeming power of Love. Like the

CotW's interlude with John Thornton, there is an analogous deviation in Cutthroat's pursuit of the Great Sleigh when he goes after Cim Glowing, whom he is growing to love.

That's the best I can do for now; surely others can be clearer, cleverer, more thorough and more eloquent than I have been here. I just got The Castle of the Otter and I want to go read it.

Matt G.

Matthew King — 13 Jun 2007, 14:00 · in reply to Matthew Groves

On Jun 12, 2007, at 7:21 PM, Matthew Groves wrote:
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This resembles the arc of White Fang more than Call of the Wild.

I haven't read either since I was twelve, so my recollection of the details is fuzzy. But I do recall specifically noting that CotW depicts a dog's descent from, and WF a wolf's ascent to, civilization.

Matthew Groves — 13 Jun 2007, 23:06 · follows Matthew King

Matthew King noted:

This resembles the arc of White Fang more than Call of the Wild.

Yes, White Fang is there too, I imagine, although I haven't read it, so someone else will have to draw those connections. Someone on the old urth list speculated that the Wiggikki's hunt of Nashhwonk was based on a passage in WF depicting a moose hunt.

Daniel D Jones — 13 Jun 2007, 23:18 · in reply to Matthew Groves

On Wednesday 13 June 2007 19:06, Matthew Groves wrote:
Matthew King noted:

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Yes, White Fang is there too, I imagine, although I haven't read it, so someone else will have to draw those connections. Someone on the old urth list speculated that the Wiggikki's hunt of Nashhwonk was based on a passage in WF depicting a moose hunt.

I've never read either CotW or WF. London has long been on my list of authors to Get Around To Someday. This thread inspired me order a collected works which includes both stories. I plan to read both of them, then re-read Tracking Song. I'll post any observations I have when I'm done.

Roy C. Lackey — 14 Jun 2007, 18:12 · follows Daniel D Jones

Some scattered, even contradictory thoughts.

Daniel D Jones wrote:
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to Get Around To Someday. This thread inspired me order a collected works which includes both stories. I plan to read both of them, then re-read _Tracking Song_. I'll post any observations I have when I'm done.

Good. I relented and read CotW, not a book I could honestly recommend to anyone much past puberty. But there can be no doubt it influenced TS. Still, as I said before, it doesn't come close to explaining Wolfe's story. If I may make a suggestion, I think it might be a good idea to shrug off the whole crime-and-punishment, Cain-and-Abel idea when you read TS again. It has colored my view of the story for so long that it's hard to shake, and I'm not sure that it's really valid. After all, such moral/ethical considerations have nothing to do with a dog like London's Buck.

That leads back to the unspecified prelude to TS; how Cutthroat came to be separated from the Great Sleigh and the presumed link to his amnesia. There is another point of correspondence Matthew G. didn't mention, Buck's "dreams". He had impossible dreams (impossible unless you grant some sort of collective, ancestral, Jungian archetype) of lying near a fire where some caveman-type fretted in the night. This happened to Buck late in the story, when he was very near to being completely feral. As Buck regressed from domesticated dog to wild animal, his instincts came to the fore and he all but forgot his tranquil California past.

Something similar happened with Cutthroat's memory: "I have no memory. But there is something behind the no-memory. I know words for many things I cannot remember ever having seen. I think of a certain thing, and begin to look for it, and then I realize that I have never possessed such a thing -- that the shelves and cabinets and drawers I find in my mind do not exist. I think of other people around me; but they are not there." He spoke this to the Min. Cutthroat forgot his past with the Sleigh people and his canine instincts took over to insure his survival, but his "ancestral" *human* memories were still there, just below the surface. They arrested his slide toward the animal part of himself; he started acting more like a man and less like a wild dog.

His pursuit of kidnapped Cim violated the first law of survival as expressed in both CotW and TS. Roughly stated, it says that to survive *at all costs* is the individual's first duty. Niceties such as of who or what to eat are a distant second, along with tribal dos and don'ts.

There's another point of correspondence between CotW and TS. Buck and the other dogs dug holes in the snow to keep warm at night. Cutthroat tried that one night and almost froze to death.

This leads to another question: Since Cutthroat is clearly not native to the planet and came to be there by way of the beings on the Sleigh, is he the same type of being as they or is he not? If he is not -- if he is a dogman, then the same sort of genetic tinkering has been going on elsewhere that produced the local beastmen. (I had the distinct impression in the Urth Cycle that the Increate frowned on Man 'improving' on Creation.) Be that as it may, if Cutthroat is a type of being subservient to Man and on a lower moral plane, and if the beings operating the Great Sleigh are indeed men (as God made them in _Genesis_), then where do they get off punishing a dog for acting like a dog and not like a man, particularly if they have been *treating* him like a dog? That is, *if* he was being punished.

This reading does not explain why the Min and machines recognized Cutthroat as a true man. And it makes the ending farcical. If Cutthroat is a dogman and the winged man is any sort of angelic being, then why is the angel there? To keep Cutthroat from returning to the Sleigh? That's swatting a fly with a sledgehammer and completely unnecessary; he was clearly dying and the Sleigh people had already kicked him out. To carry him to Hell? That seems excessive. To carry him off to Heaven because he learned his lesson and became such a good dogman?

Each of the tribes of "people" Cutthroat encountered started out as some species of animal, but each type apparently looked far closer to human than animal, so much so that Cim was mistaken as true human until she was seen without her "tunic". We don't know exactly which physical animal traits each species retained, but in the warmth of the cave Cutthroat bared himself to the waist, which act did not betray him as being other than true man and which act he regarded as "extremely important". So his animal parts must have been below the waist. For whatever that's worth.

I said before that I didn't think the winged man was just another type of beastman, but maybe I was wrong. He might be a large eater of carrion, and the joke is on Cutthroat.

-Roy

Daniel D Jones — 14 Jun 2007, 21:57 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Thursday 14 June 2007 14:12, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

I said before that I didn't think the winged man was just another type of beastman, but maybe I was wrong. He might be a large eater of carrion, and the joke is on Cutthroat.

Ouch! A condorman, perhaps? That's a twist I'd never considered.

Matthew Groves — 14 Jun 2007, 22:12 · follows Daniel D Jones

Roy,

I'm glad you've taken up this thread as I didn't feel I was doing it justice.

If I may make a suggestion, I think it might be a good idea to shrug off the whole crime-and-punishment, Cain-and-Abel idea when you read TS again.

It has colored my view of the story for so long that it's hard to shake, and I'm not sure that it's really valid. After all, such moral/ethical considerations have nothing to do with a dog like London's Buck.

I think you may be right about reading in the specifics of the Cain/Abel story; however, I'm not sure I agree with the last sentence. Imagine you're Gene Wolfe reading the last two chapters of CotW. What strikes you as significant there?

There is another point of correspondence Matthew G. didn't mention, Buck's "dreams".

Yes, I forgot about those dreams. (They were rather implausible dreams, you have to admit.) And I did mean to mention Buck's forgetfulness.

There's another point of correspondence between CotW and TS. Buck and the other dogs dug holes in the snow to keep warm at night. Cutthroat tried that one night and almost froze to death.

Thanks for pointing this out. I didn't even make the connection.

Since Cutthroat is clearly not native to the planet and came to be there by way of the beings on the Sleigh, is he the same type of being as they or is he not?

I think he is not. I think Cutthroat is a man like us. Remember Master Malrubius's analogy somewhere in TbotNS (I think before they leave Nessus) about Man's relationship to the Increate being of the same nature as Triskele's relationship to Severian? I think this is how we are to understand TS. In terms of CotW, Cutthroat's relationship to the Great Sleigh is analogous

to Buck's relationship to John Thornton. I think there may be other Sleigh dogs like Cutthroat, but I think there are also Mushers, or at least a Musher. The Sleigh dogs are men; the Mushers are, in some sense, divine.

If he is not -- if he is a dogman, then the same sort of genetic tinkering has been going on elsewhere that produced the local beastmen.

Does there have to have been tinkering?

then where do they get off punishing a dog for acting like a dog and not like a man, particularly if they have been *treating* him like a dog? That is, *if* he was being punished.

Perhaps not. He may simply be a lost dog like Buck. He may also be being tested and perfected like Abraham. Cutthroat's story seems too similar to Latro's for us to leave out some discussion of Soldier....

...which I will happily leave to someone else.

Matt G.

Dave Lebling — 14 Jun 2007, 22:29 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Buck's dreams in CotW are easily explained. Jack London was a believer in racial memory (and a lot of other tosh as well). He wrote a whole novel in which the protagonist (an imprisoned radical) escapes into dreams/visions/astral projections of the past, including a session in prehistoric times, which corresponds nicely to Buck's dream. It was called "Star Rover."

Dave Lebling, aka vizcacha

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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is another point of correspondence Matthew G. didn't mention, Buck's "dreams". He had impossible dreams (impossible unless you grant some sort of collective, ancestral, Jungian archetype) of lying near a fire where some caveman-type fretted in the night

brunians at brunians.org — 14 Jun 2007, 22:36 · in reply to Dave Lebling

Buck's dreams in CotW are easily explained. Jack London was a believer in racial memory (and a lot of other tosh as well).

And he didn't like the Jews.

.

Tim Walters — 14 Jun 2007, 22:38 · in reply to Dave Lebling

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Before Adam uses the same trope, IIRC.

Tim Walters | <http://doubtfulpalace.com>

Stuart Hamm — 14 Jun 2007, 23:05 · in reply to Tim Walters

Hey Evryone,I have a question for you all...

I have a couple of good friends I want to turn on to GW, what is a good strting point? Don't want to scare them off to soon...

I'm thinking "Strang Travelers" or "The ISland..." ,or should I just give them Shadow and Claw and be done with it???

Stuart

Tim Walters <walters at doubtfulpalace.com> wrote:

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Tim Walters | <http://doubtfulpalace.com>

Daniel D Jones — 14 Jun 2007, 23:59 · in reply to Stuart Hamm

On Thursday 14 June 2007 19:05, Stuart Hamm wrote:

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I can't speak for anyone else, but TBotNS is what hooked me on Wolfe. Had I read anything else, I'd probably have enjoyed it but it certainly wouldn't have inspired me to go grab everything by him I could get my hands on. I'd almost certainly never have read _Peace_ or _Pandora_. (Definitely my loss!)

Then again, I'm a fairly twisted soul. The tale of a banished torturer in a stagnant, decadent, dying future society with a sort of steampunk feel really appeals to me. Perhaps I'm not the best example to use. :-)

Matthew Keeley — 15 Jun 2007, 02:20 · in reply to Stuart Hamm

Stuart,

I started off with Shadow & Claw myself; I was hooked by the end of the first chapter. I haven't read Strange Travelers, but I'm not sure if The Island of Doctor Death is the best place to start; lots of the science stuff hasn't aged as well as one might hope, and some of the stories, like "The Eyeflash Miracles," are so obscure and difficult to read that I wonder if they might turn off readers. That said, it seems to me that "Seven American Nights" from that collection might make a very good intro to Wolfe; it seems to me a very representative Wolfe story, what with the decaying world and the monumentally unreliable narrator.

I suppose that The Wizard Knight is another possible starting point; my one caveat is that lots of readers either a) hate Able or b) think that The Wizard drags a lot, so that might not be the best place to begin.

Best of luck convincing your friends.

-Matt

On 6/14/07, Stuart Hamm <hammstu at sbcglobal.net> wrote:

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Tim Walters | <http://doubtfulpalace.com>

Dave Lebling — 15 Jun 2007, 02:46 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

Personally, I would consider "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" (meaning all three novelettes, of course) as a good introduction to Wolfe. I have to admit that I've had very little luck getting people interested in him, using that or "The Book of the New Sun." The prospect pretty much has to be interested in SF or Fantasy and be interested in "literary" fiction; not many are.

Dave Lebling, aka vizcacha

Steve Taylor — 15 Jun 2007, 03:35 · in reply to Dave Lebling

Dave Lebling wrote:

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I started on Book of the New Sun and it suited me very well. I owe it all to Michael Moorcock too - I'd been ignoring it because "Shadow of the Torturer" sounded pretty trashy. In _Wizardry and Wild Romance_, a book of essays on fantasy, he talked it up big enough that I was willing to try it - and loved it of course. I'd recommend this for readers who would be taken by the sweep of invention

I can see The Knight (haven't read The Wizard yet) as a good starting point because of the astonishing simplicity and purity of the language. Somehow Wolfe can write "The sea was blue. The sun came up." and make the prose sing. I am mystified as to how he does it.

Fifth Head would be suitable for puzzle solvers. It's one of the demanding books which asks the

reader to untangle it. I'm not a puzzle solver by nature - I figure that if the author thinks I need to know something they can just come out tell me. Which makes it pretty odd that I'm such a big Wolfe fan - but then, that's my point - there are different Wolfe's for different readers. Fifth head would be a poor starting point for me, but possibly a good starting point for others.

(Oddly enough, I'm pretty sure I read Death of Dr Island etc when I was about 9 - but at that age I would finish any book I read, whether I disliked it, whether I completely failed to understand it, whether I was holding it upside down... My only memory of reading it is "Huh?".

Dave Lebling, aka vizcacha

Steve

don doggett — 15 Jun 2007, 04:40 · in reply to Dave Lebling

--- Dave Lebling <dlebling at hyraxes.com> wrote:

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Yeah, it's Carver or Cthulhu for many. Sorry, I'm reading Brian Lumley's Titus Crow series right now and I couldn't resist. It's real potboiler stuff (seemingly on purpose) but pretty entertaining and I'm suspecting it might be subtler than it appears. Sadly, I only have the second and third omnibus, but I thought that might be a fun way to tackle a series. Like catching a movie in the middle and only finally seeing the beginning years down the road.

Don

The Evangelists: a Lesser Apocrypha

<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=178109961>

Joe Riley — 15 Jun 2007, 05:00 · in reply to Steve Taylor

I am probably in the minority on this, but I think the Soldier series is a fantastic place to start. It's language is as clear-cut as The Knight's is, but it's set in a world most people are at least passing familiar with. Maybe if you include a little cheat sheet that translates the places and gods from Latro-speak into English, they could at least surf through the story and wallow in Wolfe's brilliant realization of ancient Greece. They're bound to realize there's more down below...

Steve Taylor <steve.taylor at majitek.com> wrote:

Dave Lebling wrote:

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Dave Lebling, aka vizcacha

Steve

JWillard — 15 Jun 2007, 05:27 · in reply to Stuart Hamm

Stuart Hamm wrote:

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/Tim Walters <walters at doubtfulpalace.com>/ wrote:

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--

Tim Walters | <http://doubtfulpalace.com>

Tim Walters — 15 Jun 2007, 05:57 · in reply to JWillard

A lot depends on who's getting the recommendation. Much of the pleasure of BotNS and later fiction lies in the way Wolfe treats and/or subverts standard sf and fantasy tropes, and someone who hasn't read much in the genres may not get that.

I don't quite remember my first encounter with Wolfe--it was back in the Seventies, I think, since I remember being very excited when *_Shadow_* came out--but it was almost certainly a short story in an Orbit or Nebula collection, possibly "The Death of Doctor Island." To this day I prefer his stories above all, and I think *_Island..._* might be the best introduction, unless the receiver is one of those surprisingly numerous people who just doesn't like short fiction at all.

But to the Joyce/Eliot fan I gave *_Fifth Head_*. Not that he ever read it.

Tim Walters | The Doubtful Palace | <http://doubtfulpalace.com>

Andy Robertson — 15 Jun 2007, 07:36 · in reply to Matthew Groves

Does anyone ever suspect that GW might not know what he is writing or (to be more precise) exactly how each bit of each story fits in to the overall pattern he is trying to weave?

That writing might sometimes be a purely instinctive thing, grasping at vague mad visions?

That GW might sometimes be as surprised by what happens and as ignorant of the "real" meaning of it as you or I?

- hartshorn

Daniel D Jones — 15 Jun 2007, 11:19 · in reply to Andy Robertson

On Friday 15 June 2007 03:36, Andy Robertson wrote:

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That GW might sometimes be as surprised by what happens and as ignorant of the "real" meaning of it as you or I?

I think there's probably a bit of truth to that in that we (his readers) sometimes over-interpret his works. I don't think it's humanly possible to put the thought and emphasis on every word when writing that we tend to give when reading. So I think we sometimes "find" implications and interpretations and links and allusions that Wolfe never intended.

But I don't think that by any means accounts for all or even most of the complex pattern Wolfe weaves. Although we sometimes see shapes in the shadows, Wolfe isn't merely a verbal Rorschach test. He's more akin to an optical illusion. Both the vase and the kissing couple are there - because Wolfe put them there. So's the werewolfe howling in the background. But that smell of oranges? That's probably just your imagination.

Probably.

brunians at brunians.org — 15 Jun 2007, 11:58 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

I think there's probably a bit of truth to that in that we (his readers) sometimes over-interpret [GW's] works.

Do you think?

He does.

.

Stuart Hamm — 15 Jun 2007, 13:35 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

So wait...does this mean I'm not a complete Moron if I can't figure out everything that is (and is not) happening in the stories????

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Do you think?

He does.

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Joel Sieh — 15 Jun 2007, 13:36 · in reply to Tim Walters

I got started with BotNS, and that's what hooked me. However, some of the people I've recommended it to couldn't get past Shadow & Claw.

I don't think I'd recommend a collection of short stories to the person. I can't seem to sit and read through a collection, and find myself picking stories to read based on their titles, summaries, or what I've heard. If instead you had your own list of selected short stories, I think that could work well. That way your friend could try out a few without too much investment. Some of my favorites:

The

Joel Sieh — 15 Jun 2007, 13:43 · in reply to Joel Sieh

Let's try that again. That will teach me to use bleeding edge technology (Safari win beta)!

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The Hero as Werwolf (Castle of Days?)

The Death of Doctor Island (The Island of Doctor Death, etc.) Tracking Song (The Island of Doctor Death, etc.) The Ziggurat (Strange Travelers) Queen of the Night (Strange Travelers) Rattler (Starwater Strains)

--Joel

hammstu — 15 Jun 2007, 13:47 · in reply to Joel Sieh

I got hooked on the way "Blueberry Jam" and "Ain't you 'most Done" played off each other.

From: urth-bounces at lists.urth.net [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net] On Behalf Of Joel Sieh
Sent: Friday, June 15, 2007 6:43 AM To: The Urth Mailing List Subject: Re: (urth) A Question

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I don't think I'd recommend a collection of short stories to the person. I can't seem to sit and read through a collection, and find myself picking stories to read based on their titles, summaries, or what I've heard. If instead you had your own list of selected short stories, I think that could work well. That way your friend could try out a few without too much investment. Some of my favorites:

The Hero as Werewolf (Castle of Days?)

The Death of Doctor Island (The Island of Doctor Death, etc.) Tracking Song (The Island of Doctor Death, etc.) The Ziggurat (Strange Travelers) Queen of the Night (Strange Travelers) Rattler (Starwater Strains)

--Joel

Joel Sieh — 15 Jun 2007, 14:08 · in reply to hammstu

On 6/15/07, hammstu <hammstu at sbcglobal.net> wrote:

I got hooked on the way "Blueberry Jam" and "Ain't you 'most Done" played off each other?

I enjoyed those, too. I felt like Wolfe using Neil Gaiman's world and characters was a little gimmicky, but it didn't wreck my enjoyment of the stories. I think I liked Blueberry Jam a little better because of this, and also because it showed a world stuck in a crazy traffic jam. :)

--Joel

Tom Kenney — 15 Jun 2007, 16:03 · in reply to Joel Sieh

Hello,

Long time lurker here, coming out of the woodwork for a few reasons.

Regarding the Question: there's no easy way to get into Wolfe. You need to take the long view. Give them a copy of Shadow&Claw and let them work their way through it. If they like it - great! If not, then let it lie for a while, perhaps making the occasional comment about the Tower being a spaceship or such. Let their interest build until they have the chance to pick it up again. The reread is what got me hooked.

The first time I read TBotNS I was fifteen, the text seemed boring compared to other SF I was reading and I doubted I would read it again.. The second time I was 23 and enjoyed it superficially; I had picked it off the shelf by chance that time, heading to the airport. The third time was when I really sunk my teeth into it, armed with some of the tips and answers from this list. It was also the time I read the majority of it aloud (to my then girlfriend now wife).

If there was ever a book that would benefit from an audio recording it would be TBotNS. Wolfe's prose sings when spoken, and many of the mysteries that might sneak past tired eyes lodged firmly in my ear.

I'm also feeling quite lucky to be at the Hall of Fame Induction on Saturday. As a few people have said, the Man isn't doing much traveling any more.

Cheers,
shampoohorn

don doggett — 15 Jun 2007, 17:25 · in reply to Andy Robertson

--- Andy Robertson <andywrobertson at clara.co.uk> wrote:
Does anyone ever suspect that GW might not know what
he is writing or (to be
more precise) exactly how each bit of each story
fits in to the overall
pattern he is trying to weave?

That writing might sometimes be a purely instinctive
thing, grasping at
vague mad visions?

That GW might sometimes be as surprised by what
happens and as ignorant of
the "real" meaning of it as you or I?

God, I hope so. We can always use another insane
genius in literature. But I think it's more the case
that rather than creating this ridiculously
complicated architecture in his fiction, he has an
understanding of a sort of universal vagueness that
allows things to create their own complexity. I think
he takes his cue from the bible and other great
religious texts and myths that have endured precisely
(ha!) because no one interpretation can be
definitively pinned on them. That's not to say he
doesn't have something in mind, but it does seem that
he is willing to subvert even his own opinion of what
the story should mean.

Don

The Evangelists: a Lesser Apocrypha
<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=178109961>

Daniel D Jones — 15 Jun 2007, 22:15 · in reply to Stuart Hamm

On Friday 15 June 2007 09:35, Stuart Hamm wrote:
So wait...does this mean I'm not a complete Moron if I can't figure out
everything that is (and is not) happening in the stories????

If it does, we need to change the name of the list from urth.net to moron.net. Anyone who
claims that he knows everything that is (and is not) happening in a Wolfe story and isn't named

Gene Wolfe is a liar. (And even he's suspect.)

Bob Miller — 16 Jun 2007, 03:44 · in reply to don doggett

--- Andy Robertson <andywrobertson at clara.co.uk> wrote:

Does anyone ever suspect that GW might not know what he is writing or (to be more precise) exactly how each bit of each story fits in to the overall pattern he is trying to weave?

I truly believe Wolfe is more aware of the varieties of information that he puts into his storie/books than just about anyone else I have ever read.

At the same time I am confident that no one is aware of everything they put into a work as lengthy as The Devil in the Forest (correct name?) much less BotNS.

James Wynn — 16 Jun 2007, 04:27 · in reply to Bob Miller

Hey,

In case anyone else is going to be there. I'll be at the Science Fiction Awards events on Saturday.

J

James Wynn — 16 Jun 2007, 05:00 · in reply to Stuart Hamm

I read "New Sun" first. I came away from it convinced that Wolfe was a phenominal creator of worlds but only a so-so writer. I thought that because:

1. Wolfe failed to make clear and/or resolve key plot elements by the end of the book.
2. Wolfe would go into great detail describing something Severian's childhood relationship with a dog or enjoying quiet-time in a mausoleum and then relate the death of the alzado in a single sentence.

Now, of course, I realize these complaints are like criticizing Rock&Roll music because "it could lead to dancing". The next Wolfe story I read was "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" and suddenly I "got it". At that point I began telling people that Wolfe was THE finest science fiction writer period.

So I don't know where to start with Wolfe. Probably, a recommendation from a someone you trust is the best introduction to Wolfe.

J

----- Original Message -----

From: Stuart Hamm

Roy C. Lackey — 16 Jun 2007, 23:48 · follows Bob Miller

Again, contradictory thoughts, but I can't seem to help it.

Matthew Groves quoted and wrote:

Since Cutthroat is clearly not native to the planet and came to be there by way of the beings on the Sleigh, is he the same type of being as they or

is he not?

I think he is not. I think Cutthroat is a man like us.

Then our views of this story are further apart than I thought. We agree that Cutthroat is not the same type of being as those who are responsible for the Sleigh, but I think there has to be a dog in his family tree, just as there is a lion in Ketin's and a wolf in Longknife's.

Remember Master

Malrubius's analogy somewhere in TbotNS (I think before they leave Nessus) about Man's relationship to the Increate being of the same nature as Triskele's relationship to Severian? I think this is how we are to understand TS. In terms of CotW, Cutthroat's relationship to the Great Sleigh is analogous to Buck's relationship to John Thornton. I think there may be other Sleigh dogs like Cutthroat, but I think there are also Mushers, or at least a Musher. The Sleigh dogs are men; the Mushers are, in some sense, divine.

Why divine? Where is the evidence?

Terms like "man" and "men" are used loosely in TS and, depending on who is using them, mean different things. Each of the beastmen tribes seems to refer to members of its own species as men, but members of different types of tribes are fair game (pun intended), because it is less clear whether they regard the other types of beastmen as also being "men" on a more-or-less equal moral footing or not.

Longknife flat-out stated that Cutthroat was **not** a man, and all but stated explicitly that Nashhwonk and all the other talking species were "animals". His use of the word "man", in context, clearly extends only to members of the wolfmen. Their **tribal** law mandates that the tribe not kill and eat its own kind, but that law is superceded by the law of survival, which requires that, if food becomes scarce enough, Crookedleg will be killed and eaten because he is the weakest member and cannot prevent it. That was the threat Cutthroat faced if he stayed with the wolfmen; he was not a man of their species and could therefore be killed and eaten even before Crookedleg, if circumstances demanded it.

Of course, there is always something else to muddy the water. One of the other wolfmen told Cutthroat there were "Many men and women, all dressed like you." on the Sleigh. Obviously, he is not using "men" in the same sense as Longknife.

Nashhwonk left human footprints, and Cutthroat spoke of him as a man. Cutthroat said to him, "I don't hunt people. I thought we were after an animal." Cutthroat was ashamed of having hunted him, and he saw the body dismembered. If there was any telltale mark of a beast about Nashhwonk, I find no mention of it. Even his great size relative to the wolfmen seems to be in the same proportion as a human to a wolf.

More mud. Nashhwonk said he was called Mankiller. He said the legs of his chair (how many animals use chairs?) were bound with sinews cut from a man's leg. He makes it absolutely clear that he does not regard the wolfmen as the same kind of being that provided the sinews. So which species provided the sinews if it wasn't his own?

Eggseeker said, "We knew you were from the Great Sleigh by your dress and your face -- like all of them, you look much like the Wiggikki, but we see you are not cruel, as they are." Note the "all of them". Everyone from the Sleigh that Eggseeker's people saw looked like Cutthroat, and Cutthroat looked much like the wolfmen, only less savage. Nice doggie. No "Mushers" in sight moralizing or showing video of the planet's idyllic future.

Still, who is the "you" Cutthroat addresses in the recorder/transmitter, and why will that entity not communicate with him?

I am tempted to suggest that the cutoff in communication (intended to last for, say, fourteen days) was punishment for some minor infraction (say, the equivalent of a dog peeing in the house), only the punishment had unintended consequences. ["If you're going to act like a dog, see how you like being treated like a dog." Later: "Oh, you poor thing! Let's see if I can make it all better."] This is essentially a religious argument, from the perspective of those who hold that being cut off from God is its own Hell. But this suggestion fits Matthew G.'s position rather than mine, so forget it. <g>

I just don't see any evidence in TS that any great crime was committed by Cutthroat that got him expelled from the Sleigh. I don't see any evidence of divinity associated with the Sleigh, unless it is that winged man at the end of the story. And I'm not even sure the winged man has anything to do with the Sleigh. The winged man is definitely not the "you" addressed by Cutthroat; indeed, Cutthroat seems never to have seen such a creature before.

Returning to the CotW angle; by the time Buck encountered John Thornton he had already turned his back on men. Only his fear of what men had done and could do to him again kept him in his place. Buck would have died but for Thornton's interference and ministrations. Even back in sunny California, though Buck had never been abused, neither had he been treated with any particular regard. It's only natural that he came to "love" Thornton, the only man who ever treated him so well. But in Buck's experience, Thornton was a fluke, and even he was killed by other men.

The irony of the situation is that, had Buck never come to "love" a man, he would never have become a man killer. Was Cutthroat ever in an analogous situation with someone on the Great Sleigh, the "you" he remembered at the end? Or is that carrying the analogy too far?

Or is it indeed just a "lost dog" story, as someone once suggested? There was no crime, no punishment. Crewman Cutthroat became separated by some mischance from the Sleigh and, like a real dog or small child, lacked the intellectual capacity to fully understand his situation. The psychological trauma of being what he can understand only as abandoned caused his amnesia. He started chasing the Sleigh, like a silly dog, got distracted by other animals and had adventures, got hurt and laid himself down to die. The Sleigh, having completed its mission and having heard reports of him, comes hurrying to find him, but is probably too late. And the winged man turns out to be just a carrion eater, or else an angel come to collect his human soul, depending on one's religious preference.

Why did the "you" on the other end of the transmitter -- if there was anyone there at all -- not speak to him? I don't know (and I may not be the first to say this; can't remember), but it may have something to do with Man having lost the ability to speak and understand the language of the animals. The various tribes of animals all spoke the same language, but the person on the other end of the transmitter, if he were a true man, might not have understood Cutthroat's plight until it was translated for him by another crewman. The true man (or men) may have stayed out of sight in the "big hut" on the Sleigh.

But that's reaching.

-Roy

Daniel D Jones — 17 Jun 2007, 01:01 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Saturday 16 June 2007 19:48, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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animal." Cutthroat was ashamed of having hunted him, and he saw the body

dismembered. If there was any telltale mark of a beast about Nashhwonk, I

find no mention of it. Even his great size relative to the wolfmen seems to

be in the same proportion as a human to a wolf.

That's another angle I'd never considered. Is Nashwonk not a giant but merely an ordinary sized man, and the other characters in the story still roughly the same size as their animal counterparts?

Matthew Groves — 17 Jun 2007, 04:27 · follows Daniel D Jones

On the dogness of Cutthroat, Roy writes:

Then our views of this story are further apart than I thought. We agree that

Cutthroat is not the same type of being as those who are responsible for the

Sleigh, but I think there has to be a dog in his family tree, just as there

is a lion in Ketin's and a wolf in Longknife's.

I don't think we're that far apart; it's just a matter of how literal we're being. Cutthroat is a dog-man in the story. I said, "Cutthroat is a man like us," meaning that he is not some kind of higher being like the Great Sleigher he's talking to. In the hierarchy of TS's universe, with it's wild tribes and unapproachable Great Sleighers, Cutthroat occupies a position analogous to our own.

On the divinity of the Great Sleighers:

Where is the evidence?

First, we have the sense that they are Visitors to this world, bringing some sort of Promise of Salvation, along with lots of new Laws. Then there's the sense that Cutthroat is on a Pilgrim's Progress. And one of his entries from near the end reads like a prayer of supplication: "I hear your breathing as well, though you are far ahead in the Great Sleigh, and I wonder why it is you cannot speak. Am I being tested? If I pass, do the right thing, if only once, will you talk to me then?" Above all, though, there is the tall, winged being atop the Juggernaut at the end.

On the beastness of Nashhwonk:

If there was any telltale mark of a beast about Nashhwonk, I find no mention of it.

The telltale mark of the beast is, ironically, his "chair," which is his antlers. From the context, I assume that Nashhwonk is intimating that the sinews binding his "marriage of wood" are from men like Cutthroat, but this may just be bluster. Male moose are notoriously dangerous if you get too close, and when the fuzzy flesh that covers their antlers while they are growing begins to fall off, those bloody scraps that hang off their antlers are pretty suggestive.

I just don't see any evidence in TS that any great crime was committed by Cutthroat that got him expelled from the Sleigh.

His name is Cutthroat; that has to mean something. I suggested that, in light of Call of the Wild, it has something to do with Buck's tearing the throats of the Yeehat Indians after the death of John Thornton. But if you don't think something like this CotW episode is in Cutthroat's past, then you have to find some other reason for his name. This is Wolfe, after all.

I don't see any evidence of divinity associated with the Sleigh, unless it is that winged man at the end of the story.

You need **more** than a winged man? Some might have said that Wolfe lacked subtlety. Some might have said the religious iconography was layed on a little thick here...

And I'm not even sure the winged man has anything to do with the Sleigh.

Well, he's **on** it, so there's that. Why the sudden agnosticism regarding the winged man? Do you seriously think he's a carrion bird?

The winged man is definitely not the "you" addressed by Cutthroat; indeed, Cutthroat seems never to have seen such a creature before.

That's because he's forgotten everything, unless you think he's regained all his memory upon seeing the Great Sleigh. But there's nothing in the text to suggest that.

Matt G.

Matthew Groves — 17 Jun 2007, 05:14 · follows Matthew Groves

Is Nashwonk not a giant but merely an ordinary sized man, and the other characters in the story still roughly the same size as their animal counterparts?

I don't think so. There are several giants in the story, and I'm convinced they all correspond to large animals. Nashwonk is a moose (the chair is his antlers), Mimmunka is some kind of large cat ("feminine" appearance, high cheekbones, big green eyes, soft-looking hand, cruelly hooked weapon), Ketin is a lion (big eyes, mane). The tall, winged man at the end is obviously some kind of bird, whatever else he may represent.

Roy C. Lackey — 17 Jun 2007, 07:55 · follows Matthew Groves

Daniel D Jones quoted and wrote:
Even his great size relative to the wolfmen seems to be in the same proportion as a human to a wolf.

That's another angle I'd never considered. Is Nashwonk not a giant but merely an ordinary sized man, and the other characters in the story still roughly the same size as their animal counterparts?

One of Nashwonk's fingers was as large as Cutthroat's wrist and his legs were longer than Cutthroat was tall, so it depends. Allowances have to be made for size differences due to the lower gravity of the small planet relative to Cutthroat's home planet. As I see it, each species of beastmen looks more-or-less human. I think that was the point of the genetic tinkering that produced them. When the humans and their civilization died out, the beastmen reverted to their animal skills to survive.

Cutthroat's height only came up to the wolfmen's shoulders, whereas in CotW Buck was much bigger than any wolf.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 17 Jun 2007, 07:57 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Matthew Groves quoted and wrote:

If there was any telltale mark of a beast about Nashhwonk, I find no mention of it.

The telltale mark of the beast is, ironically, his "chair," which is his antlers.

He's sitting on his own head? "Sitting in the very center of it [the Sleigh track], in a massive, high-backed chair of dark wood, was a man bigger than I had ever conceived that a man could be. He was facing me [. . .]" Nashhwonk later rose from the chair and walked around it. Is this incident "just a matter of how literal we're being"?

I just don't see any evidence in TS that any great crime was committed by Cutthroat that got him expelled from the Sleigh.

His name is Cutthroat; that has to mean something. I suggested that, in light of Call of the Wild, it has something to do with Buck's tearing the throats of the Yeehat Indians after the death of John Thornton. But if you don't think something like this CotW episode is in Cutthroat's past, then you have to find some other reason for his name. This is Wolfe, after all.

Okay, but the name was given to him *after* he departed the Sleigh *by* the wolfmen. They knew nothing of his past. Names bestowed by the beastmen are largely descriptive; witness Crookedleg's new name. Cutthroat said they gave him that name because of his "reddish-brown birthmark". You earlier suggested that the "birthmark" was an analogue of Buck's forced submission by a rope around the neck. You also suggest the name Cutthroat is a reference to a hypothetical, past analogue of Buck's well-earned reputation as a man killer. And, yes, a symbol can represent more than one thing. The problem for me is, it is Cutthroat who is carrying the mark that should be on his victim(s). In other words, the descriptive name given by the wolfmen suggests to me that Cutthroat was on the receiving end of a cut throat.

The winged man is definitely not the "you" addressed by Cutthroat; indeed, Cutthroat seems never to have seen such a creature before.

That's because he's forgotten everything, unless you think he's regained all his memory upon seeing the Great Sleigh. But there's nothing in the text to suggest that.

He may not have regained it all, but he did remember who "you" was, and it was not the winged man, who was "with you". If the winged man is divine, then there is no reason for "you" to be divine also, even if "you" is divine only by analogy. If "you" is to Cutthroat as God is to Man, why is the winged man there at all?

-Roy

Matthew Groves — 17 Jun 2007, 16:13 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Nashhwonk's chair as his antlers, Roy writes skeptically:

He's sitting on his own head? "Sitting in the very center of it [the Sleigh track], in a massive, high-backed chair of dark wood, was a man bigger than I had ever conceived that a man could be. He was facing me [. . .]" Nashhwonk later rose from the chair and walked around it. Is this incident "just a matter of how literal we're being"?

Yes. If you accept that the Wiggikki are a wolf tribe, you should have no trouble accepting that Nashhwonk is a moose. All the animal tribes are humanoids that have weapons that are keyed to their real-world animal counterparts. Mimmunka has a "polearm ending in cruel hooks, like fishhooks, made from the ribs of some large animal." These represent Mimmunka's claws. The Pamigaka have "short-handled tools with heavy, curved blades." These represent the Pamigaka's tusks.

On the meaning of Cutthroat's name:

Okay, but the name was given to him *after* he departed the Sleigh *by* the wolfmen. They knew nothing of his past. [...]
You earlier suggested that the "birthmark" was an analogue of Buck's forced submission by a rope around the neck. You also suggest the name Cutthroat is a reference to a hypothetical, past analogue of Buck's well-earned reputation as a man killer. And, yes, a symbol can represent more than one thing. The problem for me is, it is Cutthroat who is carrying the mark that should be on his victim(s). [...]

Maybe I should be clearer about at what level I'm looking at the story when I make these claims. There's more than one symbol here, and more than one meaning for each. Ultimately, it's Wolfe who gave Cutthroat his name, and I'm looking for what *he* might have meant by it. Also, I'm keeping the "birthmark" and the nickname somewhat separate as symbols. And I still like Borski's "mark of Cain" interpretation." So I think Cutthroat's "birthmark" represents his exile via the Cain story and his loss of freedom via CotW. The name "Cutthroat" means "killer," so I think Wolfe is saying that this guy is a killer in some sense.

On the divinity of "you" in the story:

He may not have regained it all, but he did remember who "you" was, and it was not the winged man, who was "with you".

I don't read it this way. I think the "you" at the end of the story is plural, or collective. He sees some strange thing coming from the east, speculates that it's another sledge, but no, it couldn't be on this melting snow, and it's too large, so maybe the warmth revived Roller, but no it's even bigger than that, "As big as a hill, and there are *people* standing on it*." (Emphasis mine.) Then he recognizes them for what they are: the Great Sleighers. And then he sees something strange: "Who is that tall man with you [i.e., with y'all people standing on the Sleigh]?" So it's not necessary to assume that Cutthroat has remembered anything at all.

Matt G.

Roy C. Lackey — 18 Jun 2007, 04:55 · follows Matthew Groves

Matthew Groves quoted and wrote:
Nashhwonk later rose from the chair and walked around it. Is this incident
"just a matter of how literal we're being"?

Yes. If you accept that the Wiggikki are a wolf tribe, you should have no trouble accepting that Nashhwonk is a moose.

I have no trouble accepting the animal origins of the various beastmen tribes or the retention of species-specific attributes as manifested by their use of tools and weapons. But, *in the story*, those tools and weapons are *really* tools and weapons, not just symbols. For instance, Cutthroat made use of a sail and sledge he got from the wolfmen, and Cim used Cutthroat's

pocketknife and recorder. And all of the beastmen apparently made use of fire.

Maybe I should be clearer about at what level I'm looking at the story when I make these claims. There's more than one symbol here, and more than one meaning for each.

And this is the root of our divergent views. I tend to get down in the dirt and follow the plow. The rising of the Pelerines' tent cathedral really was due to a lot of hot air -- whether you choose to also call it a miracle or not. <g> Severian and Dorcas, having witnessed the "miracle", discussed this issue in chapter 32 of SHADOW, when he asked her if she knew the key to the universe:

"The brown book is a collection of the myths of the past, and it has a section listing all the keys of the universe--all the things people have said were The Secret after they had talked to mystagogues on far worlds or studied the popul vuh of the magicians, or fasted in the trunks of holy trees. Thecla and I used to read them and talk about them, and one of them was that everything, whatever happens, has three meanings. The first is its practical meaning, what the book calls, 'the thing the plowman sees.' The cow has taken a mouthful of grass, and it is real grass, and a real cow--that meaning is as important and as true as either of the others. The second is the reflection of the world about it. Every object is in contact with all others, and thus the wise can learn of the others by observing the first. That might be called the soothsayers' meaning, because it is the one such people use when they prophesy a fortunate meeting from the tracks of serpents or confirm the outcome of a love affair by putting the elector of one suit atop the patroness of another."

"And the third meaning?" Dorcas asked.

"The third is the transsubstantial meaning. Since all objects have their ultimate origin in the Pancreator, and all were set in motion by him, so all must express his will--which is the higher reality." [. . .] "Dorcas nodded. I could see the glimmer of her pale hair in the moonlight. "It seems to me that what you call the third meaning is very clear. But the second meaning is harder to find, and the first, which ought to be the easiest, is impossible."

I agree with Dorcas; it's a tough job, but someone has to do it. Whatever the soothsayer may have to say about the grass, the cow can eat it only if it's real grass. In TS, the surface story has to work or else the symbols get hung out to dry.

In the surface story, the animal tribes are physically much nearer to human form than they are to their respective animal forms. It is their collective, almost-human nature that unites them despite their innate bestial inclinations to war with one another for survival; they just need to be reminded of it. Cutthroat failed the test the Min vizier gave him when he didn't kill Cim and Ketin, even when they were penned together. But at the same time he passed the same test by *not* killing them, in his own eyes and, presumably, in the ears of whomever was listening on the other end of the transmitter when he recorded that day's events. It took cooperation among species to escape the room, the underground city and for Cutthroat to survive on the trail afterwards.

I have to figure out what happened in the story before I can figure out what Wolfe meant by it. With Wolfe, that is often the bigger part of the battle.

And then he sees something strange: "Who is that tall man with you [i.e., with y'all people standing on the Sleigh]?" So it's not necessary to assume that Cutthroat has remembered anything at all.

Since you brought up alga's comments on this story, you may have noticed that she also thought there was only one winged being on the Sleigh. Its wings are what distinguish it from

"you", whether "you" is singular, plural or collective. As alga said, the Sleigh made several stops among the beastmen tribes and none of them reported seeing any winged beings. They saw people who looked and dressed like Cutthroat.

-Roy

Matthew Groves — 18 Jun 2007, 14:41 · follows Roy C. Lackey

And this is the root of our divergent views. I tend to get down in the dirt
and follow the plow.

I thought I was following the plow. What does yours look like?

I hereby attest that all these facts are true:

Nashhwonk's chair really is a chair, just as Mimmunka's polearm really is a polearm. Cutthroat's name was given to him by the Wiggikki. There is only one winged being on the Sleigh.

Here's some more interesting facts:

The epigraph is from the Aeneid.

Aeneus is a hero from the Iliad.

"Sing, O Muse, of the rage of Achilles."

"Mankiller" is an epithet of Achilles.

Nashhwonk is called "Mankiller."

Nashhwonk is felled by cutting his Achilles tendon.

Maybe I'm just not cut out for a plowman.

Matt G.

Roy C. Lackey — 19 Jun 2007, 05:10 · follows Matthew Groves

Matthew Groves wrote:

Here's some more interesting facts:

The epigraph is from the Aeneid.

Aeneus is a hero from the Iliad.

"Sing, O Muse, of the rage of Achilles."

"Mankiller" is an epithet of Achilles.

Nashhwonk is called "Mankiller."

Nashhwonk is felled by cutting his Achilles tendon.

And Mankiller's tendon was cut by Cutthroat.

Mankiller's throat was cut by wolfish Longknife.

So, when you mix Greek, Roman and Hebrew mythologies with Jack London and Wolfe, what do you get? A presumed man killer called Cutthroat helped kill a humanoid called Mankiller by exploiting a well-known human weak spot.

Maybe I'm just not cut out for a plowman.

Or I'm not cut out to be a soothsayer. <g> Will you elaborate on how the moose-man's fate relates to the rest of Wolfe's story?

-Roy

Michael Straight — 21 Jun 2007, 15:55 · in reply to James Wynn

Here's my picks for some of Wolfe's best and/or most accessible short work:

"Trip, Trap,"
"Forlessen,"
"Westwind,"
"War Beneath the Tree,"
"The Other Dead Man,"
"A Cabin on The Coast,"
"The Last Thrilling Wonder Story,"
"When I Was Ming the Merciless,"
"Death of Doctor Island,"
"Seven American Nights,"
"Tracking Song"
The Horars of War"
"How I Lost the Second World War and Helped Turn Back the German Invasion"

Rostrum

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 21 Jun 2007, 17:47 · in reply to Michael Straight

For introductory Wolfe shorts (both "good" and "accessible"), I would suggest, in roughly this order:

"With the Lafayette Escadrille"
"War Beneath the Tree"
"Detective of Dreams"
"La Befana"
the one about Peter Pan on the island, can't recall title "Westwind" "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories"

These are all pretty accessible, but become slightly more difficult and/or allusive as you go along. I would absolutely give "tloDDaOS" to someone before any of the other island doctor stories, though I agree that "The Death of Doctor Island" is a bit more immediately accessible, because I have always felt that there is a real sequence to them, though I can't explain just what it is.

On 6/21/07, Michael Straight <mfstraight at gmail.com> wrote:
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"Tracking Song"
The Horars of War"
"How I Lost the Second World War and Helped Turn Back the German Invasion"

Rostrum

Matthew King — 21 Jun 2007, 18:48 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Jun 21, 2007, at 12:47 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:
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the one about Peter Pan on the island, can't recall title
"Westwind"
"The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories"

The first time I read "La Befana", I thought: "That is freaking stupid".

I immediately re-read the story and realized that I was freaking stupid.

The Peter Pan story is "The Changeling".

Megan Bugge — 22 Jun 2007, 04:22 · in reply to Joe Riley

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Bob Miller — 22 Jun 2007, 11:05 · in reply to Megan Bugge

My experience with trying to get people to read BoTNS has been negative. I think it is because of the relatively slow start. While some of it is only suggested, there's a lot of "action" around Latro's introduction==violence, sex, con games, multiracial friendships==not to mention not having three or four add'l books to be threatened with. I would like to be wrong. I love Latro, but there is definitely more total in Severian's stories

Date: Thu, 21 Jun 2007 23:22:56 -0500

Book of the New Sun is a perfect place to start. The trick to getting someone to stick with the books is to be honest. It is a challenging read, more so than anything I've ever read before. It is also dark and beautiful. The beginning is slow, but it is on purpose. Trust this author. You will be rewarded for your loyalty. (at least this has always worked for me)

Of course, the Soldier series is everything described below, and might be easier to chew. On the other hand, if someone does not like BotNS... Perhaps it's a trial by fire sort of a deal. GW isn't an author for people who like to be spoon fed their stories.

~Megan

I am probably in the minority on this, but I think the Soldier series is a fantastic place to start. "It's language is as clear-cut as The Knight's is, but it's set in a world most people are at east passing familiar with. ?Maybe if you include a little cheat sheet that translates the places and gods from?Latro-speak into English, they could at least?surf through the story and wallow in?Wolfe's brilliant realization of ancient Greece. They're bound to realize there's more down below..."? ??? ?? ?? ??? ??? ???

PC Magazine's 2007 editors' choice for best Web mail award-winning Windows Live Hotmail.

jason wichlacz — 22 Jun 2007, 15:38 · in reply to Megan Bugge

I've decided that Long Sun is a great place to people. I started with New Sun and it took me several tries before I got thru it. I love it now and enjoyed it then too but it was work. I know now that Wolfe is worth the work but when breaking in a newbie it might make sense to give them something a little more user-friendly. Long Sun has warmth, humor, likable charcters, action, and introduces us to some of Gene's larger themes and puzzle play in a somewhat more gentle way. I just finished reading Long Sun to my wife and she loved it. I think she trusts Gene enough now to try either Latro or Severian but I don't think she would have stuck with either without the intro to what Wolfe can do given in the slightly more gentle form of Long Sun.

It was Megan who while working in a book store hooked me on Neil Gaiman and especially Wolfe and all I can say is Thank you, thank you thank you thank you.

Jason

--- Megan Bugge <srapollo at hotmail.com> wrote:

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through the story and wallow in Wolfe's brilliant realization of ancient Greece. They're bound to realize there's more down below...

Stuart Hamm — 22 Jun 2007, 15:42 · in reply to jason wichlacz

I love the Long Sun as well, and greatly enjoyed re-reading a few months back, but I'm not sure I agree that it's a good starting place...there's an awful lot of dialogue and it's easy to get trapped down in those mines...

jason wichlacz <borisdancing at yahoo.com> wrote: I've decided that Long Sun is a great place to people.

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