

The Circle of Fate: The Drifter

Larry W. Batts

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In the woolly winter of Alaska lives a drifter code-named “the Drifter” with a part-wolf dog named Dog. His horse is Horse of course.

Seeing a plane crash nearby the Drifter and Dog track that way a taxing hike through snow for several hours. The Drifter finds a couple dozen passengers alive but they are suffering at the hands of three deranged murderers identified as the Hunters. The Drifter must outwit them in a game of ultimate hide and seek to save the innocent. Wilderness survival skills learned from an old timer named Old Trapper John are crucial to the mission of keeping the survivors alive.

The Circle of Fate is a story in service of a structure. The varieties of fate in question are psychologically unhealthy replacement fantasies as responses to grief. Previous to his Alaskan hermitage the Drifter was a highly regarded architect overly focused on his career. He alienates his family by breaking commitments and it comes back to bite him. As a consequence the Drifter feels he does not deserve to have a name until he redeems himself. He acts on the basis of similarities between persons which mirror a bit too literally.

The Drifter’s hermit home is an actual stick-built house in a cavern. Like Grizzly Adams living a la Bruce Wayne with indoor livestock stables and an elevator. Days from the nearest town he and Dog have only each other. Batts scores an unintentional laugh and gives the wrong impression on that situation:

Dog was excited about the loving and was repaying his master with a wet tongue.

The dialogue needs help. The author’s grasp on realistic interpersonal relations is tenuous. The Drifter makes callous abrasive sometimes misogynistic comments to people who somehow forget that and come to admire him in short order. People don’t instantly waffle:

[Car Salesman to the Drifter:] *“I don’t like this at all...but for some reason I feel I can trust you.”*

The motivations of the Hunters aren’t sufficient. One crash victim reminds them that they are normal family guys with kids and mortgages rampagers only on the rare weekend. She asks Tom the most dangerous one why he really wants to pursue a killing spree. His answer is typical of the level of nuance operating:

Because it’s fun you stupid bitch.

Batts may have been shooting for a modernized Jack London aura. In general the outdoor scenes do a good job of putting across the sheer unforgiveability of polar blizzard country. The final chapter is more artfully imbued with significance than the rest of the work; perhaps that sheen is indicative of more fully realized novels yet to come. *The Circle of Fate* may be worthwhile to avid adventure readers.

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