

The Nature of the Aborigines of St Anne (again)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 07 Apr 1999

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Tony Ellis — 07 Apr 1999, 14:11

Mitchell A. Bailey wrote:

I myself when I first read 5HC pondered the possibility that the Shadow Children were the evolved offspring of pleiomorphs and the abos were descendants of human colonists. I believe that the evidence, apart from what the Shadow Children say about themselves, more convincingly suggests the converse.

My primary objection to this is artistic. If the Shadow Children really are the descendants of space-travelling humans, why is that fantastic truth handed to us on a plate right from the start? Why is the "wrong" explanation raised at the climax of the story? That's not how it's done. You build to a revelation. You feed your reader the wrong explanation first, then surprise him with the truth. Look how we're set up to think that Number Five is Maitre's son in the first novella, or that the person writing in jail in "V.R.T." is still Dr Marsch.

I'm also struck by the way the Shadow-Children-as-indigenous theory is raised not once, but twice. The Old Wise One first says "we were mostly long, and lived in holes", casting a shadow of doubt over what we've been told earlier, and then -later-, on a different occasion, "we were always here". Such reiteration suggests to me that we're being told something significant.

The explanation I would offer is based on the fact that, as you say, the Old Wise One at the time this remark was made was being generated by one lone Shadow Child, Sandwalker, and a tenuous contribution from every other Shadow Child band on St. Anne.

<next post:>

Guess I better own up to a goof: when the OWO makes that statement there are still three Shadow Children of that band remaining with Sandwalker.

As you say.

...Contrast this with the Old Wise One's manner when the Shadow Child band was intact earlier, at which time he was more knowledgeable and confident of his viewpoint and beliefs.

Which is just why I don't believe him. As you yourself say, the Shadow Children have "inflated" egos and "a poor grasp of reality", and each one is "part of a telepathic mental continuum". We are also told that they have the power to pick up the "songs" or thoughts of those around them, and amplify them. They tell Sandwalker, for example, "we are taller than you, and stronger". We should trust the Old Wise One, when these are the ones generating him?

One more thing. When the Old Wise One confesses that he is confused, he goes on to talk of an indigenous people, and a second, star-travelling race, our "Atlanteans". The first "heard the songs of the second and sent them out again", which is to say, they had a strong telepathic ability right from the start. If Sandwalker's people were the indigenous people, why is it that the Shadow Children are the ones with the telepathic ability?

My impression of the contact accounts Dr. Marsch recorded in his journal in "V.R.T." were more likely with pleio-abos than Shadow Children. It is strongly implied they only occurred in daylight...

Well, Mary also says "one night Pa killed three", arguing that the same creatures she saw were also active at night. But I'm mostly persuaded by her "...the children, the little ones, you know", which sounds like classic Wolfean hiding-the-truth-in-plain-view.

...and the last one remembered by Culot's grandfather in particular was alone and camouflaging itself.

I don't think that was what was being described. We're initially told that the creature looked "sometimes like a man, but sometimes like the post of a fence" which certainly sounds like the fabled Annese shape-changing ability, but then Wolfe immediately has M. Culot correct himself, saying "sometimes like a man, sometimes like old wood." We're also carefully told that M. Culot senior liked to express his contempt for the way other people failed to see properly, by being economic with the truth. Now, why go to all this trouble? Why prime us with all this, unless there is more going on here than meets the eye? I think what M. Culot senior was really saying was that this creature was gnarled and twisted like old wood, which sounds like one of the Shadow Children to me.