

5HC: the abo "stellar chameleon device"

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 16 Dec 2000, 10:17

Talarican,

Thank you, that is indeed the conclusion toward which I was meandering ever so erratically. The difficulty I have, with just leaving it at that, is that I should think that the French interstellar explorers who (re)discovered the system would have done basic astrometrics as a matter of course and perhaps been put on guard by the evident fact that Messrs. Hertzsprung, Russell, Newton, and Kepler have gone on holiday so far as this system is concerned.

Part of the situation here is: the C/A system had been overlooked, more distant stars explored and colonized (the planets, of course), at the time that the first French ship came down.

The easy answer is: ah, it was that "cloaking device" type spell being done by the Shadow Children. It made the star itself not invisible (they knew it was there), but looking like a canonical star that should not/could not/did not have any planets at all for one reason or another (too big, too small, too young, etc.). If this theory is to be followed out, then we should be looking for completely inappropriate stars in the target range, rather than stars that could really be right.

OTOH, when Shadow Child Wolf pulls the plug on the spell, it seems more like maybe it was only hiding the twin planets (rather than disguising the star). But maybe not, come to think of it. So anyway, there's this stellar chameleon device angle.

If the star is so nonconformant to the parameters of the main sequence, who knows how unstable it might be? (and, if artificially altered, what would be the ramifications of that scenario? What if the parties responsible return, prepared to weed from their garden any biological infestations which might have occurred in the interim?) Would it be wise to colonize it, or even to invest the effort of exploring it with an objective of possible colonization? Or, perhaps, was the Great Anglo-Franco War already raging elsewhere in the galaxy, and were the French explorers/colonists in fact desperate refugees disinclined to look a gift horse in the mouth? (rather reminiscent of Larry Niven's motley collection of flawed colony worlds in his Known Space cycle.)

I still get a kick out of thinking about the twin planets and their star as a big world-building/star-tinkering forerunner-race project. I don't know if Wolfe thought of it this way at all, but still it is a neat angle. Remember how in RINGWORLD there is this Stapledonian angle of how the humanoids come to fill each ecological niche . . . of an artificial megaworld? So you have grazing humans, and jackal humans, and so forth: a huge ecological pyramid all evolved from human stock. Hard sf leading right back into that deep primitive hunter realm of "we are all brothers, animals and humans alike" (which is very different from the herding realm!): and this is exactly what we have in the case of Wolfe's wonderful "Tracking Song" (terraforming, beastmen, etc.).

But in a manufactured environment: like bacteria found growing in jet fuel, where supposedly

nothing could survive. We know that creatures adapt to their environment, that the landscape biome shapes them, and that each continent on Earth has its own little variant as well. Shaping humanity as well, into what we call races (Wolfe mentions this in TBOTNS). So what if plastic humanity is put into an artificial alien construction? In Niven's case, the world is obviously a dingus, so the surprise is how the humanoids have responded by mutating the way they have (that is, we see the "song of Ringworld" through the people it causes to flourish). In the case of 5HC, even if the worlds and their star are not a manufactured thing, still, they are in effect a couple of alien continents--biomes which we begin to sense by the types of humans they cause to flourish.

The contest between Ste. Anne and Ste. Croix may originate in their soils, and predate all human contact. If the worlds were manufactured, then the contest might be one of alien design rather than natural happenstance. In any event, it may be that Anglo-French conflict has really nothing to do with it: the situation is the song of the planets being sung.

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