

Shadow Children in the Lupiverse? (attn. Tony Ellis)

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 25 Apr 2002

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Robert Borski — 25 Apr 2002, 08:14

Hey, Tony:

How goes it? I have a question for you relating to the following:

While admitting that almost all of the evidence about the Annese having shapeshifting abilities is anecdotal, how do you explain the lack of manual dexterity that all the abos seem to possess--from the shovel test, which the French used to determine who was human and who was faking it, to Victor's poor handwriting? (The latter a notion carried over by Wolfe to his other shapeshifting race, the inhumi of Green. Or are they non-pleiomorphic too?)

1) The Annese never had the ability to begin with. This, however, seems to vitiate your notion that the Annese are human colonists from prehistoric Earth;

2) The Annese had the ability, but lost it, and cannot recover it due to Dollo's Law. Unfortunately, I can think of no evolutionary model which would confer a benefit to any relict population which has lost the ability to use its hands effectively, whereas those who still retained this ability would almost certainly be favored by natural selection. It's why evolved simians rule the world, not cetaceans or pachyderms (to pick two rather large-brained mammalian species); or

3) The Annese were able to copy the form of human hands, but not the function, much as a gifted, if perverse, plastic surgeon could sculpt tentacles from human arms or fuse the legs to forge an undine's nether parts, although in neither case, because of nonadaptive skeletal restrictions, innervation, and cerebellar pathways, is it likely such limbs could function in the same way as their true biocounterparts.

The last of these, of course, would be my explanation. But perhaps you have an alternate explanation--one more congruent with your theory that the Annese are unable to shapeshift?

Just curious, as always.

Robert Borski

Tony Ellis — 25 Apr 2002, 17:07 · follows Robert Borski

Hey Robert, glad to know you're still out there.

I go for explanation 2: the Annese had the ability, but lost it, and cannot recover it due to Dollo's Law. If that doesn't make evolutionary sense, blame Wolfe, not me, because I don't think he would have slipped Dollo's Law in there unless that was the connection he wanted us to make. Victor may be self-taught, but we're given to understand that he is intelligent and a quick study, so I think we're supposed to accept his theory.

I don't even have Victor's qualification to talk about Dollo's Law, but it seems to me that whatever could cause -some- colonists to lose their tool-using ability - harsh living conditions, the drug mentioned in 'A Story ', a conscious decision to return to primitivism - could also cause -all- colonists to lose that ability, especially if there was only a small number of them to begin with. There would be no viable tool-using population to lose-out to.