

Shadow Children in the Lupiverse?

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 26 Apr 2002

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Robert Borski — 26 Apr 2002, 18:46

Tony Ellis having written this about the Annese's lack of manual dexterity:

"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."

It's not so much that this in itself doesn't make evolutionary sense, but that no mechanism is posited for the loss. You yourself cite a number of potential theories, but there is no more evidence for any of them than there is for the alleged shapechanging abilities of the abos. In the latter at least there's a widespread oral tradition; but we hear nothing from Victor or Dr. Marsch about how the native Annese arrived at this state. And when Victor, writing in his prison diary as Marsch, cites Dollo's Law, he is not doing so to expound his own personal theory about the matter--on the contrary he absolutely does not want the authorities to know he is Annese--he's trying to come up with what he hopes is a scientific-sounding (and thus perhaps something a little more elevated than plain bullshit) explanation for his own bad handwriting. I.e., "I am unable to hold my pen correctly and therefore I hold it another way." The prison authorities are less than likely to be familiar with Dollo's Law (I was exposed to it only in an upper-level course on organic evolution), and Wolfe/Victor uses it, at least in this case, invalidly: new handwriting stratagems may indeed be learned, but this is a far cry from evolving new working appendages over time à la the panda's sixth digit (which is actually a mutated bone in the wrist complex, the radial sesamoid). So while you may be right about the Dollo non-dexterity connection, it still remains speculative.

On to another recent post of yours, and then a question.

On one hand you seem to dismiss the shape-changing abilities of the Annese as mythologization, but on the other hand you're willing to credit the events that take place in "A Story" as real. I would argue the reverse. "A Story," for example, cites the colonization of space by starfaring races more likely to be found in the history of the world as posited by such diverse luminaries as Edgar Cayce, Erich von Doniken, and the tabloid press. The Annese have no written documents, so everything Victor describes has had to come down to him originally as oral testimony. But while you discount similar oral testimony of the Annese French colonists as tall tales, you're willing to accept the abo record as genuine. More likely it's as suspect as any body of such collected testimony, being part history, part myth, and part self-aggrandizement. As a boy in the states, for example, I learned about how George Washington chopped down the cherry tree and then admitted his guilt; while the westerns I watched in the movie house depicted Indians as bloodthirsty savages. Can you imagine the sort of history I would have written were I in a situation like Victor's? Especially if all I had access to was the oral testimony of my parents and grandparents? So I've always seen "A Story" as being more akin to a fable than anything else, even if it does incorporate actual, but probably somewhat distorted,

historical events.

And lastly then, this bit of evidence for the shapeshifting-is-real argument. In the back of beyond Victor becomes highly upset when Dr. Marsch attempts to kill a following farmcat. Why? Is it because he simply loves cats? If so, why does he himself later attempt to kill this same cat? I contend it's because she's the shapeshifted abo girl Marsch later catches Victor trysting with; and that he must kill her because she knows he's killed Marsch. Your theory?

Robert Borski

Tony Ellis — 27 Apr 2002, 09:07 · follows Robert Borski

Robert Borski wrote:

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The first time I ever read 'V.R.T.' I took it as read that girl and cat were one, because hey, weren't these abos supposed to be shapeshifters or something? But that's never felt satisfactory since. Where does all that extra mass go when girl becomes cat? Why doesn't Victor change into a cat and escape from gaol? And why, as you say, does he later attempt to kill this same cat? Certainly not because she saw him kill Marsch - what does it matter what an ignorant abo girl in the middle of the outback sees?

It seems to me that there is singularity at the heart of 'V.R.T.' that we can never see into: the circumstances of Marsh's death. The details given by Victor in the journal are too contradictory and too hallucinogenic - he's losing it big time. And cat and girl are all mixed up in the affair. Did the cat really bite Marsch's hand, so that in fact some of the entries we think are Victor's are still Marsch's? Did the girl bite Marsch when he got too frisky? Did she have a mouthful of narcotic plant when she did so, like the Shadow Child at the end of 'A Story', so that in fact Marsch never died at all but only thinks he's Victor? (Believe me, I've thought about that last one a lot.)

So. I don't really have a theory. It's another of those little bits of 5HC I keep coming back to and coming back to.