

# Recent human crash-landing on St Anne

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 07 Jan 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5879>

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Tony Ellis — 07 Jan 2011, 13:28

(See? I can do new subject headings, if that's what people want. :-) )

Some problems with this line of reasoning.

Firstly, there *is* no recently-lost spaceship in the text. You have to invent one out of whole cloth. Yes, you can say all records of such a ship were conveniently lost, but you can say that about any fact invented to support any theory. For example: I think the Annese grew tree-circle observatories for thousands of years. We don't have any record of them because, hey, they rotted, which Marsch actually says is happening to the current observatory. If we can have missing recent spaceships we can have missing ancient tree-circles.

Also, Marsch never entertains the idea of a recent crash. He's the one actually living in this future, he knows better than us what's feasible and what isn't. He muses that the Annese could *almost* be the descendants of "an earlier wave of colonisation", but he never considers that they could be the descendants of a missing ship from the *current* wave of human colonisation. If it was possible for St Anne to have been colonised by a ship that crashed a couple of hundred years ago - even some ship he has never heard of - this would be the moment for Wolfe to make him consider it. He doesn't.

And again, Dollo's Law. Taken at face value, it explains why VRT is physically unable to hold a pen the usual way. We have the answer to a puzzle. If we say VRT is actually an alien (who for no good reason can only learn to hold a pen the wrong way), suddenly the evoking of Dollo's Law needs an explanation too.

Another problem, which I think we all need to consider in constructing 5HoC theories, is that VRT is supposed to be a half-abo. He certainly thinks he is. He has less of his mother's ability to change how he looks, but more ability to dress himself, cook and write. If abos breeding with humans doesn't suit your theory, sure, you can invent reasons why he only thinks he is half-abo, but I'd put more faith in a theory where you don't have to.

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Lee Berman — 07 Jan 2011, 14:05 · follows Tony Ellis

Tony Ellis: Another problem, which I think we all need to consider in constructing 5HoC theories, is that VRT is supposed to be a half-abo. He certainly thinks he is. He has less of his mother's ability to change how he looks, but more ability to dress himself, cook and write. If abos breeding with humans doesn't suit your theory, sure, you can invent reasons why he only thinks he is half-abo.

Tony first, I hope to clarify that your theory is that while Shadow Children are aliens, you propose that abos are fully (in descent as well as appearance) human. Yes?

My own interpretation is that Shadow Children and abos are both imitations of humans and not a product of earth. The individual bits of evidence seem contradictory (or we wouldn't be having

this discussion). So I'd like to step back and attempt to look at the problem from a broader perspective.

I think all can agree that the first portion of this novel is meant to force us to question our ideas of family and kinship by presenting us with a family of clones. I think the questions regarding identity and relationships which are raised actually prepare us for even more obtuse questions raised in the next two sections.

Perhaps we can agree that whatever the imitative species native to Ste. Anne are, it is not in their basic nature to reproduce sexually. So when we hear the Shadow Children's words about their "family" it doesn't quite make sense to us.

If, as I tend to think, abos are also alien, imitative creatures, when we read the words of VRT or interviewees on Ste. Anne what we are hearing is the attempts of an imitative asexually reproducing creature to describe their situation in terms of their current, sexually reproducing guise of human.

What I'm saying is that when we hear about VRT's "mother" or him being "half-abo", it doesn't actually mean what we sexually reproducing non-imitative beings think it means. For such beings, being "half-abo" might have nothing to do with genetic ancestry but rather a level of imitation currently achieved.

(FWIW I think Wolfe addresses similar issues in BotNS. In Thecla and Thea we have "half-sisters" the relationship unexplained. But surely it means something. This is a society in which cloning occurs but is not mentioned in polite conversation. I think we can detect it from names given- a clone gets a name which is a derivation of the source. Carina-Catherine, Pelagia-Pega and perhaps a couple others. If Borski was to get anything from his "onomastics" he should have gotten this one. But he didn't. Hah! ;- ) )

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David Stockhoff — 07 Jan 2011, 14:32 · in reply to Tony Ellis

I think this could be a very good accounting for how the tree-ring dating theory, while sound, may be a misdirection. We know an extant ring is a century old; we can also guess that it could survive to be 300 or 500 if it had been left alone. There don't need to be much more than 20 such to cover 10,000 years of "observation."

Another pro of this explanation is that these rings are called observatories, which makes us think of Stonehenge, which is a couple thousand years old, and which is stone. Whereas stone can survive, trees can't, but if anything, that implies they are older still, not younger.

The Wolfean narrative principle employed here seems to be implied repetition to hide/reveal vast stretches of time.

On 1/7/2011 8:28 AM, Tony Ellis wrote:

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Gerry Quinn — 07 Jan 2011, 18:34 · in reply to Tony Ellis

From: "Tony Ellis" <tonyellis69 at btopenworld.com>  
Some problems with this line of reasoning.

Firstly, there *is* no recently-lost spaceship in the text. You have to invent one out of whole cloth. Yes, you can say all records of such a ship were conveniently lost, but you can say that about any fact invented to support any theory. For example: I think the Annese grew tree-circle observatories for thousands of years. We don't have any record of them because, hey, they rotted, which Marsch actually says is happening to the current observatory. If we can have missing recent spaceships we can have missing ancient tree-circles.

We know that in recent history there has been a scramble for colonies and a vicious war between colonial powers. We know that there is no direct communication with Earth. In such a universe, a lost ship is no stretch at all.

The missing trees are more difficult - maybe the old trees rot, but when exactly do you plant new ones, and where? In the same places or somewhere else? Surely it would be easier to build a new observatory than to renew the old one?

Also, Marsch never entertains the idea of a recent crash. He's the one actually living in this future, he knows better than us what's feasible and what isn't. He muses that the Annese could *almost* be the descendants of "an earlier wave of colonisation", but he never considers that they could be the descendants of a missing ship from the *current* wave of human colonisation. If it was possible for St Anne to have been colonised by a ship that crashed a couple of hundred years ago - even some ship he has never heard of - this would be the moment for Wolfe to make him consider it. He doesn't.

Marsch is represented as a bit of an idiot. Besides, as I've said before, the solutions to puzzles should not generally be put in the mouths of characters, except in certain fairly definable circumstances.

And again, Dollo's Law. Taken at face value, it explains why VRT is physically unable to hold a pen the usual way. We have the answer to a puzzle. If we say VRT is actually an alien (who for no good reason can only learn to hold a pen the wrong way), suddenly the evoking of Dollo's Law needs an explanation too.

I agree it works well with the ancient humans model. It works okay as an analogy, though, in the alien imitator model, and that's all VRT says it is.

Another problem, which I think we all need to consider in constructing 5HoC theories, is that VRT is supposed to be a half-abo. He certainly thinks he is. He has less of his mother's ability to change how he looks, but more ability to dress himself, cook and write. If abos breeding with humans doesn't suit your theory, sure, you can invent reasons why he only thinks he is half-abo, but I'd put more faith in a theory where you don't have to.

As an advocate of the alien imitator theory, I am not too hung up on whether breeding is possible or not, because Wolfe is not writing hard SF. However, it's quite in accordance with the story that they don't interbreed (the cuckoo hypothesis in the case of characters like VRT).

How do you know how VRT's abilities compare with those of his mother? If shapechanging is an ability of the ancient humans (for reasons that need to be explained) he does rather well with it, substituting for a professional man from Earth and getting away with it for quite some time (he was unlucky to be caught). His mother did not pull off any coup of this sort.

I don't know if he thinks he is genetically the son of his apparent father - does he indicate this anywhere?

- Gerry Quinn

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Tony Ellis — 07 Jan 2011, 21:06 · follows Gerry Quinn

Lee Berman wrote:

Tony first, I hope to clarify that your theory is that while Shadow Children are aliens, you propose that abos are fully (in descent as well as appearance) human. Yes?

This is possibly a bit redundant now, but: yes.

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António Pedro Marques — 09 Jan 2011, 04:23 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

No dia 7 de Jan de 2011, às 18:34, "Gerry Quinn" <gerryq at indigo.ie> escreveu:

Wolfe is not writing hard SF

This so called hard sf always leaves me with a smirk.