

The Prisoners in Cell 986

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 31 May 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/689>

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Robert Borski — 31 May 1998, 16:39

Yet another mystery I detail in my CAVE CANEM involves the account of Mrs. Blount in VRT of FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS.

Mrs. Blount is an 80 year old woman Dr. Marsch interviews for his anthropological research, hoping to glean some abo lore. She tells the good doctor how she was actually born aboard one of the "colony" ships just before it departed for Sainte Anne from Earth, but it is most curious account.

For starters a war is going on on Sainte Anne, although it does end before her ship makes planetfall. We know this because Mrs. B. mentions how only the very smallest French children did not bear war injuries. That the war had been going on at least 21 years--which is how long it takes the ship to reach Sainte Anne-- we also know, because Mrs. Blount never says anything like "Gosh, imagine our surprise when we got to the New Eden and found out a war had broken out while we're in transit." As the shipbound travelers are put to sleep on boarding the vessel, they're also precluded any advance knowledge of a sudden war having broken out as well.

But why would you want to ship out to someplace where a war was going on, especially if you were pregnant, as Mrs. Blount's mother was? It would be a little like picking Bosnia for a vacation spree with your kids during the height of the Yugoslav conflict.

We also have Mrs. Blount's account of the ship's name. It's Nine-Eight-Six. Not a name, but a number. Mrs. Blount subsequently tells us it's not one of the first ships to launch, but one of the earlier. She also tells us she once heard ships had names instead of numbers, which she feels would have been "prettier."

Again, this seemed strange, and for a while both mantis and I attempted all sorts of decoding, not coming up with anything. But then as we were discussing how prisoner Two Twelve To the Mountains was almost certainly Number Five ($2 + 1 + 2 = 5$), another clue fell into place.

The only numbers given in all of VRT are cell numbers.

What if the ship named Nine-Eight-Six was actually a single big cell? I.e., not a colony ship in the regular sense of the word, but one that was used to transfer prisoners to an off-world penal colony--which immediately recalls Australia, the similarly-named abos of which are already a tangent. Question for our fine Australian representative, Mr. Broderick: are there any towns in Australia named Blount? Or perhaps some historical penal colony figure similarly named?

Also, granted that the passengers of Nine-Eight-Six are prison scum, would any government be bothered by the notion that they might lose their lives in some conflict on the other end of the destination? Me thinks not, mateys.

This is also lends a whole new angle to possible reasons for the aforesaid war--i.e., the French of

Sainte Anne-Sainte Croix doing a reverse Emma Lazarus and saying to the Mother World, hey, would you mind not sending us your tired, poor, muddled refuse, please.

Clearly, it's quite possible the sisterworlds of FIFTH HEAD may have started out as penal colonies.

Robert Borski

Damien Broderick — 01 Jun 1998, 13:50 · follows Robert Borski

"Robert Borski" <rborski at coredcs.com> asks:

are there any towns in Australia named Blount? Or perhaps some historical
penal
colony figure similarly named?

Nothing springs to mind. Bad luck.

Damien