

Trenchard, Abo: Part II

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 04 Jun 1998

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Robert Borski — 04 Jun 1998, 22:37

Lawyer Dupont, for the defense, your honor. According to state prosecutor, the Honorable Tony Ellis:

You asterisk several lines in VRT's rowboat memory, but not this one:
"My mother...had been buttoned into her yellow dress by him." Buttoned in because the Annese can't handle buttons any more than they can handle tools or writing. How can Trenchard do that if he's Annese too?

You ever see any old style frontier dress buttons or even a pea coat? They're not at all like our current miniatures and some are quite large. Ditto for the button holes (or they might involve hooking, the same way a net is woven). Possibly the boat incident incurred while he was still in possession of his human digits.

For someone who grew up in a marsh, doesn't RT read rather well? Yet his wife remained illiterate.

RT can read rather well? Did I miss something? The so-called library mentioned in the narrative is clearly stated to be Victor's. Victor also has the intelligence to go on and impersonate a doctoral candidate, so obviously he got his wiley smarts from someone. Why not Pop?

If RT is an abo, why does his son have to keep correcting all his bogus information about the abos?

RT's life and continued well-being may depend on his never being taken seriously. It's part of his passing schtick. Witness what the community thinks of him. Recall especially RT's story about Dupont and the farm contestment. If RT appears too authentic, he could suffer the same load of buckshot as the abo in Dupont's narrative. The more authentic on the other hand Victor appears, the more likely Marsch will hire them.

We're shown that VRT lacks the manual dexterity to have made the fake flint tools RT shows Marsch. That leaves RT. How did he make them, if he's an abo too?

Victor comes right out and says such tools are made with one's teeth (p, 143). Marsch later adds such tools require little manual dexterity to chink out.

You're also saying that the Running Blood test took place a mere 15 years ago, but Dr Hagsmith tells us this is a test that the French applied, which puts it about a century back. He even says that the French were "supposed" to have applied it - wouldn't he be a little more certain if it had only happened 15 years ago?

The 15 year figure is given on p. 147 by Mr. D. If you chose to contest this, what does the 15 years refer to? Especially since the only other seemingly close dates in the narrative concern Victor's age. It's not chaff; it's a clue.

The French are also not going to go around whispering, hey, we lynched a few abos last night, don't put too much starch in my white sheets. Hagsmith, remember, is English: the French are

his sworn enemy.

If RT was a shape-shifting abo, why would grafted human limbs even accept his alien tissue in the first place? And if they did, why would this give him the ability to use tools, when the organ that has "atrophied" is in his brain?

Right. The abo tissue would reject the human transplant, but reproduction between human and abo is possible? Because this is what you're saying. You're also not reading Dollo correctly with your atrophied-brain supposition. Believe me, I have the bona fides in biology and can cite you the appropriate scientific literature if you like. (Evolutionary theory is a discipline of mine, but I refuse to bring up Scopes.)

Also reread Hagsmith's tale. Specifically note how the abo half of the second cattle-drover's wife would steal something, but the human half would put it back.

In any event, there is no evidence that the Free People can grow new limbs.

Wait a minute. You can change your shape into a dead tree or a carabou, with the attendant wild morphing of form, but you can't recast the distal portion of a limb into the form of a hand or retransmogrify yourself altogether? If antlers, why not hands? If tree branches, why not fingers? Also keep in mind there are several different varieties of abo--check out my abo taxonomy post for details. Some are wildly pleiomorphic, others less so.

At any rate, my honorable opponent, how about some questions for you then?

What do you make of the name End of Days, when Annese names are all pretty much descriptive? Simple abo calendar reform? All of the other good names were taken? And the fact that the shovel test took place here and that one of its other names is Running Blood, what, this indicates nothing of significance?

Why does RT yell at Victor for waving at the government military craft and what possible purpose to the story does our not hearing his entire admonition serve? With Wolfe, what you don't hear is unusually important. Just as what appears to be simple casual asides are also important. Also beware when a Wolfe character who is guessing the nature of something says, "this probably meant...or was probably used for..." Because it's standard Wolfe misdirection.

What does Victor mean when he says "I knew everything that I was to learn later." What is "everything"? What does he learn later? Simply that Dad's a bum and Mom's a slut? What happens to Dad's hands? Arthritis? Gasp. The horror, the horror.

What is the purpose of Dr. Hagsmith's abo fable? Is it totally nonrelevant to the narrative, just a little bit of shared folklore that has nothing to do with the novel? Remember it is in Victor's parody of Dr. Hagsmith's tale that we first hear the name Three Faces. How are both tales, since one is parodic, linked? Or don't you think Victor mother's name is Eve/Three Faces, because Victor never says "Her name was Eve when we lived in Roncevaux, but Three Faces when we were in the back of beyond." By this sort of reverse induction the woman in the cell next to VRT in the citadel is simply a crazy thief of no importance to FIFTH HEAD because nobody tells us otherwise? [Still your best work, Tony: be proud.]

What function does Cinderella bring to the tale in your version? More Wolfeish noodling wordplay? Gene the punster lives on?

Also, if you're skeptical about the abos even possessing shape-changing abilities, how is it you used the opposite line of reasoning when you made your Don't You Think These Little French

Girls Could Be Abos presentation a few days ago--not that they couldn't be detected by their bad handwriting, because as VRT reminds us, there must always be one student in a class who has the worst handwriting, but it is **never** a girl.

Let me sum up the case for my defendant with two notions, your honor, after first thanking our opponent once more for voicing his objections. In my heart of hearts I believe both men simply seek the truth.

Now Mr. Borski will be first to admit he took some liberties with his theory. But while he may have used a few odd-sized bricks to fill the interstices in his wall, he believes the mortar is sound. Simply stated he believes his conjectures more easily explain the birth of Victor Roy Trenchard than the Gondwanaland-reverse-Doniken-we're-all-just-humans-playing-on-the-same-big-slide approach.

He would also like to quote Roy Trenchard from the testimony of Dr. Marsch. "It's all falsity. Everything is false, Dr. Marsch."

Obviously, no truth here, right?

Defense rests.

(Dupont goes back to table, slides in next to client. Whereupon defendant lean over, whispers, "Don't get too comfortable, Dupont. I haven't posted my revelations about Jeannine Wolfe yet."

(Large audible moan from Dupont).

<g>

Tony Ellis — 05 Jun 1998, 15:24 · follows Robert Borski

Let's start by clearing up some misconceptions:

Right. The abo tissue would reject the human transplant, but reproduction between human and abo is possible? Because this is what you're saying.

No it's not. I'm saying that the Free People are humans, from Gondwanaland - a theory that is raised far too often to be dismissed out of hand. (Or out of limb, come to that.) That's why abos and humans can reproduce, that's why if anyone did graft a limb onto an abo it would take. You, however, by saying that the abos can change shape and grow new limbs, are saying that they are alien. If that were so then no, grafting wouldn't take and interbreeding wouldn't work.

Also reread Hagsmith's tale. Specifically note how the abo half of the second cattle-drover's wife would steal something, but the human half would put it back.

I have reread it. This is a story about a new woman that is grown from an arm (by a third party). Notice too that the new wife is abo "except for the one arm" - because the arm she has been grown from was a human one. This is not a story about an abo who can regrow a lost limb, and no such ability is implied. (As for its "purpose": among other things it serves to show just how mythologized the abos have become. How large a grain of salt we should take with every story.)

Wait a minute. You can change your shape into a dead tree or a carabou, with the attendant wild morphing of form, but you can't recast the distal portion of a limb into the form of a hand or retransmogrify yourself altogether? If antlers, why not hands? If tree branches, why not fingers?

Who can change his or her shape into a tree or carabou? When do we ever see one of the Free People doing this? This is why I say that the whole shape-changing

business is riddled with misconceptions.

<deep breath>

To begin with, we should distinguish between actual Lon Chaney type shape-changing and mimicry. We have clear evidence that the Free People are great mimics. VRT can take off Dr H, and make himself look older/younger at will. His mother can assume a number of guises. The little French girls get the best boys. This may be a matter of voice and the muscles of the face, as RT says, or a telepathic ability, but it is a thousand miles away from the ability to change into an animal or a tree. If the Free People could change shape, why didn't they change into birds and fly out of the pit in "A Story"? Why didn't Sandwalker make his escape by changing into a Goul-Bear, or a Fast Thing With Very Long Legs? Why do the Marshmen have to tie their genitals off with women's hair in order to lose them, instead of just reabsorbing them? (Why don't they grow back?) Why don't any of the Hill People or the Marshmen even -once- raise the subject of being able to change shape? Just once.

They don't because they can't. There may well be a form of indigenous Annese life that can genuinely shape-shift, personally I'm sure there is, but it has nothing to do with the Free People.

So where has the confusion come from? From people not seeing, and not listening. We're shown this quite explicitly. M. Culot's grandfather used to see Annese all the time. He knows that there are many different races. "Others, he said, might think them to be all one, but the other knew less than he. He would have said that to the blind, all cats are black." When asked what one looked like, M Culot junior remembers him saying "sometimes like a man, but sometimes like the post of a fence." Sounds like a shape-shifting human, right? Sure, except that a moment later M Culot changes his story: "It may have been that he said: 'Sometimes like a man, sometimes like old wood.'" Now that is something very different. That sounds very much like a Shadow Child, and even more like someone saying "some of them look like us, but some of them are gnarled and twisted, like old wood." Bear in mind that we have been carefully told that M Culot senior was (a) angry at the time, and (b) known to "speak the truth in such a way as to make it sound impertinent". He's not going to spell things out to those who refuse to see.

Some Annese lifeforms can shape-change, some can't. But this distinction has been lost in the re-telling, and in the mythologisation of the unknown. What do you think we are being told when Marsch tells us the following? "...the reports are very contradictory. Even in the interviews I have, it's often difficult to believe that two subjects are talking about the same thing, and the reports of the early explorers - such of them as have survived - show even less agreement."

Like I said, the issue of shapechanging is a debate in itself. Back to your arguments:

RT can read rather well? Did I miss something?

When Marsch hands RT his card RT reads it. "'Ah, you are a doctor! Look, Victor, our visitor is a doctor of philosophy! ...Doctor, Doctor Marsch'" He spent all his formative years in a mudhole, but he knows "PhD" when he sees it? And a name like Marsch? Victor can read because Victor went to school as a boy. His mother didn't and can't, so why should an abo father fare any better?

We're shown that VRT lacks the manual dexterity to have made the fake flint tools RT shows Marsch. That leaves RT. How did he make them, if he's an abo too?

Victor comes right out and says such tools are made with one's teeth

No he doesn't. He says "With their teeth." Like any sulky adolescent confronted by the embarrassing stupidity of adults, Victor is getting his revenge by providing the most minimal, unhelpful response possible. He's saying two things. He's saying "You think my people made

stuff like that? What with, their teeth?" And he's saying "When they wanted to cut something they used their teeth. You morons. "Only a few lines further on, he clarifies this: "The Free People didn't use those things. ...if they wanted to cut something they used their teeth."

You don't -seriously - think it's possible to fashion flint tools with your teeth, do you Robert?

Marsch later adds such tools require little manual dexterity to chink out.

Absolutely. That's why RT can make them with his arthritic hands. VRT still can't because he's a hopeless ham-fisted abo. He doesn't have this skill because none of his people have any tool-using skills. How many times do you count Sandwalker using a flint knife? And the other Hill People? And the Marshmen? Anyone?

"My mother...had been buttoned into her yellow dress by him." Buttoned in because the Annese can't handle buttons any more than they can handle tools or writing. How can Trenchard do that if he's Annese too?

You ever see any old style frontier dress buttons or even a pea coat?

VRT's mother just happens to be wearing a dress that she can't button up herself? In a story where the ability to manipulate human artifacts is absolutely crucial???

The 15 year figure is given on p. 147 by Mr. D...

Unfortunately your page numbers are different to mine. I've hunted up and down for a passage resembling the one you imply, and the nearest I can get is where M. d'F says "they have a son of fifteen or so". You're going to have to give me a quote for this one.

You're also not reading Dollo correctly...

This is the least of my arguments, and I'm quite happy to bow to your superior knowledge. (I may ask you for details later on, simply for my own curiosity.)

He would also like to quote Roy Trenchard from the testimony of Dr. Marsch.
"It's all falsity. Everything is false, Dr. Marsch."

Uh, wrong again, sorry. It's Victor who says that. And he's playing at being Dr Hagsmith at the time.