

If you hear hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 05 Jun 1998

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Robert Borski — 05 Jun 1998, 14:52

To my esteemed colleague from across the Pond, re our latest 5H debate:

All right, Tony, you win.

Millions of years ago, pre-Flintstones spacecraft traveled to Sainte Anne, where the spacehumans subsequently forgot the technical skills required to ferry them back across 20 light years of space, and subsequently retrogressed to the level of savages.

Meanwhile, back here on Earth, as hundreds of thousands of lifeforms thrived, then died off (hello dinosaurs, hello neanderthals, hello dodo), Homo sapiens pangalacticus re-evolved the necessary skills to make the transit back across the leagues of space to Sainte Anne, where the natives have never changed over a similar span of millennia, and a single solitary viable hybrid is produced between Annese and human.

This is much easier to accept and scientifically valid that the notion the parents of Victor Roy Trenchard are simply both abos.

Logic rules, Mr. Ellis.

I stand in your shadow.

Robert Borski (who although he may vehemently disagree with TE still enormously respects his opinion because at least he's read FIFTH HEAD and can marshal his arguments from text. We simply have alternate takes on the same book, eh?)

Tony Ellis — 08 Jun 1998, 07:45 · follows Robert Borski

It may be just me, but do I detect a teensy note of irony here? <g>

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<snip>

Meanwhile, back here on Earth, as hundreds of thousands of lifeforms thrived, then died off (hello dinosaurs, hello neanderthals, hello dodo), Homo sapiens pangalacticus re-evolved the necessary skills to make the transit back across the leagues of space to Sainte Anne, where the natives have never changed over a similar span of millennia, and a single solitary viable hybrid is produced between Annese and human.

...Logic rules, Mr. Ellis.

If you find this too fantastic blame GW, not me, Robert. Because however illogical, the Gondwanaland theory is raised too many times for us to just look the other way and pretend it isn't there. Care to count along with me?

In Fifth Head, young Gene suggests it during lessons with Mr Million. Ok, he's just a kid trying to be clever. Forget it. I mean it's not as if Gene Wolfe ever hides the truth in plain view or anything, is it?

In "A Story", it is the Old Wise One who says "It is possible that our home was named Atlantis or Mu, Gondwanaland, Africa, Poictesme, or The Country of Friends". Coincidence, right? That's why there's a subtheme running the whole length of the novella about how the shape-changing indigenous Annese were once visited by a race of space-going humans. (Oh yes, and their home world had a yellow sun.)

Finally, in "VRT" it is Dr Marsch who muses that "there remain a great many reports of a native race so similar to human beings that they might almost have been the descendants of an earlier wave of colonization."

"What I tell you three times is true."

If it's the lack of human evolution on St Anne that bothers you, there are several answers. For starters, "Gondwanaland" may be intended more as a name to conjure with than a fixed reference. The Old Wise One also mentions Africa, which may imply a migration only after the continents broke up. Atlantis, if we're to believe Plato, sank a mere 11,000 years ago.

On top of this, we do see some signs of evolution. That knack of mimicry came from somewhere, and the dreams of the Free People imply a nascent telepathic ability, too. (Presumably the ability to use tools wasn't de-evolved overnight, either.)

Not least of all, a lack of change is very much in keeping with the peculiarly timeless, dreaming character of The Back of Beyond that Wolfe conveys. Like the Australian subcontinent it so closely resembles, St Anne seems to be a world that exists outside of the normal flow of time.

This is much easier to accept and scientifically valid than the notion the parents of Victor Roy Trenchard are simply both abos.

There is nothing "simple" about your notion that Victor's parents are both abos! It is precisely the fact that it requires so much shoring-up and rewriting of the texts that makes me mistrust it. (And how "scientifically valid" is the idea of grafting human limbs onto 100% alien tissue?)

Tony Ellis (who thinks that if he has to suspend his disbelief in God to accept the logic underpinning The Book of the New Sun, everyone else can accept a trifling prehistoric migration or two.)