

Islands in Commonwealth

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 20 Jul 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1014>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Peter Westlake — 20 Jul 1998, 09:23

At 13:57 1998-07-05 -0500, Adam wrote:

prion wrote:

A previous letter to the list (I'm sorry but I don't remember when) asked how the Commonwealth could be in a South America geographically similar to the current continent when the Commonwealth is described as consisting of an archipelago of islands to the south. The answer is that SA does have a long chain of many islands in the south, but it closely follows the coast, so the questioner probably wouldn't remember them or have noticed them just by casually looking in the first place.

I was the original questioner, and I was aware of the islands in the south of SA. My question was based on my belief that Severian was asserting that the Commonwealth consisted entirely of islands. But reexamining the quote, it now seems clear to me that the relevant phrase--"a chain of islands like our south"--refers to the southern-most portion of the Commonwealth, and not to the Commonwealth as a whole, as I had originally thought. So there's no problem there.

Hasn't Wolfe said that Gyoll is the Orinoco? As usual, I can't find the place where I read this. But I looked at an atlas yesterday and was quite surprised. Because if it's true, then the islands in the South - the direction away from the Equator - would be the West Indies.

Last year Scott Dalrymple wrote:

And, regarding Vodalus's assertion that Urth has flipped on her axis, would that matter? To someone like Severian, wouldn't the world appear to be the same? He'd still be traveling toward Urth's belly to reach the tropical regions. After all, North and South, while tied to poles, are somewhat arbitrary constructs, aren't they? Why couldn't we depict the world with the South Pole on "top"? Maybe we've got the whole universe upside-down.

(I quote Scott because I can't find the original quote ;-)

It makes sense for the West Indies to be rather colder than nowadays, while the islands along the coast of South America would surely be under the ice. The West Indies are more of an archipelago, too. I think this also explains why the rivers all flow West, when we would expect them to flow East.

In Citadel Severian is walking North with the sea to the West and the Sun rising on his right. The Sun still rises in the East, I think (doesn't Typhon's statue face West, away from the sunrise?) so this really would be the world having turned over, not a magnetic reversal. Mind you, this is about the one place in the whole book where left or right are mentioned explicitly. I would almost rather believe the Sun rose in the West than trust Severian to know which way was right, given his total inability to follow directions.

SBear.

mary whalen — 20 Jul 1998, 03:35 · follows Peter Westlake

This is Sean Whalen (prion).

---Peter Westlake wrote:

At 13:57 1998-07-05 -0500, Adam wrote:

prion wrote:

A previous letter to the list (I'm sorry but I don't remember when) asked how the Commonwealth could be in a South America geographically similar to the current continent when the Commonwealth is described as consisting of an archipelago of islands to the south. The answer is that SA does have a long chain of many islands in the south, but it closely follows the close, so the questioner probably wouldn't remember them or have noticed them just by casually looking in the first place.

I was the original questioner, and I was aware of the islands in the south of SA. My question was based on my belief that Severian was asserting that the Commonwealth consisted entirely of islands. But reexamining the quote, it now seems clear to me that the relevant phrase--"a chain of islands like our south"--refers to the southern-most portion of the Commonwealth, and not to the Commonwealth as a whole, as I had originally thought. So there's no problem there.

Hasn't Wolfe said that Gyoll is the Orinoco? As usual, I can't find the place where I read this. But I looked at an atlas yesterday and was quite surprised. Because if it's true, then the islands in the South - the direction away from the Equator - would be the West Indies.

Wheww. How's that for a bundle of citations?

I don't remember Wolfe ever saying this, and it doesn't appear possible (see below).

Last year Scott Dalrymple wrote:

And, regarding Vodalus's assertion that Urth has flipped on her axis, would that matter? To someone like Severian, wouldn't the world appear to be the same? He'd still be traveling toward Urth's belly to reach the tropical regions. After all, North and South, while tied to poles, are somewhat arbitrary constructs, aren't they? Why couldn't we depict the world with the South Pole on "top"? Maybe we've got the whole universe upside-down.

Vodalus was talking about the magnetic axis flipping, which has happened often before on Earth.

North and south may seem arbitrary, but east and west definitely aren't. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Assuming a human has a head in one direction and feet in the other, it is possible to determine which side is left and which right, and they are different. But anyway, with a person's left to the west and right to the east, he would be facing north, as happens to Severian (see below).

(I quote Scott because I can't find the original quote ;-)

It makes sense for the West Indies to be rather colder than nowadays, while the islands along the coast of South America would surely be under the ice. The West Indies are more of an archipelago, too. I think this also explains why the rivers all flow West, when we would expect them to flow East.

In Citadel Severian is walking North with the sea to the West and the Sun rising on his right. The Sun still rises in the East, I think (doesn't Typhon's statue face West, away from the sunrise?) so this really would be the world having turned over, not a magnetic reversal. Mind you, this is about the one place in the whole book where left or right are mentioned explicitly. I would almost rather believe the Sun rose in the West than trust Severian to know which way was right, given his total inability to follow directions.

SBear.

As I understand it, the entire geography is like this: the sea level is lower because the colder temperature has frozen more water into the ice caps. There is thus more land. South America is in the general area it is now, with a similar distribution of continents. Nessus is on the west coast, west of the "Andes" and perhaps on land that is currently underwater. The Gyoll flows from it's source in the Andes west to it's mouth on the west coast. East of the Andes is the Amazon jungle. North in North America is the country of the Ascians. West are the Xanthic lands (Asia).

To explain: in the book it says that to the south are the narrow lands and the southern archipelago. This could refer to either what is currently north or south, however, it also says that to the north is the waist of the world and north of that the Ascians. There is no isthmus to what we call the south. Therefore, the directions are the same as we use today. The Ascians live in North America, the waist is the Isthmus of Panama and environs. The narrow lands are the narrow southern part of South America. Also, the islands may not be the ones there today, but lower ones revealed by the receded ocean. Severian also says that the north is hotter, in some sections of the books.

The rivers flow west because he's west of the Andes. There's also more land in that area because of the sea level.

I've already discussed how Severian's northward journey helps confirm this.

prion