

unsubscribe

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 20 Jul 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1017>

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Internet Megantic — 20 Jul 1998, 09:53

unsubscribe

At 03:43 20-07-98 -0700, you wrote:

----- BEGIN urth.v017.n006 -----

001 - adam louis stephanides <a - Severian and the White Fountain
002 - adam louis stephanides <a - Il (Peter) Principe
003 - Internet Megantic <suppor - unsubscribe- Digest urth.v017.n005
004 - "Alex David Groce" <adgro - Eleanor Bold
005 - "J. Schultz" <jschultz@wc - Autarch
006 - m.driussi at genie.com - (urth) Questions Keep Questing
007 - mary whalen <marewhalen@y - (urth) David as Maitre 2
008 - mary whalen <marewhalen@y - (urth) Fifth Head miscellaney
009 - Peter Westlake <peter@har - Re: (urth) Islands in Commonwealth
010 - mary whalen <marewhalen@y - Re: (urth) Islands in Commonwealth

URTH Digest -- for discussion of Gene Wolfe's New Sun and other works

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.1 -----

From: adam louis stephanides <astephan at students.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Severian and the White Fountain
Date: Sun, 19 Jul 1998 12:15:42 -0500 (CDT)
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; charset=US-ASCII
In-Reply-To: <199807142021.NAA29492 at lists1.best.com>

On Tue, 14 Jul 1998 Christopher R. Culver wrote:

Adam asked:

Why is it necessary for anybody to "bring the White Fountain" to Urth? Why can't the Hierogrammates just send it?<

This is, IMHO, rather simple. The Hierogrammates are theological beings who serve the Pancreator. As such, they judge the sentient beings of their area and decide whether those people are deserving of a miracle.

What I meant to ask was not "Why don't the Hierogrammates distributes White Fountains to everybody who need one?" but "Having decided to give Urth a White Fountain, why don't they simply send Severian back to Urth, assuring him the White Fountain will be along shortly? Why go through this routine of having Severian "become" the White Fountain as well, which he then "guides" to Urth, or at least believes he does.

Also: > <And if someone has to bring it, why must it be an Autarch?>

Severian mentions on the Ship of Tzadkiel that the Autarch is by right the representative of Urth to the Hierodules, even though he rules a small portion of it.

True, but Severian's "trial" is not, as he originally believes, to determine his or Urth's moral fitness to receive the New Sun, but to determine the likelihood of his successfully bringing the New Sun. So it's not obvious why the New Sun needs to be brought by an ex officio "representative of Urth."

--Adam

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.2 -----

From: adam louis stephanides <astephan at students.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Il (Peter) Principe
Date: Sun, 19 Jul 1998 16:35:59 -0500 (CDT)
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; charset=US-ASCII
In-Reply-To: <199807140634.XAA22362 at lists1.best.com>

mantis,

I was away for a few days, or I would have responded to your post earlier. I have a few minor cavils, which I'll discuss elsewhere, but I found it admirably clear and enlightening.

Unfortunately, it only leaves me more baffled regarding _Urth_ as a whole. In fact, it now seems to me that _Urth_ is at least as obscure as _Castleview_. To start with, the Hierodules have been supporting the "rickety" political structure of the Commonwealth for a thousand years or more, apparently solely so that at the end of this time Severian, the man destined to bring the New Sun, will be Autarch. This is too reminiscent of _The Sirens of Titan_ for my taste. More to the point, it makes even more urgent the questions I asked in an earlier post: why must an Urthman bring the New Sun, why an Autarch, and why Severian? I'm not as confident that the answers I gave are correct as I was then, but I haven't seen any better answers. For that matter, I'm doubtful about the whole punishment-and-redemption-of-Urth schema: if the "redemption" involves wiping out 99.9% of Urth's population, one would think the "punishment" could be dispensed with as superfluous.

I'm also baffled by the course of events surrounding Severian's "trial." Why is he led to think that his trial will be like his predecessor's? Is it just so he will be a more humane ruler as Autarch? But then why isn't he told the truth as soon as he leaves Urth?

And what is the function of the battle royal between the sailors and the aquastors? Were the Hierogrammates really willing, after all those years of preparation, to risk the survival of their race on the outcome of that battle?

In short, your post made me realize that so far, the first half of _Urth_ doesn't make sense for me. Any help you, or anyone else of course, can give me would be most appreciated. (If this post seems querulous, it's a reflection of my desperation.)

--Adam

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.3 -----

From: Internet Megantic <support at megantic.net>
Subject: unsubscribe- Digest urth.v017.n005
Date: Sun, 19 Jul 1998 17:32:19 -0400
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

At 21:10 18-07-98 -0700, you wrote:

----- BEGIN urth.v017.n005 -----

001 - "William H. Ansley" <wans - Re: (urth) Sev's Dad; Aztecs in Space
002 - "Robert Borski" <rborski@ - Sanderson's Abandonment
003 - "Alice Turner" <al@interp - Re: Digest urth.v017.n004
004 - Derek Bell <dbell at maths.t - Re: (urth) Sev's Dad; Aztecs in Space
005 - raster at highfiber.com (Cha - Re: Claudius

URTH Digest -- for discussion of Gene Wolfe's New Sun and other works

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n005.1 -----

From: "William H. Ansley" <wansley at warwick.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) Sev's Dad; Aztecs in Space
Date: Fri, 17 Jul 1998 23:50:38 -0400
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"
In-Reply-To: <199807180216.TAA14355 at lists1.best.com>

One of the more puzzling names in THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS to be sourced is the Country of Friends. It's cited by the abos as the possible homeport of the star-faring Homo sapiens pangalacticus, who've traveled to Saint Anne in the distant past, and mentioned in the same breath as Atlantis and Gondwanaland.

I'm now speculating it relates to the Aztecs.

This is because Texas--where Gene Wolfe grew up--is derived from the Indian word "texia," meaning "friends." And since Texas was once part of Mexico, it's possible the Country of Friends generally refers to Aztec civilization.

I like this too.

I have a nagging idea that the phrase "the Country of Friends" occurs elsewhere in Wolfe and I have seen it recently in my rereading. If I find the reference, I will certainly post.

William Ansley

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n005.2 -----

From: "Robert Borski" <rborski at coredcs.com>
Subject: Sanderson's Abandonment
Date: Fri, 17 Jul 1998 23:26:00 -0500
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit

Earlier, in regards to my Continuing Westward post, Sean Whalen (aka prion) wrote:

"This seems to fit, but how does it fit in that he originally thought that she stabbed Sanderson? He didn't just decide to leave him, he thought that he was dead."

This may relate to some aspect of a Kipling short story (The Phantom Rickshaw?), but I'm not sure--it's been 30+ years since I read SOLDIERS THREE and the other collections. Or it may be simple irony. Paris, the Great Seducer, undone by his own lust (whereas the Paris of legend stakes a claim to the most beautiful woman in the world and precipitates a war).

Of course, all of the Homeric correspondences are rather loosely clumped together--hence the notion of Greek Odysseus and Trojan Paris as shipmates--so the search for parallels may be intrinsically flawed to begin with, at least if we expect 100% fidelity with the Illiad/Odyssey.

Also, what I forgot to mention in my Cherry Jubilee piece is that KGB agent Vera Oussenko, who, as you mention, is arrested, represents truth, which she is seeking, even though she gets it wrong (Vera = veritas), only in the inverted value system of CJ she's "punished"--not being allowed to disembark, she's spared the hell of Mars.

Robert Borski

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n005.3 -----

From: "Alice Turner" <al at interport.net>
Subject: Re: Digest urth.v017.n004
Date: Sat, 18 Jul 1998 03:16:27 -0400
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain;
charset="iso-8859-1"
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit

Don't know if this has been brought up before, but if Owen/Ouen is considered to be the Welsh/Celtic equivalent of Eugene, doesn't that mean Sev's father might also be called Gene?

From the Oxford book of English Christian names:

OWEN: a common Welsh name; in Middle English romances often spelled Owain, Owayne, Ywain. It has been supposed to be derived from Latin Eugenius...see Ewan. (Ouen)

EWEN: this name, now confined to Scotland, was once common in England...It is probably the same as Irish and Gaelic Eoghan 'a youth,' which is frequent in Celtic legend and history. Eoghan is usually derived from Primitive Celtic Eugenius 'well-born,' from which is derived Old Welsh Euguein which later became Middle Welsh Ewein, Ywein, whence modern Welsh Owain, Owen.

Bravo, scolex. Thank you.

-alga-

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n005.4 -----

From: Derek Bell <dbell at maths.tcd.ie>
Subject: Re: (urth) Sev's Dad; Aztecs in Space
Date: Sat, 18 Jul 1998 19:22:08 +0100
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"
In-Reply-To: Your message of "Fri, 17 Jul 1998 23:50:38 EDT."
<199807180352.UAA19972 at lists1.best.com>

In message <199807180352.UAA19972 at lists1.best.com>, "William H. Ansley"

writes:

I have a nagging idea that the phrase "the Country of Friends" occurs elsewhere in Wolfe and I have seen it recently in my rereading. If I find the reference, I will certainly post.

I think it's in the short story _Feather Tigers_, IIRC. It occurs in the dialog between the main protagonist and the sky(space?) yacht.

Derek

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n005.5 -----

From: raster at highfiber.com (Charles Dye)
Subject: Re: Claudius
Date: Sat, 18 Jul 1998 12:36:57 -0600 (MDT)
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

CRCulver at aol.com writes:

Alex:

< Has there been any discussion on the list (sorry, I'm new and haven't had time to exhaustively browse the archives) of similarities between Severian and Claudius, both the historical emperor and the charming narrator of the two Robert Graves novels?>

The point that comes to mind first is that both Claudius and Severian plan to write a manuscript they believe no one will read and get rid of it in a lead coffer.

The dead giveaway, for me anyhow, was the scene where Severian produces one of 'his' aes in the era of Typhon:

He examined it, bit it, and gave it back to me. "Gold all right. Looks a trifle like you, 'cept he seems to have got himself cut up. Don't suppose you noticed."

"No," I said. "I never thought of it."

Hadelin nodded and pushed back his chair. "A man doesn't shave himself sidewise. See you in the morning, sieur, madame."

Compare with a scene from "Claudius the God" chapter 6 :

It pleased my vanity to have my head on the coins.... Portraits on coins, however, are always disappointing because they are executed in profile, and it comes as a shock, when one sees it in a portrait, that one really looks like that to people standing beside one. For one's full face, because of the familiarity that mirrors give it, a certain toleration and even affection is felt; but I must say that when I first saw the model that the mint-masters were striking for me I grew angry and asked whether it was intended to be a caricature.

Robert Graves once did a translation of "The Lives of the Twelve Caesars" in which each Emperor's chapter was illustrated with the appropriate aureus.

raster at highfiber.com

----- END urth.v017.n005 -----

*More Wolfe info & archive of this list at <http://www.urth.net/urth/>

/Serges

Internet Megantic

<http://www.megantic.net/>

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.4 -----

From: "Alex David Groce" <adgroce@eos.ncsu.edu>

Subject: Eleanor Bold

Date: Sun, 19 Jul 1998 21:57:36 -0400

MIME-Version: 1.0

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii

I've often wondered if the name "Eleanor Bold" in PEACE is simply a coincidence, or is intended to mean something. I've seen Wolfe refer to Trollope before, particularly in an essay or interview when he was discussing the value to a writer of having a job other than writing (I think this is in CASTLE OF DAYS). So, it seems reasonable to assume Wolfe's read BARCHESTER TOWERS, and possibly all of the Barchester books, and it is an intentional

effect. But what exactly is it supposed to suggest? Any ideas?

--

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

--

Alex David Groce (adgroce at eos.ncsu.edu)
Senior (Computer Science/Multidisciplinary Studies in Technology & Fiction)
'98-99 NCSU AITP Student Chapter President
608 Charleston Road, Apt. 1E (919)-233-7366
<http://www4.ncsu.edu/~adgroce>

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.5 -----

From: "J. Schultz" <jschultz at wcnet.org>

Subject: Autarch

Date: Sun, 19 Jul 1998 22:42:38 -0400

MIME-Version: 1.0

Content-Type: text/plain;
charset="iso-8859-1"

Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit

It takes me a while to get around to reading all my mail. This is in response to the difference between Autarch and Monarch. As we have all figured by now Autarch means one who rules themselves. This idea works into one of the themes I see present in the first set of books (tBotNS). At each step in Severian's development we see him cast off the power of one authority after another. He breaks his ties from the authority of the guild, the Archon and his post as Lictor, Typhon, etc. It all leads up to the point where just before the Lake people attack the castle of Baldanders, when Severian says (to paraphrase) I began to follow the Increate's authority above all others. Severian has become his own man, as it were. He decides for himself what is right and wrong, moral and evil, with a personal relationship with God. Thus I feel that the title "Autarch" is symbolic of this change and that the title has more thematic meaning, rather than any real practical meaning in the way of legal procedure. A rose is a rose is a rose. Or, it doesn't really matter what you call him, the idea is that he is the top dog and no one is higher, the one man who rules himself. As we find out, however, the Autarch is the subject of the Hierodules and other higher powers (at least in some sense of the word). We can't forget that the message of tBotNS is basically spiritual and religious, whether we like it or not. In my mind it is the redemption of a torturer who is lost in an immoral and decaying world.

As far as what would have happened had Appian let Severian enter Yesod, he most likely would have failed having not learned the important lessons that were to come. However, He would have EATEN Appian's brains AT THAT TIME. Appian even says, "Gee, sorry I'm so shocked but I thought I had more time." Which leads me to believe that Appian knows that Sev will take the throne and he knows that to take the throne he (Appian) has to be dead. I would balk too if my replacement walked in the door and said, "Well, I'm ready, take me to the garden and get your brains ready." While Sev doesn't say this it is perceived this way by Appian.

Let me say that the story has already faded in my mind and mingled with half ideas, my own experiences, and the way I would like it to be. (as I'm sure happens to us all)

One timeless question (FunkMonkey steps in line behind hundreds of philosophers, ancient to modern) How much free will does Severian have? When does Tra. KNOW Severian has passed. Have they engineered him from the begining and so no test is needed? He has some power from the White Fountain long before heading into space, as Sev himself says, 'as if the presentment of his future came back through time to him.' Assuming he raised Triskle from the dead he has had his 'powers' from the begining. Everyone on Urth in Sev's time knows of the Conciliator. The Conciliator is Sev returning triumphant. Thus Severian has already succeeded before he begun! Or has he? Time travel always throws me through a logic loop. Like asking the question "If I went back in time and killed my past self, who would grow up to kill me?" Any thoughts? This could be and endless discussion.

FunkMonkey
with the logical MonkeyWrench

J. Schutlz
jschultz at wcnet.org

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.6 -----

From: m.driussi at genie.com
Subject: (urth) Questions Keep Questing
Date: Mon, 20 Jul 98 04:11:00 GMT
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit

Adam,

FWIW I didn't take your post in a querulous mode. And I'm glad that something I wrote seemed clear and enlightening, but of course I was only shooting in the dark and I can't hope to hit a homer every time, even if it is a room full of ancient Greek poets who are blind, just to mix metaphors (and this one is for raster--don't think I didn't laugh on that homer quip).

I'm comfortable with the paradoxes I hold in suspension on this one. If I can continue to explain what I see, maybe you can see it even if you don't particularly believe it.

The Peter Principle is about the triumph of mediocrity, I think.

Il Principe is Machiavelli's work about amoral statecraft.

Peter Wright's papers on the "Fictions of the New Sun" provide a Machiavellian reading (which, in turn, makes Severian's narrative much closer to Herbert's DUNE series than Tolkien's LOTR).

"Sirens of Titan" is another good touchstone and I'm glad you brought it up. This is the "sarcastic" or "cosmic joke" answer to the Big Question, and I think we can all agree that it isn't an

overwhelmingly fitting solution to the Briah/Yesod situation.

Some of your questions can be answered: The situation facing Severian rides a tightrope between free-will and pre-destination.

This by itself is a huge topic. Philosophy, physics, metaphysics, etc.

In practical terms, we rejoice that Severian took the brown book, rather than Canog's Book of the New Sun, because this "opens the loop" and makes the oracular power of the tales work their magic on Severian, which then helps him behave in a certain way, which is then faithfully recorded as Canog's Book of the New Sun. If Severian had taken Canog's, it would have been a closed loop "blueprint"; Severian would have been reduced to being a robot--and maybe would have resisted doing it, and the whole thing would collapse.

Likewise, nobody with any authority and/or knowledge could ever "tell Severian the truth" or "what to do" or anything like that. For the same reason. They tell him just enough and just in time. He has to be guided to the right decision, but he cannot be simply told, nor forced to do something.

Maybe we could liken it to developing a photograph: it is done in the dark, by mysterious rituals and formula, but there is a goal in mind and it begins to materialize until finally it is done and we can turn on the light and see it clearly.

As for why does Yesod care. Well, one model is that Briah and Yesod are two halves of the same creature--one is male and one is female, to use the crudest analogy. They must have an exchange of information to ensure their own future survival: Urth gets a New Sun, and Yesod gets the next stage closer to Hieros . . . who will then make hierogrammates. It all is a reproductive rite; as if homo sapiens were to guide australopithecus toward becoming homo erectus, so that homo erectus would give way to homo sapiens.

Which brings us to another dicotomy: the breaking of the human experience into Pure Order and the wild things. Cyriaca's tale of posthistory tells us that the First Empire was founded upon the one (Order) and brought down by the rejected other (non-order). The implication being (I think) that there should be a balance, within the individual and within the culture.

Not to be "zen" about it, nor too smug, but questions about the very mysterious first half of URTH should not be focused entirely in the "logical" or "rational" mode. If Order leads to brick walls of confusion, see if Non-order can lead to a doorway. If "modern science" can't answer, try "cave painting poetry" instead.

If you haven't already, you really should read Wright's essays. You might find that they fit you like a tee.

=mantis=

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.7 -----

From: mary whalen <marewhalen at yahoo.com>
Subject: (urth) David as Maitre 2
Date: Sun, 19 Jul 1998 23:39:50 -0700 (PDT)
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii

This is Sean Whalen (prion).

I think that in _The Fifth Head of Cerberus_ the junior officer who reviews VRT's case is actually David. First, David is known to have gone to the capital after his father's death, presumably to follow his love of political power. Plenty of time has passed since the murder and VRT's arrest for him to have attained such a position and to have held it for a fairly significant amount of time. Also, he is called a junior officer and the other officer he meets is called a brother officer. This is an allusion to the fact that David is younger than his "brother" No. 5. The other person the j.o. is mentioned in this story to be younger than is his slave, who is probably one of the clones or altered clones of Maitre. This seems to be plenty, in a Wolfe book, to link him to David. More, he is only addressed as Maitre, just like his father was, continuing the chain of linkage. The other officer also says that he always was a night owl, which is similar to the way that David and No. 5 stayed up when they were young in FHC. Also, when he hits the slave, it is like a reversal of when No. 5 accidentally stabbed him when he was fighting the other clone of Maitre with four arms.

prion

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----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.8 -----

From: mary whalen <marewhalen at yahoo.com>
Subject: (urth) Fifth Head miscellaney
Date: Mon, 20 Jul 1998 00:05:28 -0700 (PDT)
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii

This is Sean Whalen (prion).

I just wanted to put down a few minor miscellaneous points I have in my mind about _The Fifth Head of Cerberus_.

Today I saw a show about Neanderthals. It seems that their flintworkers could make a blade that is the sharpest known to man, as could the later humans. The discussor said that it is even sharper than a modern surgeon's scalpel. Marsch talks about how flint can be chipped with little dexterity when he talks to RT speculating about how he could make the implements he sells as Annese with his arthritic hands. VRT probably used flint to cut out the first pages of Marsch's diary, which are said in the story to have been cut out with an instrument sharper than a scalpel.

VRT may have bought the brass circumciser to use on himself, so that he would not be discovered to be impersonating Marsch if his books were found. Did he ever get to use it? I don't know if anyone in authority ever saw him naked, and he asked not to be strip-searched by the men who arrest him.

Isn't it possible that VRT didn't kill Marsch, but that he was killed by the tire-tiger? In the journal, written by VRT, it says that Marsch was attacked by the waiting tiger when he came down from the tree, and that he should have been mauled but was absurdly lucky, and was only knocked back into a thorn bush. It seems to me that the tiger actually killed Marsch, and that VRT wrote that Marsch survived so that he could take his place. Otherwise, there's no reason to include this passage at all, as it seems ridiculous that Marsch could actually save himself if the tiger attacked as he came down the tree.

Again, I wonder if VRT actually killed the cat-girl or just wrote that so that he wouldn't have to write about her interactions with Marsch, which would have been very different from the interactions he had with her, and too difficult for him to make up. When he begins to write in the journal, he also talks about "we" a lot, apparently about him and the mules, but perhaps not.

I don't think that I believe Robert Borski's idea that RT is actually an abo himself. It seems odd that his wife and son have green eyes when he doesn't. VRT thinks he's a human, he says that what happens to his hands will keep him from his profession, implying that he had tool-using hands before. He can operate the buttons that his wife can't.

Also, I believe that there was some discussion about what VRT and Maitre believe about Jeannine's genetic relations when VRT says that she is the daughter of "shall we say an earlier 'version'" of No. 5. It seems possible that he meant a version as the parent of the Gene Wolfe genome, rather than an earlier person in the line of clones. However, in jail VRT says that Jeannine is genetically Gene's daughter. At that time, remember, VRT didn't know that No. 5 knew he was a clone, and was thus just being subtle.

prion

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----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.9 -----

From: Peter Westlake <peter at harlequin.co.uk>
Subject: Re: (urth) Islands in Commonwealth
Date: Mon, 20 Jul 1998 10:23:52 +0100
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"
References: <199807022151.OAA05425 at lists1.best.com>
In-Reply-To: <199807051857.LAA20487 at lists1.best.com>

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 southernmost 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.

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n006.10 -----

From: mary whalen <marewhalen at yahoo.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Islands in Commonwealth
Date: Mon, 20 Jul 1998 03:35:52 -0700 (PDT)

MIME-Version: 1.0

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii

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

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