

The calendar

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 11 Aug 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1738>

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Roy C. Lackey — 11 Aug 1999, 16:35

I can only recall a single instance when a specific date is mentioned in the Urth cycle, and that is only a day of an unnamed month. After the elevation of Roche and Drotte to journeymen, the same calendar year as Severian's near drowning and his encounter with Vodalus, Roche knocks on the door of the apprentices' dormitory to collect Sev and take him to the House Azure. He knocks because he no longer lives there, as journeymen have their own rooms. Sev is then captain of apprentices. Roche remarks: "Today is what? The eighteenth--it's been under three weeks." The "under three weeks" refers to the elapsed time since the Feast of Holy Katharine and his elevation. (I, VIII)

The Feast occurs in spring, which, because the seasons are six months out of phase in the Southern Hemisphere, comes after the warm weather of summer when it was warm enough to swim, which came earlier that same calendar year. The winter in which he discovered Triskele and Valeria fell between the fight in the necropolis and the Feast. In an appendix to CLAW Wolfe notes that the months are lunar, lasting 28 days, and the weeks are 7 days. He also notes that a watch is 1/10 of a night, or about 1 hour and 15 minutes. This figure must be based on the average length of a night, which works out to 12½ hours. Therefore in Sev's era the days are 25-hour days. Also, in SWORD, in the story that Cyriaca tells of the founding of Ultan's library, she notes that the years used to be longer than they are now (III, VI).

St. Catherine's Day is Nov. 25. (I should say "was": contrary to Wolfe's opinion as to the historicity of the saint, the Vatican, in an attempt to purge its vast pantheon of some of its more dubious saints and martyrs, abolished her feast day, amongst others, in 1969.) At any rate, we are not told just how much shorter the year is in Sev's day than now, or if there are 12 or 13 months in the year. 25-hour days, for 28 days, would equal about 29.17 of our days per month. A 12-month year would then equal about 350 of our days per year, 13 months 379 days, which is too many. A 12-month year in Sev's era would equal 336 days, 13 months 364 days. This latter figure is too close to our own year to be noteworthy, so it would seem that the year would most likely be 12 months. I mention both sets of figures because I am trying to reconcile Urth's calendar with Earth's.

Alternately, the shorter year could simply be attributed to the longer day. If Urth's orbit of the sun is the same length as Earth's, then the Urth year would be 350 of its days. The problem with this figure is that it would yield 12½ 28-day months per year.

If the surviving details of the torturers' feast day are any indication, it's not likely that the date would be forgotten. If the year is 12 months, like ours, then the month that Roche mentioned it was the eighteenth of should be the equivalent of our December. But from Nov. 25 to Dec. 18 is not "under three weeks", by Earth's calendar. Even if you grant that the "November" of Urth has but 28 days, the eighteenth of the following month would fall exactly 21 days later, which is still not "under three weeks". So, as I said, since this is the only date mentioned in the series, I assume Wolfe attached some significance to it. Anyone know what that might be, or how Roche's statement can be reconciled with the calendar?

Roy

Michael Andre-Driussi — 11 Aug 1999, 19:31 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy,

I have done a lot of work on the calendar, so allow me to share a few notes.

You wrote:

I can only recall a single instance when a specific date is mentioned in the Urth cycle, and that is only a day of an unnamed month.

"Hallowmass Eve (which is to say, the full of the Spading Moon)," ("The Cat," first few pages). This is probably the best of all calendar references in the text. The months each have many names, according to Wolfe (when I asked him): the Spading Moon shows a good example of one. It reinforces the Lunar nature of the Commonwealth calendar, as well as the agricultural sense (Spading Moon), and the religious sense (Hallowmass Eve, aka Halloween). There is also the suggestion that the previous month is the Harvest Moon.

That is to say: we have Harvest Moon (first full moon after Sep 23) and Hunter's Moon (the full moon after Harvest Moon); Spading might be equal to Harvest, but to get closer to our Halloween, Spading must instead be Hunter's Moon.

Roche remarks: "Today is what? The eighteenth--it's been under three weeks." The "under three weeks" refers to the elapsed time since the Feast of Holy Katharine and his elevation. (I, VIII)

The Feast occurs in spring, which, because the seasons are six months out of phase in the Southern Hemisphere, comes after the warm weather of summer when it was warm enough to swim, which came earlier that same calendar year.

First of all, the Feast occurs "in the fading of winter"; i.e., somewhere between Aug 1 and Sep 23.

Next, as in Biblical times, one tells the date by looking at the Moon: it is hung there in the sky as a calendar. It seems, judging from the court schedule at Thrax, that the month begins on New Moon (which of course makes perfect sense!).

Next, let's establish some hard numbers:

ASTRON. EVENT DATE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE EVENT

Vernal Equinox Mar 20 Southern Hemisphere Autumn begins mid-Spring May 1 mid-Autumn Summer Solstice Jun 21 S. Hemisphere Winter begins mid-Summer Aug 1 mid-Winter Autumnal Equinox Sep 23 S. Hemisphere Spring begins mid-Autumn Nov 1 mid-Spring Winter Solstice Dec 22 S. Hemisphere Summer begins mid-Winter Feb 1 mid-Summer

(Southern Hemisphere dwellers please chime in regarding the ballpark accuracy of these numbers)

THUS

. . . the Spading Moon of the Commonwealth should fall somewhere around May 1, and, if Halloween is here, too, then it has been shifted along to match the proper season (local Autumn).

. . . New Year's Day in the Commonwealth is apparently on the first New Moon after Summer has begun (i.e., Dec 22), that is, somewhere between Dec 23 and Feb 1.

The winter in which he discovered Triskele and Valeria fell between the fight in the necropolis and the Feast. In an appendix to CLAW Wolfe notes that the months are lunar, lasting 28 days, and the weeks are 7 days. He also notes that a watch is 1/10 of a night, or about 1 hour and 15 minutes. This figure must be based on the average length of a night, which works out to 12½ hours. Therefore in Sev's era the days are 25-hour days. Also, in SWORD, in the story that Cyriaca tells of the founding of Ultan's library, she notes that the years used to be longer than they are now (III, VI).

Stop. The "watch" as a unit of time is =seasonally= variable. The long watches of a winter night really =are= longer than the short watches of a summer night (historical note: this is close to the way time was reckoned in Japan--the Dutch even made variable clocks for them, with levers that shifted through the seasons). The only time the night is really 12 hours long is at the equinoxes.

Lunar month is ballpark 28 days; but more accurately 29.53 days (for phases) or 27.322 days (for both revolution and sidereal day). (You can see why the ballpark figure is so handy!)

St. Catherine's Day is Nov. 25. (I should say "was": contrary to Wolfe's opinion as to the historicity of the saint, the Vatican, in an attempt to purge its vast pantheon of some of its more dubious saints and martyrs, abolished her feast day, amongst others, in 1969.) At any rate, we are not told just how much shorter the year is in Sev's day than now, or if there are 12 or 13 months in the year.

Lunar calendars have thirteen months ($13 \times 28 = 364$). Period. They never match up to solar calendar time, but nobody cares--the seasons (solar determined) are floating anchor points in the Commonwealth, and on Earth the Islamic holidays drift from season to season.

If my hard numbers are roughly correct, Nov 25 is (S.H.) late Spring rather than late Winter. Granted, the feast day may have been shifted to match the proper season, except that where it is (late Winter, according to text) isn't exactly the proper season (mid-Autumn--where C's feast day is in N.Hemisphere).

MORE HARD NUMBERS

Catherine Alex. -- Nov 25

Catherine Geno. -- Sep 15

Catherine Sien. -- Apr 29/30

Catherine Swed. -- Mar 24

Comparing these numbers with the other numbers, it seems as though Catherine of Genoa has a feast day at the time closest to the target. FWIW.

25-hour days, for 28 days,

Stop. I strongly resist the idea that the Urth days are 25 hours long.

All the other numbers match up to ancient calendar methods, I don't see why the length of day would be different.

Granted, one avenue I have not explored is: given that Lune is closer in orbit, what sort of (slower) velocity must it have to maintain a 28 day period. (And maybe it is exactly 28 days, instead of some fraction?)

Furthermore, there is, naturally, the gap between astronomical seasons and perceived seasons.

In part this is probably due to the fact that seasonal weather (the features that alert us to "season") takes a bit longer or shorter to develop. Boundaries are fuzzy. So when Severian talks of seasonal weather, it is quite vague. December seems like Winter to me, but 21 days of it ain't (go figure).

Anyway, there's a pile of notes for you--happy hunting!

=mantis=

Charles Dye — 12 Aug 1999, 00:17 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis writes:

Stop. The "watch" as a unit of time is =seasonally= variable. The long watches of a winter night really =are= longer than the short watches of a summer night (historical note: this is close to the way time was reckoned in Japan--the Dutch even made variable clocks for them, with levers that shifted through the seasons). The only time the night is really 12 hours long is at the equinoxes.

The lengths of hours changed in Europe, too, until about the fourteenth century (and the invention of mechanical clocks.) Adjusting a water clock is not difficult: inscribe different scales for different months. Sundials are self-adjusting, of course.

It appears that most timepieces in the Commonwealth are of the variable- speed kind. Dr. Talos refers to the Autarch's star-made clock specifically as an 'isochronon' -- suggesting that this is unusual.

Lunar calendars have thirteen months ($13 \times 28 = 364$). Period. They never match up to solar calendar time, but nobody cares--the seasons (solar determined) are floating anchor points in the Commonwealth, and on Earth the Islamic holidays drift from season to season.

But "the Spading Moon" suggests that there is some correspondence between the calendar and the solar year. I suppose you could intercalate an entire month at need, as the Jewish calendar does....

raster at highfiber.com

Roy C. Lackey — 12 Aug 1999, 06:45 · follows Charles Dye

mantis,

You wrote:

"Hallowmass Eve (which is to say, the full of the Spading Moon)," ("The Cat," first few pages). This is probably the best of all calendar references in the text. The months each have many names, according to Wolfe (when I asked him): the Spading Moon shows a good example of one. It reinforces the Lunar nature of the Commonwealth calendar, as well as the agricultural sense (Spading Moon), and the religious sense (Hallowmass Eve, aka Halloween). There is also the suggestion that the previous month is the Harvest Moon.

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THUS

. . . the Spading Moon of the Commonwealth should fall somewhere around May

1, and, if Halloween is here, too, then it has been shifted along to match the proper season (local Autumn).

Actually, your definition of the Harvest Moon is incorrect. As stated, the Harvest Moon could occur as late as October 21 (in the Northern Hemisphere), which is not so. The Harvest Moon is the full moon nearest the autumnal equinox, that is, a fortnight either side of the equinox. While I am familiar with the Harvest and Hunter's Moons, I have not heard of a Spading Moon. It would seem to me, however, that spading would be associated with planting time, not harvesting time, as you have it. In spring, when the ground is readied for planting, it is plowed (or spaded if no plow is available). This, in the Commonwealth, would happen six months away from May 1, around Nov. 1, which is, precisely, All Hallows, just as it says in "The Cat". Only, it is mid-spring in the Commonwealth, not mid-autumn, and has nothing to do with the Harvest Moon, which would happen near the autumnal equinox in March.

Thinking upside-down makes my head hurt. <g>

Roy