

Seasons

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 12 Aug 1999

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Roy C. Lackey — 12 Aug 1999, 03:10

mantis,

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

I think you're too early, and that the text bears me out. When Severian says that the feast occurs "in the fading of winter", I believe that he is referring to the "perceived seasons" you mention, not the "astronomical seasons". Remember, Urth is already feeling the effects of the damaged sun. Winter comes earlier and lasts longer than it used to. There is textual support for the Feast of Holy Katharine taking place in the spring. Sometime during the "under three weeks" between the feast at which Drotte and Roche were elevated and the trip to the House Azure, Sev made his trip to Ultan's library to fetch the four books for Thecla. While there:

"I told Cyby that I was honored to meet him, and asked, somewhat timidly, what the feast day of the curators was..."

"It is now passed," Master Ultan said. He looked toward me as he spoke, and in the candlelight I could see that his eyes were the color of watered milk. "In early spring. It is a beautiful day. The trees put out their new leaves then, in most years."

A little farther down the page Ultan adds, in part: "I suppose we are one of the spring sights of Nessus, in our little way." (I, VI)

Now, if the curators' feast is passed and it took place in early spring, then the torturers' feast, just passed, also took place in spring. Indirect evidence from the text is the fact that the actual feast--the meal--took place outdoors, something not likely to be done in winter. The snowstorm on the night of the trip to the House Azure was a fluke--nothing like it occurred three weeks after the feast the following year when Sev was elevated. Thecla's suicide took place two days after Sev's elevation to journeyman. Eleven days after that he left the citadel to begin his exile. Four nights later is when he and Dorcas met up with the thespians and Dr. Talos was striking at wild flowers with his cane--spring growth, which was even more apparent a week or so later when they were at the House Absolute and the trees and flowers were in bloom.

Sev met Dorcas the day after he left the citadel. In SWORD (page 7) he laments: "While we had been journeying together (and we had been traveling with greater or lesser expedition from the moment in the Garden of Endless Sleep when Dorcas helped me clamber, half-drowned, onto the floating walkway of the sedge) it had been as equals and companions, each of us walking every league we covered on our feet or riding our own mount." Now Sev sees that they are not equals and have drifted apart. On the next page he says: "...we, who had been incessantly together throughout the latter part of the spring, came now in summer to see each other hardly at all,...". (III, I) Sev defines their journey as beginning when she pulled him from the water and the time period as being late spring, which fits perfectly their meeting
after Nov 25, which is late spring.

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.

In "The Feast of Saint Catherine" in OTTER, Wolfe specifies Catherine of Alexandria. I don't think it is a moveable feast, like Easter. Maxentius, as you know, was the main rival of Constantine the Great for control of the western part of the Roman empire. The defeat of Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 was the occasion for Constantine's famous vision, which paved the way for Christianity to become the state religion. I'm sure Wolfe appreciated Maxentius getting his comeuppance. Nov. 25, while two months into the astronomical spring of the Commonwealth, may well be described as "in the fading of winter", because of the longer winters of Urth, which the fluke snowstorm that year was an indication of.

So, how do you explain Cyriaca's claim that the years used to be longer?

There is another temporal anomaly when Sev returns from the library. In the closing paragraph of chapter VI he mentions that he had been "two watches at least on a simple errand". He hurries back to his tower where it is time to feed the prisoners. Drotte being occupied, he brought Thecla her meal and the four books, meeting her for the first time . (chapter VII) He then returns Drotte's keys. There is a break in the text, then:

"On the next day but one, I was summoned to Master Gurloes." In the very next paragraph Gurloes says: "A week ago, or a little less, I sent you to the archivist," he said. I nodded." Two days does not a week make. What is going on here?

Roy

Michael Andre-Driussi — 12 Aug 1999, 11:01 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy,

Good job in showing that the Feast of Holy Katherine occurs in early Spring! It is very convincing and I'm willing to go along with it.

This would appear to be a compromise on your earlier position, as well, since while you see the text supports it, you also tacitly acknowledge that Nov 25 falls in the =fading= of S. Hemisphere Spring.

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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

+Feast of Cath. A. Nov 25 last quarter of Spring+

Winter Solstice Dec 22 S. Hemisphere Summer begins mid-Winter Feb 1 mid-Summer

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(I hope you don't mind my using this one again, slightly amended. You seemed to be floundering a bit on the S. Hemisphere seasonal thing, in your first post.)

Of course, the devil of dealing with seasonal weather is geographical latitude, which isn't a problem if you know roughly where you are (and with the Commonwealth, we don't). (Geographical details also play a part with local weather: San Francisco is notorious for its cold Summers, especially in contrast to "California Summer.")

That is, when Severian walks North he is walking toward (or into?) the tropics. There is a similar effect when he comes down Mount Typhon--iirc, he talks of walking through seasons.

OTOH, if a person lives his whole life in the place he was born, and this person says that local Spring weather had arrived, then he is right, of course: it doesn't matter if he is in Alaska, Oregon, or Southern California . . . these differences in latitude will have some effect in objective terms but not subjective terms.

Anyway, part of the experiment is to recognize that there are many different calendar types/traditions at play: astronomical, religious, and agricultural (at least).

Another tool at your disposal is Precession of the Equinox. Maybe your question boils down to: at what year will Scorpius be located at (or near) the Point of Aries (i.e., Vernal Equinox)?

Re: Spading Moon. Yes, sorry I gave the ballpark figure for Harvest Moon--I suppose I should have given the complete data, and then explained that since the Commonwealth month is =defined= by the Moon, that it will happen every year in roughly this place (but I felt I was running rather long already). Furthermore, I should have mentioned that I could not find any reference elsewhere to "Spading Moon," nor any named Moons around the Vernal Equinox (maybe a Farmer's Almanac would help here?); and yes, Spading sounds more like a Springtime thing to me, too, and I neglected to mention that tangent--in part because I was keeping Halloween in the Autumn where it belongs in Western tradition (as opposed to the fading of Winter, where its festival of the ghosts was celebrated in ancient Rome and Japan to this day), and in context, because Wolfe wrote it for the 1983 World Fantasy Con book (WFC happens over Halloween weekend every year).

So, how do you explain Cyriaca's claim that the years used to be longer?

This is a common Earth saying--haven't you ever heard it before? People say it about their own childhoods. I would never take it literally in Earth's case, but I can easily see why it could be an option in Urth studies.

There is another temporal anomaly when Sev returns from the library. In the closing paragraph of chapter VI he mentions that he had been "two watches at least on a simple errand". He hurries back to his tower where it is time to feed the prisoners. Drotte being occupied, he brought Thecla her meal and the four books, meeting her for the first time . (chapter VII) He then returns Drotte's keys. There is a break in the text, then:

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FWIW, in English we have the phrase "last week." On Monday, you might say, "Hey, did you see that TV movie last week?" The movie in question was on Friday, only three days ago.

If my calculations are correct, Thecla arrived on the 14th of the month. On the 15th, people could refer to this as "yesterday" or "last week" (since a new week has begun) or its equivalent, "a week ago."

Severian went to the Library on the 15th, "the next week" after Thecla arrived.

Added to all this, and perhaps more germane, I think that Master is trying to downplay the importance, trying to make Thecla out as being just another client, buried among all the daily chores, etc. This is a fairly clear fumble on his part, so he then shifts into the opposite mode--trying to impress upon the youngster that she is very important, very special, so don't mess up.

=mantis=