

The Commonwealth: North or South

The Urth list — 8 messages, 8 voices, 25 Oct 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1849>

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Redhaven1 — 25 Oct 1999, 23:25

I'm new to this list, so I apologize if this has already been discussed. In TBOTNS the Commonwealth is always referred to as being in the south and the Ascians are from the north, giving rise to the speculations that the Commonwealth might be in present-day South America. But I seem to remember reading somewhere that scientists believe that the Earth's magnetic poles had reversed sometime in the past (perhaps more than once). Has anyone else heard of this? In the movie 'Waterworld' the heroes finally found the legendary 'Dry-land' by realizing that when an ancient map said 'North', it actually meant 'South' because the north pole was now the magnetic south. If TBOTNS is far enough in the future, couldn't it be possible that this had happened in its past and then the Commonwealth could possibly be in the US or maybe Europe? Again, sorry if this theory has already been put forward.

-Steve

Mitchell A. Bailey — 26 Oct 1999, 09:13 · follows Redhaven1

Redhaven1 at aol.com wrote:

... I apologize if this has already been discussed.

It has, including a rather recent iteration which should be in the latest volume.

In

TBOTNS the Commonwealth is always referred to as being in the south and the Ascians are from the north, giving rise to the speculations that the Commonwealth might be in present-day South America. But I seem to remember reading somewhere that scientists believe that the Earth's magnetic poles had reversed sometime in the past Has anyone else heard of this? ...

Since I've taken an interest in the 'magnetic' aspect of the issue, I'll repeat that Urth, having been said to have solidified nearly through, is unlikely to have a significant magnetic field. This is because a planetary magnetic field is believed to be generated by the convection and shear of a conductive more-or-less liquid core. E.g. the Sun, Earth's core of molten nickel-iron, Jupiter's theoretical outer core of highly compressed 'metallic' hydrogen. Bodies which are believed to be nearly solid, such as the Moon, Mercury, Mars, have correspondingly weaker magnetic fields. Therefore magnetic compasses and the magnetic poles, which may have been utterly forgotten perhaps ages before Severian's time to judge by their absence from the text, evidently are nonexistent and moot.

BTW, I believe the phenomenon of planetary magnetic field reversal has been attributed in theory to major meteorite impacts massive enough to jar the circulating fluid. I can't think of any phenomenon, present or legendary, in UNS most likely explainable in terms of a major impact other than perhaps mass extinctions. Or maybe the immemorially ancient underground facilities such as those which eons later became the House Absolute and the basement of the Old Citadel were survival shelters against just such a disaster prior to the first stellar empire.

mark millman — 26 Oct 1999, 10:19 · follows Mitchell A. Bailey

At 7:25 pm 25 October 1999, Steve (Redhaven1 at aol.com) wrote:

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-Steve

and at 9:13 am 26 October 1999, Mitchell A. Bailey
<MAB at lindau.net> responded:

Since I've taken an interest in the 'magnetic' aspect of the issue, I'll repeat that Urth, having been said to have solidified nearly through, is unlikely to have a significant magnetic field. This is because a planetary magnetic field is believed to be generated by the convection and shear of a conductive more-or-less liquid core. . . . Therefore magnetic compasses and the magnetic poles, which may have been utterly forgotten perhaps ages before Severian's time to judge by their absence from the text, evidently are nonexistent and moot.

Welcome to the list, Steve. You might like to know that our esteemed alga is . . . doubtful . . . of the South American setting that most of the rest of the list accepts, so you're in good company. That said, alga doesn't base her opinion on reversal of the magnetic poles. It's pretty clear that the sun (and other celestial objects) rise in the east and set in the west on Urth, so even if there had been magnetic reversal at some point in the past, it would have meant that compasses pointed south, not that the North Pole (the geographical one, at least; it's true that the magnetic direction labeled "north" would have changed) had suddenly relocated to Antarctica.

Furthermore, at 9:30 am 26 October 1999, Rostrum (Michael

Straight) <straight at email.unc.edu> wrote:
The ideal solution, of course, is to pass out copies
of PEACE to all my friends.

-Rostrum

Which I do. It helps to have a lot of good used-book stores around.

Mark Millman

Jim Henley — 26 Oct 1999, 22:13 · follows mark millman

-----Original Message-----

From: urth-errors at lists.best.com [mailto:urth-errors at lists.best.com]On
Behalf Of Mitchell A. Bailey

BTW, I believe the phenomenon of planetary magnetic field reversal has been attributed in theory to major meteorite impacts massive enough to jar the circulating fluid. I can't think of any phenomenon, present or legendary, in UNS most likely explainable in terms of a major impact other than perhaps mass extinctions. Or maybe the immemorially ancient underground facilities such as those which eons later became the House Absolute and the basement of the Old Citadel were survival shelters against just such a disaster prior to the first stellar empire.

I'm not a Northern Hemisphere Partisan (NHP?) - far from it - but two things struck me on reading your very informative post:

1) If poles do flip, AND Urth has lost its magnetic field, might they have flipped back before the loss? Then people in Sev's time might retain the flipped sense of North.

2) Major meteoric impact without pole shifting. Near as I understand the geography of Urth and present-day South America, there simply ain't room to fit all Urth's points of interest west of the present-day Andes. Perhaps a major meteoric impact would start to explain where all that extra land came from.

Best,

Jim

"Here's a song that you can sing
by which to do the measuring"
-- Elvis Costello, "45"

Daniel Fusch — 27 Oct 1999, 04:18 · follows Jim Henley

North or South--an interesting question. I've always pictured the Commonwealth existing in what is now South America--though I had wondered about the east/west problem. Still...if Urth cycles in and out of a technological civilization in the meantime, who knows what changes mankind will wreak on the continents?

At any rate, I'm not extremely entrenched in my position on this question.

I'm curious though...this idea of the magnetic poles "flipping" -- was this hinted at in the book itself? Where did the theory come from?

Daniel

Fr.Inire — 26 Oct 1999, 22:16 · follows Daniel Fusch

--- Daniel Fusch <dfusch at hotmail.com> wrote:

I'm curious though...this idea of the magnetic poles
"flipping" -- was this
hinted at in the book itself? Where did the theory

come from?

Daniel

Well, it does help somewhat with all the well worn arguments as to what hemisphere the books take place in.

In case it hasn't already been stated (still grazing past posts...), the magnetic poles DO flip on occasion on their own, as evidenced by the alternating magnetic particles in strata of rock. My astro prof wasn't as informed on the WHY, OTOH...;->

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Jeff "My dice hate me!" Miller

The HeavyGear Parts SwapMeet is at <http://freecenter.digiweb.com/games/severian/swap.html>
Heavy Gear: Not your Dad's walking robot game...www.dp9.com

Gaming to keep War out of RealTime! '82 GS650G

Roy C. Lackey — 27 Oct 1999, 02:22 · follows Fr.Inire

I thought the question of whether the Commonwealth was in the Southern Hemisphere or not was settled. It is in the Southern Hemisphere, and there's no doubt about it. In addition to the points made by Mitchell Bailey and the observations of Mark Millman, it is clearly stated in chapter XXV of CITADEL, while the old autarch and Sev are in the flier, just before the crash. Sev tells the autarch what little he knows of the Ascians, that "...they live to the north in the hot countries, and that they're..." The autarch corrects him: "Half what you said of them was incorrect. They do not come from the hot countries of the north [i.e., near the equator], but from the continent that lies across the equator." Sorry, alga, but there it is.

Roy

Jim Jordan — 27 Oct 1999, 13:55 · follows Roy C. Lackey

At 09:18 PM 10/26/99 PDT, you wrote:

North or South--an interesting question. I've always pictured the Commonwealth existing in what is now South America--though I had wondered about the east/west problem. Still...if Urth cycles in and out of a technological civilization in the meantime, who knows what changes mankind will wreak on the continents?

The Slime (Alga) suggested long ago that because of the clearly Byzantine character of the Commonwealth, we are really in the Mediterranean. She made a valiant case for it, but it did not persuade many (any?), and she may not hold to it any longer. (Alga?)

Alga's thesis might be salvaged if we are in a physical SA location, near Buenos Aires, but the cultural geography is Mediterrean-esque.

Doesn't the Long Sun somewhere say that the Spanish culture of Viron came from people living near to Pas/Typhon? That might be another indication of South America.

My own thinking started by noticing that Blind Ultan is Borges, and that Nessus looks like a contraction of Buenos Aires (as Meeya Meefla in Cordwainer Smith is Miami, Fla.). But the Ascians being from the north, the hot lands, and also from a continent north of the hot lands, seems to settle the question.

Nutria