

(TBOTN) Utter speculation

The Urth list — 9 messages, 7 voices, 19 Jun 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4033>

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.

Craig Brewer — 19 Jun 2003, 17:47

I've been thinking about the Wall of Nessus and Baldander's assertion (ch. 35 of Shadow) that the open space inside the walls wasn't for Nessus' expansion. But something about the sheer size and height of the walls made me wonder how far off it would be to suggest that Nessus wasn't always a city but that it was initially (possibly) one huge space pad. Assuming that the walls are circular, then would it be possible that what we have is some kind of base for a huge cylinder, like...the Whorl?

Now this would be a rather insane (and, as far as I can tell) rather impossible way to build and "launch" a ship as big as the Whorl (which seems to be too massive to ever be "launched" from a planet). Still...why is the wall miles high and spread so far around the city?

If someone can easily disabuse me of this idea, please do so since it's captured my easily distracted imagination.

Craig

Michael Andre-Driussi — 19 Jun 2003, 18:13 · follows Craig Brewer

Craig wrote:

I've been thinking about the Wall of Nessus and Baldander's assertion (ch. 35 of Shadow) that the open space inside the walls wasn't for Nessus' expansion. But something about the sheer size and height of the walls made me wonder how far off it would be to suggest that Nessus wasn't always a city but that it was initially (possibly) one huge space pad. Assuming that the walls are circular, then would it be possible that what we have is some kind of base for a huge cylinder, like...the Whorl?

Now this would be a rather insane (and, as far as I can tell) rather impossible way to build and "launch" a ship as big as the Whorl (which seems to be too massive to ever be "launched" from a planet). Still...why is the wall miles high and spread so far around the city?

If someone can easily disabuse me of this idea, please
do so since it's captured my easily distracted
imagination.

Sorry, no diabusing from me! I'll just spur you on -- you haven't gone far enough yet! (Well except for the Whorl lifting off from Urth; I'll agree that seems unlikely.)

Fact: the Walls pre-date the city.

Fact: the city has been crawling upstream for a long time, so it has presumably entered the walls and taken up residence like a hermit crab moving into a found shell.

Fact: the citadel pre-dates the city, and the earliest name we have for it is the Old Port, iirc. So it probably was one of the ports from which people and materials were shuttled up to the Whorl (and that was relatively late in history -- the city was . . . approaching, but not there yet? The necropolis was for the military people based at the Old Port -- it was a military point); it was definitely a dumping ground for old worthless ships.

As for the why, who knows? Gene Wolfe might not even know. It is a Big Dumb Object that is an Enigma, with echos of the Tower of Babel and skiffy notions like a failed sky-elevator, or a blast-containment area for ships with radioactive exhaust, or a simple terrarium-type structure (an early Trantor-style "world building" module?) that never got its Buckydome roof, or just a super "particle accelerator." IIRC it is a feature of the dying sun fictions (if not even the gothic before it?) to have gigantism like this.

=mantis=

Sirius Fiction

booklets on Gene Wolfe, John Crowley

<http://www.siriusfiction.com/>

eBay Auctions <http://cgi6.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewSellersOtherItems&userid=mr.sirius>

James Jordan — 19 Jun 2003, 18:23 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

At 12:47 PM 6/19/2003, you wrote:

I've been thinking about the Wall of Nessus and Baldander's assertion (ch. 35 of Shadow) that the open space inside the walls wasn't for Nessus' expansion. But something about the sheer size and height of the walls made me wonder how far off it would be to suggest that Nessus wasn't always a city but that it was initially (possibly) one huge space pad. Assuming that the walls are circular, then would it be possible that what we have is some kind of base for a huge cylinder, like...the Whorl?

I thought the Whorl was a hollowed out asteroid, thus made in space. But the rest of your suggestion makes some sense. Even ordinary rockets blasting off might require a high wall, to stop noise pollution if nothing else. Typhon would have launched a LOT of ships to populate and supply Whorl. (But maybe we're both forgetting something.)

An awful thought just hit me: Doesn't *Starship Troopers* start off in Buenos Aires? Naw, it can't be. Nessus is the city of Borges, not of Heinlein.

Nutria

James Jordan — 19 Jun 2003, 18:29 · follows James Jordan

At 01:13 PM 6/19/2003, you wrote:

IIRC it is a feature of the dying

sun fictions (if not even the gothic before it?) to have gigantism like this.

=mantis=

I believe it's Lewis Mumford who points out that the building of huge buildings and monuments is an aspect of the last and dying phase of a strong culture. An active and growing culture does not take the time to build such things to its own glory. Another version of Parkinson's Law: "The efficiency of an organization is in inverse proportion to the depth of carpet pile in its headquarters' offices."

But I'm inclined to think the wall is a huge blast shield of some sort.

FWIW

Nutria

James Wynn — 19 Jun 2003, 19:42 · follows James Jordan

Michael Andre-Driussi said:

Fact: the citadel pre-dates the city, and the earliest name we have for it is the Old Port, iirc. So it probably was one of the ports from which people and materials where shuttled up to the Whorl (and that was relatively late in history -- the city was . . . approaching, but not there yet?

Crush responds:

If it's older name was "the Old Port", then there ought to be a "New Port". But the new port wouldn't be called that. It would be given a jazzier name. Just as when the state builds a new highway it's called the Typhon W. Rex Memorial highway or whatever and the old highway is called "Old Thrax Rd."

So maybe they didn't launch to the Whorl from there. Or maybe they did.

-- Crush

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 19 Jun 2003, 18:42 · follows James Wynn

= "Craig wrote this."

= "Mantis wrote this."

Assuming that the walls are circular, then would it be possible that what we have is some kind of base for a huge cylinder, like...the Whorl?

Now this would be a rather insane (and, as far as I can tell) rather impossible way to build and "launch"

a ship as big as the Whorl (which seems to be too massive to ever be "launched" from a planet). Still...why is the wall miles high and spread so far around the city?

While I like much of your and Mantis's) ideas here, I'm pretty sure that Nessus is more than a thousand years old and so predates Typhon and the _Whorl_. (In fact, I think it's _much_ more, but I can't recall a cite at present to prove it.)

Now this would be a rather insane (and, as far as I can tell) rather impossible way to build and "launch" a ship as big as the Whorl (which seems to be too massive to ever be "launched" from a planet). Still...why is the wall miles high and spread so far around the city?

I suspect that the Wall was originally built to contain damage in the event of a crash (something Mantis tosses off below). It would be miles high to limit the escape of hazardous materials (radioactives, alien life spores, etc.) on the wind.

Pondering: There are a few things of BDO scale in the NS books. Some of them are alive. Is there any connection between them and the nonliving ones? Could the Wall (despite my, I think, convincing theory above) have anything to do with them? Probably not; a wall isn't necessary to keep them "out" since they can't walk abroad on land.

Fact: the Walls pre-date the city.

Fact: the city has been crawling upstream for a long time, so it has presumably entered the walls and taken up residence like a hermit crab moving into a found shell.

Question: Do we know that the Walls form a closed ... circle, or whatever? Or are they open to the Sea? Or extend out into it? I don't recall Sev. mentioning passing through them as he comes up the river on _Samru_, but my memory could well be faulty in this. Anyone recall such a thing?

H'mmm. If they aren't fully closed, that blows off the "containment" theory, doesn't it?

Fact: the citadel pre-dates the city, and the earliest name we have for it is the Old Port, iirc.

The Citadel was clearly the old spaceport, yeah. I mean, that's why the Towers are old spaceships, neh?

So it probably was one of the ports from which people and materials were shuttled up to the Whorl (and that was relatively late in history -- the city was . . . approaching, but not there yet?

Umm, no. The towers were already towers in Typhon's time, if I'm not totally mistaken; they take Sev to the Matachin in UotNS, don't they? I'm pretty sure it's not a port anymore at that point. H'mm: does anyone recall whether the city is surrounding the Citadel yet at that point? Or if there's any indication?

As for the why, who knows? Gene Wolfe might not even know. It is a Big Dumb Object that is an Enigma, with echos of the Tower of Babel and skiffy notions like a failed sky-elevator, or a blast-containment area for ships with radioactive exhaust, or a simple terrarium-type structure (an early Trantor-style "world building" module?) that never got its Buckydome roof,

or just a super "particle accelerator." IIRC it is a feature of the dying sun fictions (if not even the gothic before it?) to have gigantism like this.

Yes ... Aside from Vance, the other major "dying Earth" work would be Aldiss' *_Hothouse_*, which has its share of biological gigantism -- the world- banyan, the spiders that web the Earth to the Moon ...

Hey, now. It occurs to me, going waaaaaaaaaaaaay back to certain theories about trees. Could *_Short Sun_* (and especially Green) be related to Aldiss' book in a way similar to *_New Sun_'s* relationship to Vance's?

Andy Robertson — 19 Jun 2003, 20:08 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

AND Hodgson's *THE NIGHT LAND* is of course rife with gigantism, with an eight-mile-tall arcology with hundred-mile-deep sublevels, mile-tall Watchers, giant Slugs, screaming mountains, fifty-mile-deep canyons in the Earth, and so forth.

I think the Walls are ancient "starship-level" technology, but I suspect they were built as part of the war against Abia. Maybe they were a dyke against inundation. Maybe once Nessus WAS the entire Republic.

hartshorn

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

From: "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <katbarx at hotmail.com>
or just a super "particle accelerator." IIRC it is a feature of the dying sun fictions (if not even the gothic before it?) to have gigantism like this.

Yes ... Aside from Vance, the other major "dying Earth" work would be Aldiss' *_Hothouse_*, which has its share of biological gigantism -- the world- banyan, the spiders that web the Earth to the Moon ...

matthew.malthouse — 20 Jun 2003, 07:33 · follows Andy Robertson

On 19/06/2003 18:47:44 Craig Brewer wrote:
I've been thinking about the Wall of Nessus and Baldander's assertion (ch. 35 of *Shadow*) that the open space inside the walls wasn't for Nessus' expansion. But something about the sheer size and height of the walls made me wonder how far off it would be to suggest that Nessus wasn't always a city but that it was initially (possibly) one huge space pad. Assuming that the walls are circular, then would it be possible that what we have is some kind of base for a huge cylinder, like...the Whorl?

I can think of two mundane reasons for the space inside the wall.

First to enclose farming land or other resources. That actually doesn't stand up very well because a technology that could build the wall is unlikely to be menaced by a purely ground based attack to the concept of "wall" is redundant unless there was more to it (speculations about forcefield domes have been made here in the past).

The second, and I think more logical potential reason is that the open space within the wall is a killing ground - a space left bare to provide the forces within the wall an unobstructed field of fire.

Such can be seen around fortifications built in our history but usually outside the walls so why a killing ground inside the walls of Nessus.

Nessus - or rather the Citadel - is a space port; we might infer an important one. If it's the point of entry for cacos or humans returning from the empire it's an obvious danger zone and one might well want to keep affective guns trained on it. Thus Nessus isn't "within" the wall but "outside it, the wall enclosing the rest of the world.

There's nothing I can recall to directly support this but consider that Nessus once much smaller; had the space port / Citadel to it's north while now the Citadel is in the southern inhabited reaches of the city. My impression was always that the circle formed by the wall was centered on the Citadel - again, no recalled evidence - and that the presence of Nessus, the city, was actually unrelated to the existence of the wall.

If that's credible then one should ask why the prohibition remains long after it ceased to be meaningful. One reason is the inertia such things have, law become custom and the Commonwealth seems riddled with such. Another is that as Nessus grew from a seaport to a great metropolis, the largest concentration of people and thus trouble in the realm, subsequent Autarchs might have appreciated the wisdom of not having the rabble wash up right to the foot of the fortifications.

Oh, and as for the Whorl I'm fairly sure Marble describes being ferried up to it with an implication that it was constructed in orbit.

Matthew

matthew.malthouse — 20 Jun 2003, 07:53 · follows matthew.malthouse

On 19/06/2003 20:42:13 James Wynn wrote:

Michael Andre-Driussi said:

Fact: the citadel pre-dates the city, and the earliest name we have for it

is the Old Port, iirc. So it probably was one of the ports from which people and materials where shuttled up to the Whorl (and that was relatively late in history -- the city was . . . approaching, but not there yet?

Crush responds:

If it's older name was "the Old Port", then there ought to be a "New Port".

"earliest name we have for it" Which we get on Severian's misplaced return in time.

"Old" can simply mean it's been there a long time. By then it's redundant, the ships have been grounded so long walls have been built between them but it's know not have been a port and thet they are ships; something not immediately obvious to the people in TBotNS.

If you must have a comparative perhaps the sea/river port that is Nessus is "new"; at least it

was still active in Severians time(s).

Matthew