

STL interstellar empires

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 14 Aug 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4160>

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.

Michael Andre-Driussi — 14 Aug 2003, 23:58

Andrew Bollen wrote:

The universes of New Sun and Short Sun really don't fit together very snugly. IMO, if you took them as standalones, you'd say that Short Sun is in the future, while New Sun is in the *deep* future. A few hundred years versus a geological age or two. I think that GW did a lot of back-filling to tie them together. (Not that I really mind - myths are generally cobbled together from pieces which don't fit very well, in a logical sense.)

Obvious examples:

- Typhon in New Sun at least desires to rule an inter-stellar empire, and offers Sev the job of satrap of Earth. How does this make any sense without superluminal travel? If Typhon can travel faster than light, why build the Whorl? If he can't, is he really going to feel good about a clunky slower-than-light hollow asteroid crawling through space while the immense shp/s of the Hiero-whatsits leap/s over dimesnional boundaries?

Le Guin's main sf work has been set in a common STL interstellar culture. One of the things that is suggested if not stated outright is that it is only possible because they use an instantaneous communication device -- the famed "ansible" (notoriously an anagram of "lesbian," for whatever one can make of that factoid). One of the other devices to knit the metaculture together is "mindspeech," a sort of telepathy which can be learned (iirc).

Gene Wolfe certainly read THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS and THE DISPOSSESSED, and it seems highly probable that he read the other novels, too (PLANET OF EXILE and ROCANNON'S WORLD and CITY OF ILLUSIONS) as well as the short stories set in that background.

In TBOTNS, at the Vancean resurrection of the Stone Town, the Cumaeen uses a device to contact an entity 22 light years away for a real-time conversation. This is rather a lot like an ansible. So the technology is at least possible in the universe of Briah. Typhon just wants to rule a Le Guin style interstellar grouping.

Typhon does not seem to have kept all eggs in one basket -- he hedges his bets. The library, according to the story, was a hedge he set up: originally he was going to burn all the books that had been collected. But at the last minute he came up with the hedge, just in case the empire thing didn't work out.

So why the Whorl? Another hedge, I say. While all the other stuff is conquer and control, this other project will be "pure" colonization.

- The universe of New Sun has a bunch of human-settled planets in some kind of contact with each other, if only via port-calls by Tzadkiel's ship. Why would Typhon think it was a cool thing to send out a slow boat to found a crappy little colony when these old, established ones already exist, and he presumably intends to conquer them?

See above.

- The literary survivals from our age in the Chras Writings are *really* implausible for a deep future setting.
- At some point in Exodus Silk talks of French and Latin as extant languages (at least literary languages). Ditto.

<Use of Latin in Nessus.>

<shrug>

- Why none of the bio-engineered animals from New Sun on the Whorl? No destriers, no smilodons ...

It could be that he thought they were decadent, non-natural, time-safari captures, and/or extrasolarian in origin.

- Why no chems on Urth, apart from throwbacks like Jonah? Maybe there are some around at the time of Sev vs Typhon in UOTNS; we don't meet them, AFAIK. But surely Typhon's army would have been predominantly chems?

Hard to get parts in such a low-tech backwater. Look at Jonas, for example: repaired with biological material, for goodness sake! Urth is far more resource poor than the Whorl, and look at how the chems are running down on the Whorl, after only a few hundred years of isolation.

Of course you are free to your own opinion.

=mantis=

Andrew Bollen — 16 Aug 2003, 01:37 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis writes:

In TBOTNS, at the Vancean resurrection of the Stone Town, the Cumaeen uses a device to contact an entity 22 light years away for a real-time conversation. This is rather a lot like an ansible. So the technology is at least possible in the universe of Briah. Typhon just wants to rule a Le Guin style interstellar grouping.

Sure, all this cool stuff is available to non-Urthians, and quite likely to New Sun Typhon, but there's no hint that it's anywhere on the Whorl. I suppose you could say it's there, but unused, given Typhon's premature demise.

But I don't think New Sun Typhon would be satisfied with a STL empire. Doesn't he say somewhere that he and his followers returned from the stars? If I've got that right, did they come back frozen in a slow-boat? Does this story of his return really square very well with Roger's description of Typhopn's rise in IGJ? In Claw (?) Typhon talks of delaying his decision to leave Urth too long - was he planning to freeze himself on a slow-boat? is his digital presence on the Whorl a kind of poor-man's alternative?

Obviously, all of these things which look like mis-matches to me can be glued together, but I think it needs some fairly sticky chewing gum to do it.

So why the Whorl? Another hedge, I say. While all the other stuff is conquer and control, this other project will be "pure" colonization.

But at some point the : "real" Typhon is going to want to take control - what's the point of having even an empire if you don't get to rule it? Will he have to assert his authority over his digital avatar via ansible? Of course, you can postulate some kind of built-in thingy giving real Typhon authority over digital Pas, but I don't find it very convincing.

- The literary survivals from our age in the Chras Writings are *really* implausible for a deep future setting.
- At some point in Exodus Silk talks of French and Latin as extant languages (at least literary languages). Ditto.

<Use of Latin in Nessus.>

<shrug>

I think in New Sun it's made clear that Latin is used as to translate some unknown archaic language. Maybe the terms "Latin" and "French" are used similarly in Short Sun, but I don't think so. The texts in the Chras writing are from our broad era; I assume that the languages are also.

- Why no chems on Urth, apart from throwbacks like Jonah? Maybe there are some around at the time of Sev vs Typhon in UOTNS; we don't meet them, AFAIK. But surely Typhon's army would have been predominantly chems?

Hard to get parts in such a low-tech backwater. Look at Jonas, for example: repaired with biological material, for goodness sake! Urth is far

more resource poor than the Whorl, and look at how the chems are running down on the Whorl, after only a few hundred years of isolation.

I don't understand this point. If Typhon can stock the Whorl with many thousands of chem soldiers, why does he not use them on Urth? Perhaps they were intended just for the Whorl, but again I find this quite dubious. Why should it be so?