

Typhon's folly?

The Urth list — 8 messages, 6 voices, 08 Sep 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4210>

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Roy C. Lackey — 08 Sep 2003, 05:48

Last month mantis suggested that the reason Typhon built the _Whorl_ was as a hedge against the possible failure of his plans for a new empire. Maybe so. Over the years there have been two main schools of thought on what--make that "who"-- caused the black hole in Urth's sun. Some have held that it was caused by, or at the behest of, the Increate, as punishment for the past sins of the Old Empire. Others hold that Typhon was somehow the cause. I have argued in the past for the first theory; now I want to explore the other possibility; not the mechanics of it, but how it may relate to the LS and SS books.

We don't know just how big the _Whorl_ was, but it was huge. Its long axis had to have been hundreds of miles long. It would have taken tremendous amounts of energy just to hollow out a rock that big, to say nothing of the resources consumed by the landscaping of the interior, the construction of cities, Mainframe, the Long Sun and all the other provisioning. I think it has been suggested before, by others, that Typhon somehow tapped the sun for energy in furtherance of his plans for empire, and that it was his tampering with the sun that caused its decline. I am suggesting that he tapped the sun for the energy needed to build the _Whorl_.

If mantis is right about Typhon building the _Whorl_ as a hedge against the failure of his plans for empire, then the irony is that his fall-back position led ultimately to that failure. With the decline of the sun came crop failures, a revolt of the masses, his desertion by his most trusted lieutenants and, eventually, his death, alone, behind that curtain on the mountain that bore his likeness.

-Roy

Andy Robertson — 08 Sep 2003, 05:52 · follows Roy C. Lackey

The Sun is rather bigger, of the order of a million miles across, 100 times wider than the Earth. No perceptable fraction of its energy could have been needed up to reshape the Whorl or indeed to vaporise it.

hartshorn

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

From: "Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net>

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Spectacled Bear — 08 Sep 2003, 13:16 · follows Andy Robertson

At 06:52 2003-09-08, Andy Robertson wrote:

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True. But a small black hole would be a most excellent thing for hollowing out an asteroid. Of course, you would have to be careful not to drop it...

Spectacled Bear.

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

From: "Roy C. Lackey" <rlackey at stic.net>

We don't know just how big the _Whorl_ was, but it was huge. Its long axis had to have been hundreds of miles long.

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Andy Robertson — 08 Sep 2003, 12:48 · follows Spectacled Bear

Nonetheless, I really think we are missing something here.

Wolfe talks at one point of "local" "solar" and "galactic" levels of technology, right?

I think the fundamental significance of the Whorl is that it is a starcrosser built be "solar" technology. It does not have the almost existential structure and function of the Ship. It is complex and full of wheels, not simple enough for a star-sailor to handle. It is bounded within the world of relativity, where events must follow one sequence (for Wolfe clearly understands that FTL = time machine and therefore that the Ship can travel back and forth in time).

In Wolfe, technology always has a symbolic function. The "galactic" levels of tech actually merge into the machineries of the Increate. The failure of Typhon to attain this level of being is signalled by the flaws and malfunctions of his creation.

hartshorn

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

From: "Spectacled Bear" <spectacled.bear at pobox.com>

True. But a small black hole would be a most excellent thing for hollowing out an asteroid. Of course, you would have to be careful not to drop it...

Don Doggett — 09 Sep 2003, 01:25 · follows Andy Robertson

On Sunday, September 7, 2003, at 10:48 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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crop failures, a revolt of the masses, his desertion by his most trusted lieutenants and, eventually, his death, alone, behind that curtain on the mountain that bore his likeness.

On Monday, September 8, 2003, at 05:48 AM, Andy Robertson wrote:
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Don adds:

I think Roy is right but not quite in the way he intended. Typhon did cause the black hole through his misuse of solar technology but it was the hieros I think who put it there in order to punish his hubris and protect their interests. A dying sun won't build a solar powered empire and the symbolic effects would be devastating. As they obviously were.

matthew.malthouse — 09 Sep 2003, 15:03 · follows Don Doggett

On 08/09/2003 06:52:33 "Andy Robertson" wrote:
The Sun is rather bigger, of the order of a million miles across, 100 times wider than the Earth. No perceptible fraction of its energy could have been needed up to reshape the Whorl or indeed to vaporise it.

Roy suggests that Typhon's tampering might have done the damage - the means employed to draw off energy rather than the amount of energy actually utilised.

In the venerable tradition of SF wand waving say a "string" taking energy from the sun to your asteroid working facility. Job done have shutdown failure that collapses the string into a singularity. Scientifically it's nonsense yet plausible with a vigorous enough wand. In human terms it's entirely consistent with the type of mind that built nuclear power stations leaving shutdown and cleaning solutions to be developed when they might be required.

As a narrative I like the concept. Within Wolfe's Urth I'd find it awkward because it implies a technological sophistication that I don't believe Typhon had.

Matthew

James Wynn — 09 Sep 2003, 15:45 · follows matthew.malthouse

Matthew says:

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Well, the concept fits thematically with Typhon's name and identification with Set and all the other serpents that devoured the Sun during an eclipse. So naturally the concept is attractive to me.

Once one presumes the technology to implant a black hole into a star, all bets are off for plausibility. It doesn't have to mean sending a beam of "energy" to where you want it ~ it could be some other method as inconceivable to us as power lines would be to someone in the 17th century.

Propulsion/Mirror technology and Energy technology are not necessarily the same thing. There is no need to believe that because Typhon did not have access to one, that he did not have access to the other. Typhon himself didn't seem to understand how this technology worked precisely himself.

The ancient Sumerians invented algebra, but never figured out papyrus or advanced metallurgy. The Greeks made startling advances in astronomy (discovering heliocentricity, the Earth's spherical shape, and methods for measuring the distance to the moon and the circumference of the Earth) but never developed a scientific method.

It's possibly due to my naiveté in practical science, but it never struck me as awkward.

Crush

matthew.malthouse — 09 Sep 2003, 16:18 · follows James Wynn

On 09/09/2003 16:45:48 "James Wynn" wrote:

It's possibly due to my naiveté in practical science, but it never struck me as awkward.

It could cause me to revise my conception of the Urth universe. You can be sure I find that damn awkward! :-)

Matthew