

Apu's Eclipse

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 18 May 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/43>

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.

Joel Priddy — 18 May 1997, 20:36

alga,

Thanks for the pointer towards Peter Carey. I haven't read him, but there's a copy of Tristan Smith just sitting on the library shelf, waiting for me. BTW, I very much enjoyed History of Hell. Write lots more, okay?

Tusk,

ditto re: the Pastel City. Turns out that the local university library has a copy. I wonder if my old card will still work?

Okay, I will now proceed to distance myself from any non-Wolfe-writer threads until I've heard from on-high that it's permitted on this list. Back to the matters at hand. I thought I'd do a little thinking-out-loud on the subject of Apu Panchau's eclipse.

-----SPOILERS-----

--> Okay, we know that Severian's life is spared by the fact that the sunrise is delayed one morning when he is held by the autochthons.

--> During this extended night Severian sees stars from the wrong season. Stars he'd expect to see for that season where he in his native time, but this is presumably before the Urth's axis-shift.

--> When the sun does appear, it has already risen a considerable distance.

--> We are told in the afterword that the plausible cause is an eclipse of some sort, having discounted halting the Urth's rotation as too drastic, and mass-hypnosis as too pat.

--> Severian has a certain amount of control of time and space which seems to manifest itself most potently when he feels himself to be in dire need.

--> Severian has three friends, the Hierodules, who live backwards through time, and own a spaceship. The Hierodules are attentive listeners, and have drawn conclusions from Severians past stories, including the one that led them to find him among the autochthons.

Two conclusions that seem plausible from this are:

(1) Severian worked some sorta time-hoodoo, but made a mistake because the fact of the axis-shift hadn't quite sunk into his head yet.

Maybe he took the whole village through time, maybe he just opened up a passage in the Corridors of Time to look in on the night sky of a different era (can other people see into such openings? Could Severian see the Green Man's passage?)

Severian may or may not have enough power to accomplish such a task. He had enough power to get to this point in the past in the first place, but he seems to be of limited power several decades later when the villagers again threaten his life. I would definitely try to confine thoughts on Severian as the source of the eclipse to things he could have done right at that moment, as opposed to thinking about what he might go back in time, after the fact, to set up. For one reason, I think at any later point Severian would not have made the

seasonal-astronomy mistake. For a second reason, it's a little too "Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey."

or

(2)The Hierodule's ship is highly reflective, so that when they position it between the village and the sun, it reflects the night sky from a different angle, thereby showing a different season's sky.

Are there any previous descriptions of the Hierodule ship (and would it necessarily be the same ship they'd have in the remote past?) or any other evidence that they might have a reflective ship? Or a ship that could make itself reflective if needed (and it certainly would be a nice feature on a space craft)? Would light sails be as reflective as would be needed to produce the described eclipse? If they were, I think Severian wouldn't have described them as being fuligin and silver, but as mis-matched pieces of night sky. But then, maybe that's what he meant (I'd read it as the sails being fuligin on one side, and silver on the other).

The thing that gets me about this is: if Wolfe bothers to tease us with this event in the Afterward, I can't help but feel that the solution must point towards some other unstated plot point. Therefore, I find the two above conclusions suspect because they're so self-contained.

Anyone have any thoughts?

-cephalothorax-

m.driussi — 18 May 1997, 21:51 · follows Joel Priddy

Reply: Item #5505781 from URTH at LISTS.BEST.COM@INTERNET#

cephalothorax,

I think your number two is closer. But by "hierodule's ship" you seem to be referring only to the flying saucer timecraft first seen hovering over the tower of Baldanders. My hunch is that it is the other ship that features so prominently at the beginning of URTH.

=mantis=

Reusch — 19 May 1997, 07:38 · follows m.driussi

Joel,

It's been quite a while since I've read BOTNS, but I thought that it was revealed in Urth that it was Tzadkiel's ship which eclipsed the sun for Apu.

Anyone else remember this?

Vance

Derek Bell — 19 May 1997, 18:05 · follows Reusch

In message <199705182204.PAA13202 at lists1.best.com>, m.driussi at genie.com writes:

[Posted from URTH, a mailing list about Gene Wolfe's New Sun and other works]
cephalothorax,

I think your number two is closer. But by "hierodule's ship" you

seem to be referring only to the flying saucer timecraft first seen hovering over the tower of Baldanders. My hunch is that it is the other ship that features so prominently at the beginning of URTH.

=mantis=

I'd assumed it was that vessel too - the stars that are wrong for the season are wrong because they are normally drowned in the glare of the Sun - they wouldn't be visible for another few months in the future or past, except during eclipses.

Terrel - how did you guess astronomy is one of my interests? :)

Joel Priddy — 20 May 1997, 14:36 · follows Derek Bell

Okay, consensus seems to be... Tzadkeil as eclipse-maker.

Makes plenty sense to me, and I appreciate the more astronomy-savvy amongst us filling me in on the whole you-can-see-stars-you-wouldn't-normally-see-during-an-eclipse thing. So, just to plumb the depths of my ignorance a little further... Why is Tzadkiel's ship causing eclipses? We know that it doesn't usually come any further in-system than the ring of Dis. Is it to make a dramatic statement of the fact that Severian is still under Tzadkiel's protective wing (so to speak)? To illustrate the fact that it, and all its theological implications, is still a presence in this far-remote past? Or does it refer to some specific or implied plot point I'm missing out on?

-cephalothorax-