

Severian's miraculous eclipse

The Urth list — 19 messages, 9 voices, 25 Apr 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4574>

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b sharp — 25 Apr 2006, 19:13

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URL: </pipermail/urth-urth.net/attachments/20060425/05c8c8f9/attachment.html>

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 25 Apr 2006, 20:29 · in reply to b sharp

Welcome.

It's nice that your first post is an attack on "received wisdom." There's a kind of tradition of that around here.

My own take is that, yes, I think it's Tzadkiel who saves Severian with an eclipse. The shape of the ship isn't all that relevant -- though it is, as you say, a "forest" of masts and sails, I suspect that the aggregate silhouette (which is all that matters for this purpose) approximates a sphere.

The real question is how Tzad knows to do it, and exactly when to do it. I don't think the Hieros are omniscient (or omni-anything), so timing becomes somewhat problematic; it almost seems as if Severian must have been (though unaware of it) in communication with the Hieros to make it happen so perfectly ... which comes back to unconscious use of Star Power.

I'm not bothered by the idea that he did/didn't have access to his alter-ego White Fountain at this point; we know he misleads us at points.

One side note ...

I'd like to address an issue that was discussed in the past which is the eclipse which saves Severian from being killed by the primitive tribesmen in the early days of Urth.

Say, rather, "earlier." The days of Apu-Punchau are within, say, a geological period or so of Sev's time: close enough that when he's heading north with Dorcas and Jolenta it's still recognizable as a city (albeit ruined), and not subsumed by geological processes into, say, a mine, or part of a mountain, as the really old cultures (like ours) have been in Severian's time.

--Dan'l

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.

-- St Teresa of Avila

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

James Wynn — 25 Apr 2006, 20:54 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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URL: </pipermail/urth-urth.net/attachments/20060425/9332f609/attachment.htm>

James Wynn — 25 Apr 2006, 21:06 · follows James Wynn

Hmmm... I was unsuccessful in separating my message from your HTML format. That makes me look pretty stupid. Lets try it again.

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

From: James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net>

Sent: Apr 25, 2006 3:54 PM

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Subject: Re: (urth) Severian's miraculous eclipse

Welcome mr. sharp!

Just so you know, if you send your mail to the list in html format, it will not be posted to the listserver and viewable in the archives. I suggest sending it as in plain text. I would have spent more time a response to you, but my primary purpose is to get your post into the the archives so other people who only read posts there, can respond to it. It is included intact below.

For starters, I'll just say that for Tzadkiel's ship to cause an eclipse, the total *apparent* diameter of Tzadkiel's ship from the ground (including masts and sails) need only be that of a penny. That is really to small to differentiate the masts and sails from the body of the ship without the aid of a telescope, especially with the sun behind it. If you've ever seen even a partial eclipse, you know that when the moon gets close to the sun, it disappears. To the unaided eye, an eclipse looks like the sun is going out, not as though the moon is blocking it.

If the ship looked much larger than a penny then it might not have even looked like an eclipse to an observer. It would have looked like a big thing blocking the sun. A miracle, of course, but not of the same sort.</DIV>

Aside from that...well, this isn't a very fact-based argument, but "the moon caused the eclipse" is not a very Gene Wolfe way of doing things.

J

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

From: b sharp <BSHARPORFLAT at HOTMAIL.COM

Sent: Apr 25, 2006 2:13 PM
To: urth at lists.urth.net

Subject: (urth) Severian's miraculous eclipse

Greetings all. Long time Wolfe fan who recently discovered and much more recently finished perusing the archives.

I'd like to address an issue that was discussed in the past which is the eclipse which saves Severian from being killed by the primitive tribesmen?in the early days of Urth. It seems most experts have concurred that the eclipse was caused by Tzadkiel's ship. This explanation doesn't seem plausible to me. Vast as that ship might be, I can't see how it could block the sun but not be noticable as a manufactured object. It isn't a sphere but rather a forest of masts and sails which I would think would have to be visible as shadow as it moves on and stops blocking the sun. Moreover all the descriptions of the ship suggest it wouldn't come so close to gravitational bodies such as the Urth, moon and sun. Certainly not to accomplish the simple goal of dissuading a few tribal people from committing murder, since the hierogrammates seem to rely on

agents and abilities which could accomplish the same goal so much more easily. </DIV>

Wolfe suggests the thoughtful reader could guess what opaque body could have been used to block the sun. I feel he was being ironic in that it wouldn't take much thought at all to deduce the object used was the same one used by "A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court" and others in similar circumstance; that being the normal cause of an eclipse, the moon. In Severian's time on Urth during the Typhon era he demonstrated the unconscious ability to cause major catastrophic natural events when he was angry or faced with death, i.e. a hurricane and an earthquake. I have always felt this eclipse was a similar event, caused either by stopping the moon in orbit or the earth in rotation.

Now it might be argued that Severian did not have access to the power of his star/white fountain at this time. It is implied because he doesn't seem to be able to travel through the corridors of time back to a more pleasant era. But Severian does very casually note that during his stay with the primitive people he heals those who are sick, both with his learned skills and in the manner he used to cure Declan (which was done with star power). </DIV>

I'll leave it at that for my first post and check any feedback you might have? :-)

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 26 Apr 2006, 06:32 · follows James Wynn

Hi & welcome b sharp:

On Wed, 26 Apr 2006 05:13:46 +1000 b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:
Greetings all. Long time Wolfe fan who recently discovered and much more recently finished perusing the archives.

I'd like to address an issue that was discussed in the past which is the eclipse which saves Severian from being killed by the primitive tribesmen in the early days of Urth. It seems most experts have concurred that the eclipse was caused by Tzadkiel's ship. This explanation doesn't seem plausible to me.

I tend to side with the Tzadkiel ship explanation, but it is interesting to think about what it was doing there & at that time.

Maybe it was dropping a black hole into the sun? This would be a nice touch, I think: the beginning of the end of the Old Sun and the distant birth of the New, at about the same time.

I've always assumed the black hole thing happened around the time of Typhon, but is that necessarily the case?

The death of the Old Sun is clearly a long, long process: how long must have the black hole been eating away at it, for the effects to be noticeable by Typhon's time?

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 26 Apr 2006, 06:55 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On Wed, 26 Apr 2006 16:32:11 +1000 I wrote:

I tend to side with the Tzadkiel ship explanation, but it is interesting to think about what it was doing there & at that time.

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must have the black hole been eating away at it, for the effects to be noticeable by Typhon's time?

FWIW, a long time from black hole insertion to noticeable effect on Urth is consistent with solar physics. Eg from the often-reliable Wikipedia: 'Estimates of the "photon travel time" [from core to photosphere] range from as much as 50 million years to as little as 17,000 years.'

In story terms, I don't have UOTNS here, but isn't there a reference to the death of Apu Panchu being the death of the Old Sun? Or something like that.

Rex Racer — 26 Apr 2006, 12:14 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Hello. I am delurking as the timelines involved have been of interest for me for a good number of years.

I am at work, and do not have my books handy, but I did believe the blackhole was inserted as punishment for Humanities' sin of taking its wars and strife out amongst the stars. I do believe this happened under Typhon. This punishment/crisis triggered not only the Conciliator appearing, in order to give comfort to the people and prophesize the coming of the New Sun, but in his arrogance (thinking he could get around the planet's death sentence) the Tyrant built and sent out the starcrossing Whorl with himself and his family as its gods- no Heirodules or other true representatives of the Increate to hamper the now Pas' rule either aboard the ship or on the new worlds to be settled!

I thought that Apu Panchu heralded the beginning of the movement of the New Sun (white fountain) towards Earth's sun, and not the insertion of the blackhole, so that it could arrive after its long voyage to Urth at the proper time after her epitome was found True.

There are references of the time from Typhon to Severian as being counted in chiliads, and when Silk is in Nessus (I personally think at this point Silkhorn is no longer an apt name) to bury poor, young Scylla/Cilinia (sp from memory, sorry if wrong) he says she has been dead for "many centuries." Had the span been only 300 years as the calendar inside the Whorl seems to indicate (the Cargo do not seem cognizant of possible time dialation do to the speed of flight of the Whorl, not even the chems, like Marble who doesn't understand how her internal chronometer could be off by such a large factor- and the Crew doesn't exactly chat up the Cargo about the scientific specifications of their travels, though they are friendly enough when encountered), I think Silk would have used "several" or "a few" centuries to quantify the time past.

Leaving Wikipedia's reliability aside, though vastly clever and intelligent both, Mr. Wolfe is telling a story so a period of about 3-4000 years from Typhon and the fatal stab into the Sun's heart to punish Humanity until Humanity and Urth's renewal is not unreasonable- to me anyway.

Oh, and to be actually on topic, I think that it is indeed Tzadkiel's ship, heralding the "transformation" of Severian to Apu Panchu and the birth of the New Sun in its far off creche, by making all dark over Earth until the Epitome brought back the light so to speak, balancing his bringing of the New Sun at Urth's end. Tzadkiel was with Severian in several forms during his voyage to stand for all of Humanity so I can easily see him standing by Severian one last time, though chronologically, the first. It just ties together so nice and symbolically.

Well, for what it is worth, there is my response. Be gentle, please- it is my first time! :-)

On 4/26/06, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:

On Wed, 26 Apr 2006 16:32:11 +1000 I wrote:

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In story terms, I don't have UOTNS here, but isn't there a reference to the death of Apu Panchu being the death of the Old Sun? Or something like that.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 26 Apr 2006, 13:27 · follows Rex Racer

Howdy Rex.

On Wed, 26 Apr 2006 22:14:26 +1000 Rex Racer <rex.racerx at gmail.com> wrote:

Hello. I am delurking as the timelines involved have been of interest for me

for a good number of years.

I am at work, and do not have my books handy, but I did believe the blackhole was inserted as punishment for Humanities' sin of taking its wars and strife out amongst the stars. I do believe this happened under Typhon.

But given the way the Hieros etc etc can operate out of time, it's certainly possible for the punishment to be inflicted before the crime, so to speak. Or at any rate, for the seeds of the punishment to be sewn before the crime is committed.

After all, this is true of the agent of the redemption: the New Sun is created before the crime (probably, depending on whether you think the Apu Panchau era is before the war-and-strife-amongst-the- stars era, which I do).

If the black hole thing happens in Typhon's time, then you have the redemption starting before the punishment, which would also be odd.

Rex Racer — 26 Apr 2006, 15:15 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

"But given the way the Hieros etc etc can operate out of time, it's certainly possible for the punishment to be inflicted before the crime, so to speak. Or at any rate, for the seeds of the punishment to be sewn before the crime is committed."

I guess that to me rings wrongly- it just doesn't seem to fit in with certain (admittedly Christian (Catholic for me)) ideals of wrong and punishment, especially taking into account the meaning of Severian's name at that time (and please correct me if I misrecollect) as "Head of Dawn." Apu is the beginning of the New Sun that will come (as The Conciliator is its herald and Severian its self), not the beginning of the punishment that necessitates its coming- at least to me.

The redemption being at hand before the punishment makes sense to me, in as much as the Redeemer existed before we who needed redeeming in theology; so the mechanism for Urth's renewal, once the Epitome had been found (found himself?) worthy of it happening could take place in the past. Several times, it is mentioned that some knew already Severian had passed his test because of the powers he had which came not from the claw, but his connection to his extra-solar self- the New Sun.

I can see Heirodules planting the seeds of success in the distant past, but it strikes me as uncharacteristically vindictive to my reading of their characters for them to punish ahead of time. That part of the book is hopeful and positive and someone the planting of the black hole during that part seems to run counter to energia of that moment in the text.

I can see where you are coming from, and we may be looking at the same coin, but different sides; still, I must at this time respectfully disagree and hold to my thought that the black hole came to be when the offense occurred- that is, under The Monarch Typhon.

Quick Addendum about how long Triskele was with Severian: I just always figured Severian was playing loose with the truth again, as he does throughout his own text; I can see a young man given to stretching or glossing over the truth trying to impress his odd, seemingly fantastic visitors with various non-truths. I do not think Mr. Wolfe nodded here, nor do I think Silk had an effect on the history found in the Book of the New Sun. I think Severian was fibbing.

Rex Racer — 26 Apr 2006, 15:19 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Oh, and "hello"- I apologize for seeming rudeness, and wanted to acknowledge your greeting. No more off topic messages, I promise!

On 4/26/06, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:
Howdy Rex.

Jeff Wilson — 26 Apr 2006, 15:20 · in reply to Rex Racer

Rex Racer wrote:

I thought that Apu Panchu heralded the beginning of the movement of the New Sun (white fountain) towards Earth's sun, and not the insertion of the blackhole, so that it could arrive after its long voyage to Urth a the proper time after her epitome was found True.

This isn't necessary in a Christian allegory about an eternal Pancreator; just as Christ was present at the Creation before there was anyone to be saved, it's fitting that the Pancreator, foreseeing the sorrowful misdeeds of mankind, sent the white fountain toward the earth ages before it was needed, to give it time to complete its ages-long journey. Apu Punchau greets the first light of the WF reaching earth, but doubtless it had been on its way already.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 26 Apr 2006, 15:33 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:
Welcome.

Say, rather, "earlier." The days of Apu-Punchau are within, say, a geological period or so of Sev's time: close enough that when he's heading north with Dorcas and Jolenta it's still recognizeable as a city (albeit ruined), and not subsumed by geological processes into, say, a mine, or part of a mountain, as the _really_ old cultures (like ours) have been in Severian's time.

I don't think you can support more than a few hundred centuries' separation between the eras. the stuff in the mines and mountain sides is easily explainable by the same technology that makes mountains into figures of rulers. And, "apu" is a surviving word for "god" and "mountain" (they're the same thing as far as the Quecha are concerned).

Hmm, so the engines of Typhon literally make new gods out of old....

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Rex Racer — 26 Apr 2006, 15:36 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Thank you. You have expressed it better than I, but that is largely my point, and why I do not see the black hole being inserted in the sun when the affirmation of life that is the first light of the FW reaches earth. It seems to break the symbolism of the text at that point for me.

I see the seed of redemption preceding the need for it, but I do not see the seeds of punishment being sown before the crime has been comitted.

On 4/26/06, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
Rex Racer wrote:

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Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 26 Apr 2006, 19:26 · follows Rex Racer

Greetings, Rex

Well, for what it is worth, there is my response. Be gentle, please- it is my first time! :-) <<

Fwiw, and speaking in general terms, I think you got it right.

I don't think there's much room for doubt that the sun was wounded in Typhon's era. That's why he mentioned his scientists' errors in calculating the effects of the black hole. The decline in the sun's activity, in just a "few years", led to famine and riots.

Whether the decline of the sun was caused directly by the Hierodules or Typhon doesn't really matter, in a religious sense. It can -- and probably will <g> -- be argued that Typhon, if he did it, like Satan, was doing the Increate's bidding, whether he intended to or not.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 26 Apr 2006, 20:29 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 4/26/06, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:
I don't think there's much room for doubt that the sun was wounded in Typhon's era. That's why he mentioned his scientists' errors in calculating the effects of the black hole. The decline in the sun's activity, in just a "few years", led to famine and riots.

Yep. In fact, I always took this to mean that Typhon's scientists had actually put the Black Hole into the Old Sun, at his behest.

Why? Only speculations here -- perhaps as part of his plans to return to the stars; perhaps because he felt that Urth really should not continue once he was gone.

--Dan'l

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.
-- St Teresa of Avila
<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

mournings glory — 26 Apr 2006, 21:12 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Mssrs. Lackey and Danehy-Oakes writing respectively:

I don't think there's much room for doubt that the sun was wounded in Typhon's era. That's why he mentioned his scientists' errors in calculating the effects of the black hole.

Yep. In fact, I always took this to mean that Typhon's scientists had actually _put_ the Black Hole into the Old Sun, at his behest.

This seems to belie Sev's response to the villager in _Urth_ who, in referencing early snowfalls two years in a row, proclaims, "The sky people are angry at us."

Severian: ""The sky people--*the Hierodules and Hierarchs*--do not hate us. It is only that they are remote from us, and they fear us because of things we did before, long ago when our race was young."

Ergo, it seems Typhon had no direct involvement.

em

Tony Ellis — 26 Apr 2006, 22:37 · follows mournings glory

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Say, rather, "earlier." The days of Apu-Punchau are within, say, a geological period or so of Sev's time: close enough that when he's heading north with Dorcas and Jolenta it's still recognizeable as a city (albeit ruined), and not subsumed by geological processes into, say, a mine, or part of a mountain, as the _really_ old cultures (like ours) have been in Severian's time.

Actually I think b_sharp is correct here, that Apu-Punchau is from "the early days of Urth." That is, from our own history. The clincher is that when Famulimus and co find Severian among these people she says she is surprised to find him "where men have scarce begun." That statement alone puts us at the dawn of history.

Even before The Urth of the New Sun came out I always got the impression that Apu Punchau's town was supposed to originate some time in our own past. The way Merryn talks about it in Conciliator, it sounds seriously, major league old.

It also sounds as if it may now exist outside of normal time. The herdsman tells Severian at some length how spooky this place is, and particularly that it "bends" your path so that you must always pass through it. This reminds Severian of the Botanical Gardens, and me too. In the Urth books, time-travel is regularly linked to movement through space.

I quite agree that if periods of future history have become geological strata, then anything as old as an Incan or pre-Incan city should be long gone. But I think Apu-Punchau's town, or at least his tomb, has been supernaturally preserved. Severian actually asks "why is his palace still standing when the rest of the town is only tumbled stones?" so it's clear something funny is going on.

Needless to say he never gets a straight answer. But "because it contained the body of a miracle-working, time-travelling demigod" works for me.

Jeff Wilson — 27 Apr 2006, 03:06 · in reply to mournings glory

mournings glory wrote:

Mssrs. Lackey and Danehy-Oakes writing respectively:

I don't think there's much room for doubt that the sun was wounded in Typhon's era. That's why he mentioned his scientists' errors in calculating the effects of the black hole.

Yep. In fact, I always took this to mean that Typhon's scientists had actually put the Black Hole into the Old Sun, at his behest.

This seems to belie Sev's response to the villager in Urth who, in referencing early snowfalls two years in a row, proclaims, "The sky people are angry at us."

Severian: ""The sky people--*the Hierodules and Hierarchs*--do not hate us. It is only that they are remote from us, and they fear us because of things we did before, long ago when our race was young."

Ergo, it seems Typhon had no direct involvement.

If I recall correctly, Typhon was the **last** stellar tyrant, not the first, and actively sought to copy or surpass the accomplishments of his predecessors. Thus, the hieros could be fearing the fell deeds of the earlier tyrants, while Typhon's hand in damaging the Old Sun was the last (and admittedly largest) black mark in a very long line of them on humanity's record.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

b sharp — 27 Apr 2006, 12:19 · follows Jeff Wilson

Thanks for all the helpful responses! I'm not the most computer literate but I think this is now in plain text and postable.

I am almost ready to bow to the "received wisdom" regarding Tzadkiel's ship as the source of the eclipse though I am still clinging a bit to Sev's own ability to create natural phenomena, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, as a possible cause. Are there some who question that Sev caused the earthquake when hit by the convulsor in the courtyard?

I think I will agree with Tony Ellis (and Famulimus) that Apu Punchau lives in a time period previous to our own and that special forces keep the Stone Town as preserved as it is in Sev's time. Unlike the primitive villages and towns of the future, Wolfe gives no hints here of a greater civilization existing previous to Apu-Punchau such as advanced relics or artifacts. He makes no suggestion there is a larger civilization somewhere dominating and demanding tribute from Apu Punchau's village. Faced with an attack by nomads, the village has only its own defenses to rely on. This suggests this is a pre-Pizarro and probably pre-Incan (1400's) empire village.

The question of the black hole (the flaw, the claw) being placed in our sun was brought up to explain what Tzadkiel's ship might be doing there at the "dawn of history". I like the symmetry of the black hole and the white fountain being created simultaneously in our distant past and then reunited in our far-flung future. Severian ran through the Corridors of Time (Brook Madregot?) until he couldn't, suggesting he stopped at the time of the creation of the white fountain. And also at the time of creation of the black hole? Has the black hole (size of a penny?) been very slowly eating at the sun through our history and lifetimes but not noticeable until the time of Typhon?

If Severian, as the New Sun, brings the white fountain, might he also, as Dark Sun, Head of the

Day, bring the black hole? Do humanity's sins (execution of a savior) extend far before Typhon to our earliest roots? Is there any way that this bringing of the black hole (not the "opaque body") is the cause of the eclipse? Could Apu Punchau have been killed in the year 33 A.D. (isn't Sev about 33 years old at this point?)