

Hierodules and time

The Urth list — 12 messages, 5 voices, 25 May 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4618>

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b sharp — 25 May 2006, 14:29

Macronaut is right. It was Vodalus.

Mental note to self- stop posting from work when your books are home.
self note to mental- fat chance.

-bdull

Macronaut — 25 May 2006, 18:56 · in reply to b sharp

Not trying to be a doubting Thomas, just curious
whether Typhon also had made a chess metaphor -- that
would increase its importance as a theme.

I know little about chess, but isn't it true that
black is considered to have a slight disadvantage in
chess because white moves first? Wonder if that has
significance?

Macronag

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 26 May 2006, 11:18 · follows Macronaut

So just trying to find a consistent solution to the Hierodules/time problem (foolish though the attempt may be).

1. There is evidence that they do, by nature, experience time backwards.

- When parting from Sev on the ship, F asks: "Tell me if you will see us more?" Sev says: "Many times". She says: "You know our nature, that is plain. We greet you then, and say farewell". (UOTNS Ch26)

- Earlier, Sev ruminates on the recent attempt on his life outside his cabin: "Doubtless the Hierodules, whose time ran counter to the time we know, had foreseen <etc>". (UOTNS Ch6)

2. On the other hand, there is evidence for Don's sensible solution (ie that they occasionally travel into the past, but do not actually live backwards).

- These same two encounters on the Ship. For them, their first meeting with Sev is the first occasion they meet on the Ship, at the time of the attempt on his life; and they already know him when they "greet and farewell" him as he leaves the Ship. They are moving in the same temporal direction as Sev.

- In the encounter at Baldanders' tower, they know of the (earlier) scene in the gardens of the House Absolute in where they (or their colleagues) fired on Baldanders; and they seem to be aware of past interactions with B involving themselves. (Sword Ch34).

- The overall absurdity of trying to imagine any kind of coherent interactions between two entities moving in opposite directions through time.

The easiest solution seems to be to dismiss (1), and go with Don. But then you have some other complications. Sev's first interactions from his POV go like this:

(a) First meet at Baldanders' tower.

(b) Have numerous meetings during the period after the conclusion of BOTNS, while he is Autarch.

The problem is that at point (a), the Hieordules remember (b). So their movements would have to be something like this, at the simplest:

- Arrive at Urth some time when Sev is Autarch, and have multiple interactions with him in forward-time until he leaves for his "trial".

- Then go back in time to start doing stuff with Baldanders, up until the time Sev arrives at his tower.

Of course, their movements could be more complicated than that, but if so, it would only highlight the natural question: Why go to all that bother?

Hmmm. Now I guess I'll go obsess about something else for a while <g>.

b sharp — 26 May 2006, 12:50 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Thalassocrat I think it is simpler than all that. F, B and O move only backward in time, virtually without exception (which marks them as pawns, in Tzadkiel's chess analogy).

Their first meeting with Severian is on Tzadkiel's ship. They go back in time to meet him as Autarch a number of times, they go back to meet him in Baldander's castle, then go back to watch him in Eschatology and Genesis, then go back to find him as Apu Punchau. They (F and B anyway) know the least on Tzadkiel's ship and they know the most in Apu Punchau's time.

Severian knows the least about them during Eschatology and Genesis and a lot on Ship Tzadkiel. They all know the most in Apu Punchau's time because Severian, also a pawn, has reached the end of his time/chessboard and has been plunked back to the beginning as a more powerful player with more flexible moves (as the rules of chess allow).

Now it is true that when they meet Severian for short periods of time they are moving forward in time. Roy (and Gene?) explains that allowing for that is Ossipago's function. If this is hard to swallow, I'll refer you to a quote from Gene Wolfe about the movie Who Framed Roger Rabbit?

Gene is explaining why the universes of the New Sun and the Short Sun had a connection:

Because the books would have been lame if they had not. There's a wonderful bit in the Roger >Rabbit movie nobody seems to get. Roger goes around with handcuffs on his wrists for half an >hour. Then he pulls one hand out of the cuffs and does something with it, and sticks it back in.

Bob (Hoskins, the hard boiled private detective) says, "You mean to tell me you could get out of >those whenever you wanted to?" And Roger says, "No, only when it's funny." That is a profound >expression of the law that governs all writers and performers. The audience doesn't have to think about that, but writers are bound by it. If there's a gun on the wall in Act I, it must be fired >before the end of the play. Etc.

I take this to mean, in our current context, that if Wolfe didn't use a "deus ex machina" storyteller's trick (Ossipago's role) then he would have had to leave out the "backwards in time" nature of Hierodules. And the story would have been worse. And he is, first and foremost, a storyteller.

There is a reference to using "deus ex machina" (he only alludes to this phrase) tricks in the text of BotNS. Something like: "only the worst playwrights use them, but it is better to use them than have the play end badly". I've been looking for it but for the life of me I can't find it again. Help somebody! Roy? Anybody!!!!

-bsharp

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 26 May 2006, 13:14 · follows b sharp

On Fri, 26 May 2006 22:50:58 +1000 b sharp

<bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

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then go back to find him as Apu Punchau. They (F and B anyway) know the

least on Tzadkiel's ship and they know the most in Apu Punchau's time.

No, it doesn't work like that. As I pointed out, they know about the E&G incident at the time they meet Sev at Baldanders' castle. Sword Ch33, Barbatus to Dr Talos: "We could have killed your creator easily enough that night, as you know. We burned him only enough to turn aside his charges." And as I also pointed out, at this stage they know *both* the past (this incident) and the future (dealings with Sev when he is Autarch). Any solution to the conundrum isn't going to be simple.

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storyteller.

I really don't see the relevance of the well-known Roger Rabbit quote to the Hierodule/time issue, sorry, and I can't really see the putative role of Ossipago as a "deus ex machina" device, as the term is usually understood.

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It's aquastor-Malrubius to Sev, at the end of botNS.

b sharp — 26 May 2006, 13:43 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Thalassocrat, sorry I should have been more clear! If the knowledge of the play at Baldanders' castle is not a Wolfe mistake then seems to be using Ossipago in that capacity ("he has a memory like yours"). Q. How do they know? A. Ossipago told them.

Hence the deus ex machina reference (and thanks for finding it!). Gosh, who could be more of a God and a Machine than hierodule/robot Ossipago? He fits the phrase (defined below) almost perfectly and I suspect Wolfe had this in mind as he wrote.

On deus ex machina, Wikipedia says:

Deus ex machina is a Latin phrase that refers to an unexpected, artificial, or improbable character, >device, or event introduced suddenly in a work of fiction or drama to resolve a situation or >untangle a plot. The phrase has been extended to refer to any resolution to a story which does >not pay due regard to the story's internal logic and is so unlikely it challenges suspension of >disbelief; allowing the author to conclude the story with an unlikely, but more palatable ending. In >modern terms the Deus ex machina has also come to describe a person or thing that suddenly >arrives and solves a seemingly insoluble difficulty. While in storytelling this might seem unfulfilling, in >real life this type of figure might be welcome and heroic.

-bsharp

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 26 May 2006, 14:05 · follows b sharp

On Fri, 26 May 2006 23:43:40 +1000 b sharp
<bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:
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knowledge of the
play at Baldanders' castle is not a Wolfe mistake then seems to be
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But when F says "Only O here has memory like yrs", I think it's clear she means like Sev's, who had just said, "I remember everything vey well, as you had better know at once". O's a machine, so he remembers stuff well; there's nothing in the passage, or elsewhere AFAIK, to suggest he has a special time- fixing role.

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mind as he wrote.

But O doesn't get introduced "suddenly". I'm sure the term really refers to the equivalent of suddenly dropping a god into the play to put the brakes on the otherwise-inevitable denouement. It's "god from a machine (ie, a crane)" not "god and machine", of course, and anyway O isn't a god or at all god-like.

Not that it matters; it's a tiny issue, I confess, but time travel always annoys me. And I can't help feeling that Wolfe has something devious going on here, and that I'm missing it completely, which is irritating <g>.

b sharp — 26 May 2006, 15:35 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Thalassocrat says:

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annoys me. And I can't help feeling that Wolfe has something devious going
on here, and that I'm missing it completely, which is irritating <g>.

I disagree! I think this is a very interesting and pertinent topic. And I agree! Wolfe is being devious. Pondering this one is relevant to other Wolfe puzzles.

btw, my two years of Latin class, mostly forgotten, do at least allow me to know that "ex" means "out from". I think you are taking the literal translation of the phrase too strictly (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deus_ex_machina) and missing the point of the Roger Rabbit quote.

A "deus ex machina" has broadly come to mean the literary device defined above. I am saying Ossipago is a metaphor (and apology) for all the "dei ex machinae" (is that the plural? lol) Wolfe uses. He wants to make good stories and will bend credulity a bit to do so.

I think Wolfe is having devious fun with Ossipago. Just as Baldanders is a reverse Frankenstein (monster who creates his doctor), Ossipago is a reverse deus ex machina. He is a machine from the gods, a device, sent to carry a weak thread in the plot. The exact weak thread which is bothering you so much.

I am bookless for now, so I'll have to get back later on the issue of Ossipago's memory. I'm not saying I have all the answers, quite the contrary! I'm just trying my best to help both/all our understandings. In fact I hadn't really given this issue the thought it deserved until you brought it up, for which I am very thankful and appreciative!

-bsharp

Matthew King — 26 May 2006, 18:31 · in reply to b sharp

On May 26, 2006, at 8:35 AM, b sharp wrote:

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Someone did a GoogleFight on this:

<http://www.geegaw.com/archives/0210.shtml#000922>

In b sharp's context, I think I would go with "gods from machines", which would be _dei ex machinis_ or _di ex machinis_. If you like "gods from the machine", parallel to "brothers in law", that would be _di ex machina_

This could raise the question of whether Wolfe has one machine or many.

Chris — 26 May 2006, 21:28 · in reply to b sharp

Forgive me for bringing up something that is old hat, but it's new to me and I don't see it in the archives. I am reading "The Once and Future King", within the first couple of chapters I find this:

[Merlyn has placed a paper in front of a mirror and asked Wart to connect the dots to make a "W", using only the mirror to see.]

"Ah yes. How did I know to set breakfast for two? That was why I showed you the looking glass. Now ordinary people are born forwards in time, if you know what I mean, and nearly everything in the world goes forward too. This makes it quite easy for ordinary people to live, just as it would be easy to join those five dots into a W if you were allowed to look at them forwards, instead of backwards and inside out. But I unfortunately was born at the wrong end of time, and I have to live backwards from in front, while surrounded by a lot of people living forwards from behind. Some people call it having second sight."

He stopped talking and looked at the Wart in an anxious way.

"Have I told you this before?"

"No, we only met about half an hour ago."

"So little time to pass?" said Merlyn, and a big wet tear ran down to the end of his nose. He wiped it off with his pyjamas and added anxiously, "Am I going to tell it you again?"

"I do not know," said the Wart, "unless you have not finished telling me yet."

"You see, one gets confused with Time, when it is like that. All one's tenses get muddled, for one thing. If you know what is going to happen to people, and not what **has** happened to them, it makes it difficult to prevent it happening, if you don't want it to have happened, if you see what I mean? Like drawing in a mirror."

Thalassocrat, sorry I should have been more clear! If the knowledge of the play at Baldanders' castle is not a Wolfe mistake then seems to be using Ossipago in that capacity ("he has a memory like yours"). Q. How do they know? A. Ossipago told them.

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-bsharp

b sharp — 27 May 2006, 19:36 · follows Chris

Chris that was good to remind us, in that thread, of the first? legendary character to live backwards in time. At least one of the first, I'd guess.

Chris — 27 May 2006, 20:17 · in reply to b sharp

I found the reference to mirrors to be interesting, particularly the idea of the Hierodules's attempts to mold our history as a sort of drawing in a mirror. When Wart tries to do this he gets it upside down - an "M" instead of a "W". So if the Hierodules get everything upside down, what is the

real result they were trying to achieve?

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