

Black hole timing, "punishment" etc

The Urth list — 6 messages, 3 voices, 11 Jun 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5050>

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 11 Jun 2008, 00:39

Looking back through the scenes in UTONS following Sev's return to Urth from Yesod, I do get a strong impression that the sun has already been in decline for some time.

As far as I can see, in Typhon's time Sev never comments that the sun seems brighter than in his time, that he can no longer see the stars by daylight etc etc etc.

Obviously, things are at least a little warmer: eg there are orchards in places where fruit couldn't grow in his time. But overall the "two parts in a thousand" drop seems to have produced a situation not hugely different to Sev's time in terms of general "look & feel". And I think it is clear that before the drop, the situation would still have been pretty unlike ours - this drop in our sun's output wouldn't be enough to produce stars by daylight etc etc.

So in terms of Typhon's words quoted by Roy, I go for a reading on which the astronomers knew that the sun had been in decline for a more-or-less lengthy period, and were surprised when it suddenly dropped a notch instead of continuing to decline smoothly & gradually.

(I guess that the sudden drop was caused by the Hierogrammates, to trigger a crisis, and set the stage for the New Sun "religion" and the establishment of the line of Autarchs. From quotes below, it's evident that Sev returns to Urth a couple of years after the drop commences.)

There's nothing in this to tell us when the black hole came into being, of course, but it does leave open the possibility that it was in Apu Panchau's time.

Some of the events upon Sev's return to urth also serve IMO as a grim satire on the myth that it had anything to do with "punishment" or was a measure taken to curb violent humanity or whatever.

In Typhon's time, the notion that "sky people" have wounded the sun as a punishment has general currency, at least amongst the villagers Sev meets when returns to Urth from Yesod (UOTNS XXIX):

Villager: "It snowed before the corn was ripe. This is the second year .. The sky people are angry with us."

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

A little later, another villager says: "All our lives we have gone to the high places and sent the smoke of offerings to them, yet the sky people are angry and send us frost. Men in Nessus say the sun grows cold - ... We have gone to the high places as our fathers did. We ... burned our best ram before the frost came..."

Sev "tried to tell them how the Hierodules feared us because we had spread through the worlds in the ancient times of Urth's glory, extinguishing many other races and bringing our wars everywhere."

Some of the villagers nod as if they understand

Well, maybe, but if Sev hadn't performed a couple of miracles they'd be shooing him away as a lunatic. The notion of "sky people" fearing these pre-industrial peasants inhabiting a resource-depleted world is as absurd as the idea that any kind of justice is served by their suffering for the alleged crimes of distant forebears.

If punishment or restraint were intended, why not *before*,
during or *immediately after* the allegedly violent eruption of ancient humanity?

I don't think there's a good argument that these peasants are just enduring the after effects of a punishment/restraint delivered long before. The old humans were not restrained; they spread through the worlds, and they're still there.

And the only ones who seem to be suffering or restrained are these peasants. The simple, consistent, plausible reading is that this is just what was intended: keep Urth people down, so that when it's time they will be easy to kill off.

Dave Tallman — 11 Jun 2008, 09:22 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Andrew wrote:

As far as I can see, in Typhon's time Sev never comments that the sun seems brighter than in his time, that he can no longer see the stars by daylight etc etc etc.

The sky is cloudy on their arrival, but I notice quite a few descriptions that show a brighter sun:

XXVIII: "We had come to Urth through clouds, as I have said: but the tender found an opening in them... hull and masts were no more than a pinprick of golden light. At length we saw her blossom to a shining speck, like the steel that falls from a file..."

Sev seems extra-dense not to draw the right conclusion, but he may be dazed by his new connection to the White Fountain.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 11 Jun 2008, 12:23 · follows Dave Tallman

On Wed, 11 Jun 2008 19:22:02 +1000 Dave Tallman

<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

Andrew wrote:

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Sorry, that doesn;t work. You can't just point to descriptions of bright sunshine, or things shining in the sun; these occur in Sev's time as well.

Dave Tallman — 11 Jun 2008, 18:19 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Sorry, that doesn;t work. You can't just point to descriptions of bright sunshine, or things shining in the sun; these occur in Sev's time as well.

All right, how about this explanation? The old man in Casdoe's house (Sword XV) says "That was the brightest day I've ever seen. The sun had new life to him, the way a man will when he was sick yesterday and will be sick tomorrow, but today he walks around and laughs so that if a stranger was to come he'd think there was nothing wrong... They always say in prayers that the New Sun will be too bright to look at... But that day I learned it was all true..."

If the sun's output was variable within the old man's lifetime, it might also have been in Severian's. Then Sev might not find it remarkable to see a bright day at times. Most of the days he spent as Conciliator were cloudy, anyway.

By the way, have you noticed how the life of Ymar the Almost Just parallels the life of Severian? He's an apprentice torturer who becomes autarch, and his career is jump-started by miraculous intervention. He underwent the trial, too. Could early interventions by the Hiero-dudes in Reechy's life have formed the basis for a Conciliator-like legend before Sev became Conciliator?

It's vital for Sev's history that the guild start taking the children of women who fall into their hands instead of having their own children (Shadow II). And Ymar apparently did this because of his own personal experience in seeing how Madame Prefect Prisca behaved. If someone else became autarch it might not have happened. This is just one of many self-fulfilling time loops in UotNS. Another fun one is Juturna's saving Sev from drowning "because you spoke" (Urth XLIII).

Adam Thornton — 11 Jun 2008, 18:25 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Jun 11, 2008, at 1:19 PM, Dave Tallman wrote:
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Note that a wildly variable sun is a feature of Jack Vance's Dying Earth, and that there's a lot to be said for the theory that New Sun is Dying Earth rewritten by a better writer.

Adam

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 11 Jun 2008, 23:48 · follows Adam Thornton

On Thu, 12 Jun 2008 04:19:38 +1000 Dave Tallman
<davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

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(Sword XV) says "That was the brightest day I've ever seen. The sun had
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anyway.

Sure, it's possible. And it could be that Roy's interpretation is correct & the black hole event did
happen in Typhon's time. I don't think there's enough info given to really settle this definitively.
In the end, I don't think it's that important. On either reading, the notion of a punishment or
restraint doesn't make any sense to me, except as preparation for the genocide to come.

By the way, have you noticed how the life of Ymar the Almost Just
parallels
the life of Severian? He's an apprentice torturer who becomes
autarch, and
his career is jump-started by miraculous intervention. He
underwent the
trial, too.

Absolutely! It's one of those things that can make you go crazy, trying to figure out if Ymar and
Sev are actually related somehow or other.