

Ships

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 11 Dec 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5814>

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Andrew Mason — 11 Dec 2010, 19:02

Gerry Quinn wrote:

If he had interstellar ships (which would have to

be faster-than-light, I think, to get between the stars in times that would enable him actually to run an empire) it becomes puzzling what was the significance of his launching the Whorl - which Wolfe has said was intended to 'return humanity to the stars'.

Maybe they were just nearly as fast as light, i.e. good enough to escape to the stars. ?We don;t know much - or anything, really - ?about the politics of his empire.

If they were just nearly as fast as light, they would have taken four years to reach the nearest star. (Actually, of course, the stars should have moved, but Wolfe seems to be ignoring that.) Can you really be said to rule a land it takes four years to get to? You can if you have FTL communication even without FTL travel, a la Ursula K. Le Guin or Orson Scott Card, but I see no hint of that in Wolfe. Yes, perhaps he was sending expeditions to the nearer stars, but I still think he's exaggerating when he said he ruled them.

?And as you mention elsewhere, Vodalus confirms the fact of

ships, so it's not just Typhon.

But that, I think, was a lot earlier. Both Cyriaca and Wolfe in interviews seem to say that Typhon was trying to bring back something that had been lost.

As for the Whorl, perhaps it is a question of scale. ?The Whorl can transport many millions of perhaps unwilling colonists. ?Smaller vessels might not transport enough, and might also be even more prone to mission creep.

I conclude that it was

Jonas's ship, or one just like it - at it seems more elegant that it be the same vessel..

Perhaps some of the ship's crew stayed aboard and were interned there pending resolution of their cases, and it later became used for other individuals.

But does this not conflict with the idea that originally it actually was an antechamber? Only gradually did it develop into a prison. So if Kim Lee Soong had been in it from the start, he would have got out. I think it must have been in operation for some time when he entered it.

David Stockhoff — 11 Dec 2010, 20:21 · in reply to Andrew Mason

Doesn't it all depend on the kind of empire you are thinking of? There are rigid empires and flexible ones; personal ones (like Napoleon's and Alexander's) and more structured ones. These

handle distance differently.

Consider how long it took British ships to reach India.

Consider that when Peter the Great died, it took about 5 years for this news to reach Paris.

Consider that the Persian Empire consisted of satrapies which had to be reconquered every few decades even under Cyrus.

Egypt under the Sultans was independent for decades but showed up as Turkish on maps long after the British co-opted it, because the Bey was nominally loyal to the Sultan.

When parts of Central Asia became independent in the 1880s, it took the Chinese 10 years to take it back. Each year their army campaigned, stopped to plant crops, overwintered, and moved on again. No one in the West took any notice except the British and the Russians.

But communications in the Roman Empire were comparatively rapid due to technology and the Middle Sea, and so we naturally relate to that kind of highly structured empire.

If your ships are constantly going out among the stars, you will have ships reaching the provinces as often as you have ships going out. If you have an elite in place in that world or a little king who depends on your support (say, blast pistols delivered annually), you don't need to go out there personally even every four years.

Even if every planet is relatively autonomous, it can still be part of an empire, if the empire is a nominal one or a mercantile one. I think this is why Wolfe doesn't go into the details---it's not worth it. Typhon's empire could have lasted only a century (like the American Empire will) and still stand as a high mark in human interstellar power.

On 12/11/2010 2:02 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:

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Gerry Quinn — 11 Dec 2010, 21:19 · in reply to Andrew Mason

From: "Andrew Mason" <andrew.mason53 at gmail.com>

Gerry Quinn wrote:

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We have FTL communication, via the mirrors. But you may well be right - we know next to nothing about Typhon's supposed interstellar empire; all we are certain of is that he was Emperor on Urth.

I conclude that it was Jonas's ship, or one just like it - at it seems more elegant that it be the same vessel..

Perhaps some of the ship's crew stayed aboard and were interned there pending resolution of their cases, and it later became used for other individuals.

But does this not conflict with the idea that originally it actually was an antechamber? Only gradually did it develop into a prison. So if Kim Lee Soong had been in it from the start, he would have got out. I think it must have been in operation for some time when he entered it.

But he was supposed to be the most distant ancestor of the current occupants! The story is not terribly consistent by either interpretation! Perhaps over time the details became confused...

- Gerry Quinn

Andrew Mason — 12 Dec 2010, 17:34 · follows Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Kim Lee Soong had been in it from the start, he would have got out. I think it must have been in operation for some time when he entered it.

But he was supposed to be the most distant ancestor of the current occupants!

Of one family of current occupants. (I've seen it said quite frequently that he is the ancestor of all the current occupants, but I've never seen why. Jonas specifically refers to a particular family, whose members he lists, who occupy an alcove of their own.) But even if he were the most distant ancestor of all the current occupants, that needn't make him the first occupant. The people who were there in the first few generations all left.

Lee Berman — 12 Dec 2010, 21:36 · follows Andrew Mason

Andrew Mason: Of one family of current occupants. (I've seen it said quite frequently that he is the ancestor of all the current occupants, but I've never seen why. Jonas specifically refers to a particular family, whose members he lists, who occupy an alcove of their own.)

Gene Wolfe spent the decade before writing BotNS watching silly US TV shows with his kids as my parents did with me. The impact of 60's TV shows cannot be underestimated. I've previously identified Jolenta as modeled after Ginger from Gilligan's Island.

A classic book was converted to a classic movie in 1960- Swiss Family Robinson. This story in turn was converted to a cheesy, low-budget SF tv show called Lost In Space, featuring the Robinson Family, the nefarious, conniving Dr. Smith and their noble Robot servitor (Warning! Warning! Danger Will Robinson!).

It is quite apparent that Hethor has been avoiding Jonas since their first meeting. He hides in the tunnel through the Wall of Nessus, avoids him on the path to the House Absolute and avoids him in the antechamber. As a Dr. Smith analog, Hethor does not want to be recognized by his shipmate, the Robot-analog Jonas.

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