

Timescale

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 11 May 1998

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Dan'l Danehy Oakes — 11 May 1998, 11:07

Mr. Malthouse done wrote:

The age of Urth has, from my very first reason seemed to be immense.

There is no question about this. (Wolfe has never hidden that one of his inspirations for this work was Jack Vance's "The Dying Earth.") Some members of this list are interested -- perhaps a bit nigglingly -- in just how immense, just how old Urth is: or, more properly, in developing some clear sense of the intervals between at least the four periods that follow, probably in this order:

- o Our time (or equivalent in the universe-cycle of Urth, which may precede ours)
- o The time of Apu-Punchau (some have argued with some coherency that this is actually earlier than "our time")
- o The time of Typhon, Ymir, and "the Conciliator"
- o Severian's time

Also of possible interest is the time period of the people in the jungle garden (book 1); also, if "the first Severian" refers to an actually separate person, rather than a version of Severian himself, when he lived.

For myself, I think "immense" is good enough.

The miners of Saltus have for generations made a living (shaft) mining for ancient artifacts.

This, as far as it goes, could happen in a millenium or two -- check out what some modern archaeologists do with ruins only a couple millenia old.

Walking down the cliff trail to the forest house Severian notes that the fault that lifted the cliff (a league high??) has exposed the detritus of man's occupation, he even describes some of what he sees I think (floor tiles?)

This, I think, is far more significant; we're clearly talking about a time when humans have been making ceramics for geological ages.

And finally the "newer" mountain ranges are recognisable as such because they are sharp and rugged - in contrast to the 'old' mountain that have all be carved into the likeness of past Autarchs (rather than being softened from weathering).

Those are monarchs (or emperors), not Autarchs (Severian only thinks so as he sees them because he does not know their history).

Did Typhon start the fashion, or was he nearly the aprotheosis of it?

Since he appears to have been the last of the monarchs, I'd say he was its apotheosis. After him, came Ymir the Almost Just, first Autarch.

In any case Typhon's coming to Urth (which I believe to be long after its decline started) is at least one and possibly many geological ages past.

This is where I have to differ with you. It seems fairly clear that it hasn't been too many millenia since the monumental mountains were carved; their detailing is still clear and sharp. They'd erode, ya know.

oh, and had anyone noticed that the sun looked a bit tired?

Yes, but before it's time; there is a "worm" eating at its heart (a black hole).

In the light of the above I don't see much good to be had trying to identify Nessus or other landmarks from our Earth, but to nay-say Buenos Aires: Nessus isn't and wasn't a coastal city; the plate river isn't big enough; Severian turns the wrong way from Trax to reach a battlefront of an invader coming from Centram AM. and in relation to the Plate/Andes Cen.Am is too far away (or the Andes too close) to be the "waist of the world" beyond which the Ascians can be driven.

Any identity between Urth-places and Earth-places seems likely to be symbolic rather than physical. Early in the history of this list, Agla made a quite interesting mapping of Severian's journeys onto (approximately tenth century) Europe, with Nessus as Byzantium. It's in the archives.

Peace,

Roach

--Dan'l Danehy-Oakes	Can you believe that the eagle
Staff Curriculum Developer	will fly with the dove?
Oracle World-Wide Education	Can you believe in the rose
email: ddanehyo at us.oracle.com	in the raised fist'd glove?
phone: 650-506-0793	-- John Michael Talbot

Matthew Malthouse — 12 May 1998, 08:08 · follows Dan'l Danehy Oakes

Dan'l Danehy Oakes wrote:
For myself, I think "immense" is good enough.

I'll go with that!

The miners of Saltus have for generations made a living (shaft) mining for ancient artifacts.

This, as far as it goes, could happen in a millenium or two -- check out what some modern archaeologists do with ruins only a couple millenia old.

Indeed.

Writing that I became doubt stricken: the miners of Saltus plus the Autarch's silver stash etc and I had the impression that the Saltus mines were deep shafts but couldn't, and still can't, remember if that were explicit in the text. It'd make a difference if it were but the implication that useful artifacts could be had from below rock layers sort of confuses me.

Walking down the cliff trail to the forest house Severian

This, I think, is far more significant; we're clearly talking about a time when humans have been making ceramics for geological ages.

Oh Yea! The impact that scene had on first reading still remains.

And finally the "newer" mountain ranges are recognisable as

Those are monarchs (or emperors), not Autarchs (Severian only thinks so as he sees them because he does not know their history).

Forgive the "Autarchs" I wasn't thinking. The whole thing is subtle and creeps up on you. Severian's narration talks of the "shoulders" of the mountains in the way we might use describing the geophysical formation - but then fails to make a distinction between those and the carved shoulders of Typhon's image and you wonder what he really meant in using the phrase before. It sort of grew on me that something odd was going on and then -bang- suddenly my whole perception of the landscape was radically changed, wonderful!

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In any case Typhon's coming to Urth (which I believe to be long after its decline started) is at least one and possibly many geological ages past.

This is where I have to differ with you. It seems fairly clear that it hasn't been too many millenia since the monumental mountains were carved; their detailing is still clear and sharp. They'd erode, ya know.

Granted that Typhon's features are still recognisable in the mountain then I'd agree it wasn't too old, and the latest as he wanted to outdo his predecessors. Here though, I'm hazy: I think that there's mention of some being eroded so far that one might not realise they'd ever been shaped. But right now I don't know if that's textual or just my over active imagination filling in pieces. Time for a re-read I guess.

oh, and had anyone noticed that the sun looked a bit tired?

Yes, but before it's time; there is a "worm" eating at its heart (a black hole).

Doh!

Any identity between Urth-places and Earth-places seems likely to be symbolic rather than physical. Early in the history of this list, Agla made a quite interesting mapping of Severian's journeys onto (approximately tenth century) Europe, with Nessus as Byzantium. It's in the archives.

Thanks, I'll dig it out. I like the idea already though.

And -alga- was kind enough to say:

Welcome, Matthew,

Thankyou. Seems a nice place to be.

[me say N. not coastal]

Um, Nessus isn't now but *was* a coastal city. Can't recall off-hand who, but one of the "wise" characters (one of the ones we can trust) tells Sev that. Which goes along with my own theory that Nessus is a post-Alexandria. (Oh, I know, I know, no one wants to hear this. But it's a lovely theory, and I can go on and on and.....on.)

Sev's journey from the south coast took some days before he saw the first buildings I thought. The Port of Nessus wasn't (as far as I can recall) a sea-port. I took that to be a deliberate obfuscation along with the nature of the Citadel "towers".

I quite like Nessus-as-Alexandria but... Oh, you know. :)

Matthew