

Home Fires and calendar reform **SPOILERS**

The Urth list — 9 messages, 4 voices, 26 Jan 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5945>

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Dave Tallman — 26 Jan 2011, 16:55

In "Home Fires" there is never a mention of months or month names. There are days, weeks, hundred-days, and years. What sort of calendar reform is this? Asimov proposed a uniform calendar abolishing the old months, with 91 days per period. Four of these gives 364 days, a reasonable fit with the solar year. But four hundred-days is 400, which seems unreasonable. Does this calendar just let the years fall where they may? It seems impractical for things like birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries (none of these things are mentioned within the story).

The solar year is slowly getting longer, but it takes centuries to add minutes. This story doesn't seem to be set that far in the future. One possibility is that uniformity for business purposes has trumped all other practical considerations. Possibly it was mandated by the power-mad politicians. Or it may be another separation of religion and state, like the contracts replacing marriage. Religious holidays would be observed based on seasons and solstices, not a particular day of the year.

Jeff Wilson — 27 Jan 2011, 02:50 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On 1/26/2011 10:55 AM, Dave Tallman wrote:

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I haven't read it yet, but isn't it a story with lots of time spent isolated from earth, on top of the time dilation, similar to THE FOREVER WAR? Earth's calendar would become irrelevant while away, but provisioning would depend on the subjective time endured; hundred-man-day units is good for estimation and logistical bundling, where a day's consumables are 1500 minutes worth of oxygen, three hot meals, and 5 kilos of water.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
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< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Mr Thalassocrat — 27 Jan 2011, 02:50 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Thu, Jan 27, 2011 at 3:25 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

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solar year. But four hundred-days is 400, which seems unreasonable. Does this calendar just let the years fall where they may? It seems impractical for things like birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries (none of these things are mentioned within the story).

The solar year is slowly getting longer, but it takes centuries to add minutes. This story doesn't seem to be set that far in the future. One possibility is that uniformity for business purposes has trumped all other practical considerations. Possibly it was mandated by the power-mad politicians. Or it may be another separation of religion and state, like the contracts replacing marriage. Religious holidays would be observed based on seasons and solstices, not a particular day of the year.

Perhaps it's a separation-from-nature thing. Societies destroying themselves by cutting themselves off from nature is a fairly common trope for Wolfe. Abandoning a calendar based on natural cycles fits with this, I suppose.

Dave Tallman — 31 Jan 2011, 00:19 · follows Mr Thalassocrat

Mr. Thalassocrat wrote:

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by cutting themselves off from nature is a fairly common trope for Wolfe.
Abandoning a calendar based on natural cycles fits with this, I suppose.

I found another clue -- Chelle's arrival day is specified as Day 180. This suggests all days in the year are simply numbered from 1 to 400. There is no need for hundred-day period names, because they can easily be worked out from the top digit.

It's clear that there's no synchronization with the seasons. Day 180 is clearly in winter, and for us it would be around the end of June. Probably years are measured in cycles of 400 days, so all ages should be inflated by a factor of about 13/12. The system is absolutely, chillingly logical and human-centric, completely cut off from nature.

Darth Ed — 02 Feb 2011, 05:21 · follows Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

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Probably years are measured in cycles of 400 days, so all ages should be inflated by a factor of about 13/12. The system is absolutely, chillingly logical and human-centric, completely cut off from nature.

Hi, Dave. While I agree that the 100-day billing period for rent is suggestive, I think it's a bit of a stretch to make the leap to 400-day years. It just doesn't seem very pragmatic. And, if humanity were going to deviate from a solar-based calendar system, why choose 400? Why not 1000? 10 periods of 100 days each. Probably have 10 days in a "week" with 10 of those per 100-day period. I.e., the metric calendar system. That seems just as likely.

Anyway, I have another theory regarding the _Home Fires_ calendar, one that isn't wholly incompatible with yours, I think. As I was re-reading chapter 1, the opening scene got me

thinking. It's snowing outside, and, when Skip wakes up, there's a gift of sorts waiting for him. Could this be Christmas???

Later that morning, the waitress says that Chelle will be returning "this coming Saturday" on day 180. Common usage of the phrase "this coming Saturday" leads me to believe that the book opens on day 175 +/- 1 day. (Most people would not use "this coming" to specify a day unless it was 4-6 days away.) So, if Christmas is day 175, then that would mean day 1 is the Fourth of July, which would make sense for a North American Union dominated by the former USA. The "NAU" name is probably just window dressing for the United States essentially occupying the other North American regions anyway. (David Foster Wallace does something similar in *Infinite Jest*.) Perhaps 1776 is also year 1 in this Gregorian-derived calendar system. All of this could be seen as evidence of secularization and extreme nationalism in this future society.

Where my theory possibly breaks down is that the rest of the world surely wouldn't adopt such a calendar system and it doesn't seem likely there wouldn't be a commonly accepted calendar system used by the whole world.

Later,

Darth Ed <http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/pmwiki.php?n=Profiles.DarthEd>

Dave Tallman — 02 Feb 2011, 07:45 · follows Darth Ed

Darth Ed wrote:

Hi, Dave. While I agree that the 100-day billing period for rent is suggestive, I think it's a bit of a stretch to make the leap to 400-day years. It just doesn't seem very pragmatic. And, if humanity were going to deviate from a solar-based calendar system, why choose 400? Why not 1000? 10 periods of 100 days each. Probably have 10 days in a "week" with 10 of those per 100-day period. I.e., the metric calendar system. That seems just as likely.

There is more evidence that fits my theory. Johnson says he held a job for "200 days or so, about half a year." That looks like either the old 365 or my 400, not 1000. They still use week-day names, so likely the seven day week is still around. Business likes to work in quarters of a year, so I stand by 400.

Anyway, I have another theory regarding the *_Home Fires_* calendar, one that

isn't wholly incompatible with yours, I think. As I was re-reading chapter 1, the opening scene got me thinking. It's snowing outside, and, when Skip wakes up, there's a gift of sorts waiting for him. Could this be Christmas???

The only "gift" is the announcement that Chelle is coming home. If it's Christmas, it's also a work-day and nobody says "Merry Christmas" or anything. Based on the travel plans Skip makes, the date must be 178, so the Fourth of July doesn't work (a very clever idea, though). It's extremely likely that the year numbering was restarted with this calendar change.

Skip tells Sally he wants a suite reservation near the port for "the day after tomorrow" which must be for what he expects will be a reunion night with Chelle. He gets it for one night only, and that must be for day 180. His 34-hour bullet train trip, leaving no later than 20:00, is compatible with this. It would get him to the port no later than 06:00 on 180. So even if "this coming Saturday" is a little odd for the waitress to say, it has to be only two days away.

Darth Ed — 02 Feb 2011, 16:24 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman replied:

The only "gift" is the announcement that Chelle is coming home.

It's the perfect gift for a man who has everything (except his contract partner).

If it's Christmas, it's also a work-day and nobody says "Merry Christmas" or anything.

Of course not. This future society is fully secularized. Instead of getting married, people get contracted, etc., so we shouldn't expect anyone to be saying "Merry Christmas" or getting the day off from work. It's just another day to them.

Skip tells Sally he wants a suite reservation near the port for "the day after tomorrow" which must be for what he expects will be a reunion night with Chelle. He gets it for one night only, and that must be for day 180. His 34-hour bullet train trip, leaving no later than 20:00, is compatible with this. It would get him to the port no later than 06:00 on 180. So even if "this coming Saturday" is a little odd for the waitress to say, it > has to be only two days away.

You're right. I assumed they had arrived in Canam the day before (day 179). I meant to reexamine their travel schedule, but I didn't have the book handy at the time. :-/

Later,

Darth Ed <http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/pmwiki.php?n=Profiles.DarthEd>

Dave Tallman — 03 Feb 2011, 01:00 · follows Darth Ed

Darth Ed wrote:

Of course not. This future society is fully secularized. Instead of getting married,

people get contracted, etc., so we shouldn't expect anyone to be saying "Merry Christmas" or getting the day off from work. It's just another day to them.

Christmas as a secular holiday has a lot of momentum, since gift-giving is a major boon to business. What could have killed that? Possibly the energy-poor future would have seen it as an unnecessary waste of resources, and stopped the secular celebration.

Dave Tallman — 03 Feb 2011, 01:10 · follows Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

Christmas as a secular holiday has a lot of momentum, since gift-giving is a major boon to business. What could have killed that? Possibly the energy-poor future would have seen it as an unnecessary waste of resources, and stopped the secular celebration.

Actually, there's evidence for the continued celebration of Christmas, because Chelle says to Mitch, "I bet there's a company Christmas party." She's flirtatiously suggesting that he'll see more of her even after she's settled in as the contracta of the boss, but she wouldn't use this idea as a cover if the possibility of such a party didn't exist.