

Timeline << with New Sun, Urth of the New Sun spoilers >>

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 05 Feb 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/73>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

David_Lebling — 05 Feb 1997, 10:38

<< New Sun, Urth of the New Sun Spoilers ahead >>

I'd like to raise an issue that has actually troubled me ever since The Urth of the New Sun was published, which is the timing of Typhon's reign.

It seems pretty clear from Urth that Typhon reigned in "near-historical" times vis a vis Severian. I believe mantis has pegged it as about 1000 years pre-Severian. (I'm not sure of the source for this number, but from some internal evidence it feels right).

However, and this is a problem with Urth that I've raised before, there just doesn't seem to be enough time between this theory of Typhon's regnal dates and Severian's reign. For example, we are shown the construction of Typhon's mountain statue, and it is explicitly stated that it's the first one -- the rest of the range is uncarved. There just doesn't seem to be enough tech and enough time to carve the Andes even if every autarch wants this form of immortality. There is also a strong implication in New Sun that Typhon rules many planets (he offers Urth to Severian), and presumably has a reasonably expedient way to travel between them. It seems unlikely from his description that he uses a ship like Tzadkiel.

In The Book of the New Sun, Typhon expounds at length about his rationale for getting his head transplanted onto Piaton's body. It isn't stated explicitly but seems pretty clear that he is an old man when this operation is performed. (Am I correct that one of Pas's heads is referred to as "old" in Long Sun?) He also tells Severian that this is new technology, developed at his command for the specific purpose of prolonging his life.

This is all well and good, if a little troubling. However, it gets much worse in Long Sun.

First, there is the problem of Pas's sprats. The oldest appears to have been about twenty or so when stored in Mainframe. This isn't too bad. We can assume he sired them (and they are all Echidna's -- this is explicit) before his transplant, or even assume that a technology that can transplant a head can handle a few testicles with no trouble.

Second, we are told that Pas built his empire in his own lifetime, "sweeping across the whorl [meaning Urth]." This doesn't leave much room for the interstellar empire implied in New Sun.

Third, the Urth of 1000 years pre-Severian just doesn't have the technology to build the Whorl. Even if it did, the population wouldn't be as technically sophisticated as the Whorl's sleepers. Contrast Mamelta's technical saavy with that of the young Burgundofara of Urth. (Typhon/Pas seems to be quite the patron of science -- transplants, control of robots and people through computer monitors, people sleeping for hundreds of years, genetically engineered supermen and women, etc.) Note also that in New Sun Typhon seems to have taluses but no chems -- obviously chems exist even in Severian's time, but they seem more common on Long

Sun_'s Short Sun Whorl than in Typhon's Urth.

Fourth, the society and technology of the _Whorl_ (as exemplified by Viron) seems to me more like it would fit into a timeframe less than 1000 years from _now_, not approximately 100,000 years from now. Present-day languages are still known (though this could be a literary device). Computers still use cards and apparently vacuum tube displays (possibly another device, to be fair). The religion is a trumpery paganism overlaid on Christianity and parodying it in a way that indicates that Catholicism at least is well-remembered in Pas's time. This is not the case in _New Sun_, by the way; while there are Christian and even Catholic survivals in Severian's time, they are only fragments, and the Conciliator appears to be a "new dispensation."

It would be easy to dismiss these problems by saying "Wolfe messed up." Maybe he did, but I'd be interested in knowing if anyone else has a solution or interpretation that makes more sense.

Dave

(david_lebling at avid.com)

Questions or problems to whorl-owner at lists.best.com