The Pool of Time

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In the centuries prior to the formation of the Great Pile, time was conceived by scholars of the age to progress cyclically through the seasons, through feast and famine, wars, kings and queens, dynasties, decadence, and disasters. Ilfand the Sour, of [City A] in [Ancient time] writes: “The circles of our lives extend outward and inward through time: one death is the beginning of another life, there is no end, and no beginning, all things repeat.” One must wonder if Ilfand the Sour held true to his position even as he died, afflicted by violent dysentery in the rat barrens of [City A].

For the unreflecting, casual dabbler, the cyclicality of time could, in this modern day and age, be easy to dismiss as an antiquated stupidity. However, the revelations brought upon us from the Great Pile have biased our perception irrevocably towards the truth—one must remember the historicity of our failings to prevent the advent of future failures—one must actively break the coil, lest the cyclicality of time become our damnation. To understand the history of our newfound conception of time, one must look to the greatest cosmological discovery of our time: the heavenly spheres to which we lay witness in the nightly sky and which imbue us with inestimable splendor are weaving their inexorable way—not in time with the cycles of night and day—but towards inevitable calamity. Yillia Cymbar, master seer in [Less Ancient time] found to her horror that the calculations of her masters were imperceptibly incorrect, and that cyclicality to them was in fact, by year to year, the slightest change. She writes, “The stars to my eye, drift, every year, towards a point whose origin is unknown. To my lens the change is nearly imperceptible, but at the distance from us we hypothesize the stars to be, the yearly change of their location must be enormous within their basketed unknown.”

Cymbar hypothesized that if all stars are drawn inward in their yearly spiral, they must all have some common destination in the great beyond, which we have not yet observed. Despite the heretical implications of her discovery, she found herself with royal escort—possibly to simply be finally rid of her—tracing the direction of the stars. Her course was ponderous, and as it turns out, well known known to the ascetic monks and various magical creatures of the time. For the first several years, as she traced her path along our globe, she had to stop for a full year, establish a camp, and watch the stars carefully to measure their inward spiral, and determine in which direction she should travel. As the years progressed and she became closer to being able to see the center of the spiral, the movements of the stars became more and more pronounced, until she needed only a few months to estimate their course. Eventually, she followed not the stars, but the tracks left by devotees of diverse cosmological faiths, who knew the location of the Center, the time of year in which it was most visible, and the safest paths to travel. She learned from the monks its nature: the Center towards which all things tend, towards infinite, glorious cataclysm. She learned from the golems and fairies and fauns its true significance, for creatures connected directly to the ethereal streams of magic that flow through our realm do not drift idly.

And the Center did not disappoint—neither her, nor the thousands of pilgrims that have journeyed from our cities to view it each passing year henceforth. I too, have seen its glory: the fixed point in space towards which all stars spiral in their infinite course, dragging our sphere along from the very same incomprehensible magics of attraction that bind us to the earth. Cymbar’s observations lend credence to the claims of the monks of the Pile, who have long asserted that the structure of time is not cyclical, but rather an eternal collapse. They caution us against rebirth—a long promised continuation of life—and warn that destruction and decay are life’s norm. To ignore their claim one could point to the cycles of the seasons, or the spirits of our dead that infect our Southern Wilds, but one truth is certainly irrefutable: the stars tend towards their Center, and drag us along with them. Whether this center brings cataclysm or glory, fiery destruction or true Enlightenment is beyond us. Whether whirlpool or fountain our trajectory is certain: we are never to return to this moment, each step tends us towards the end.