

More on Iron Men

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 26 Apr 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1580>

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Roy C. Lackey — 26 Apr 1999, 22:59

Matthew Malthouse wrote:

If one accepts that the simplest solution suffices then Jonas and Sidero can be taken to be entities of the same kind - ex-space armour. But the contrast between Sidero's strenght and Jonas' weakness is marked. That weaknes I'd ascribe to the failing of the human parts Jonas used to repair himself which leads me to wonder how such a repair could have been effected on a hollow body.<<

Hollow or not, patching an android with human parts would be quite a feat, in any event. <g> And in chapter XVI of *_Claw_* Wolfe contrasts the relative strengths of Jonas's left (flesh) hand and metal (right) hand:

"Jonas seemed to assume that I would go as well, and gripped my shoulder with his left hand; it felt as weak as a woman's." Then, three pages later: "He gripped my shoulder as he had before, but this time with his steel hand; it felt as strong as a vice."

Before that, in chapter XIV, en route to the Antechamber, Jonas has been knocked unconscious: "... two praetorians picked up poor Jonas and carried him. They did it as easily as they might have carried a child; but I at the time attributed that only to their strength." Note the phrasing. This foreshadows Sev's noticing his lightness when he lifts him in the Antechamber. The metal parts of his body are hollow.

In my search for quotes I just realized something: unless Wolfe made an error, Sev did not die from the "fall". If you will remember, Sev says that when he was struck, several of his teeth were knocked out. This, of course, as Sev had reasoned, took place **after** he was out of Sidero's body. Androids are shown to be very strong, as well as hardy. The following is from *_Urth_*, chapter X. Sev is talking to Gunnie:

I said, "Speaking of Sidero, was he around when Zak took you to the bottom of the airshaft?"

"No, there was nobody there but you."

"Did you see my pistol, or the knife you gave me when we first met?"

"No, there wasn't anything there. Did you have them on when you fell?"

"Sidero had them. I was hoping he'd been honest enough to return them, but at least he didn't kill me."

Wrong again. The metallic object Sev heard dropped on the stair was the belt with the gun and knife on it, not Sidero's missing arm, as I suggested in my earlier post. The dialogue continues:

"He wouldn't. He can play rough sometimes, but I never heard that he killed anybody."

"I think he must have struck me while I was unconscious. I don't think I could have hurt my mouth in the fall. I was inside him, did I tell you that?"

She drew away to stare at me. "Really? You can do that?"

"Yes. He didn't like it, but I think that something in the way he's built kept him from trying to expel me as long as I was conscious. After we fell, he must have opened up and pulled me out with his good arm. I'm lucky he didn't break both my legs. When he got me out, he must have struck me."

Remember, when Sev first got inside him Sidero threatened to kill him. He did. When Sev saw his own dead body, his lame leg had a compound fracture. If the fall wouldn't have knocked his teeth out, then it damn sure didn't allow his leg to be broken. Sev knows this, at some level, which is why he said what he did about "break *both* by legs". That is the guilt Sidero felt that I mentioned in my earlier post, only his crime was worse than I thought.

That Sidero killed him is confirmed in chapter XIII. Sidero is addressing Sev:

"I hurt you. It is my right and duty to correct and chastise. Then I had joy of it."
I asked him if he referred to his striking me when I lay unconscious, and he nodded. "I must not." He seemed about to speak further, but did not. After a moment he said, "I cannot explain."
"We know what moral considerations are," I told him.
"Not as we. You believe you do. We know, and yet often make mistakes. We may sacrifice men to save our own existence. We may transmit and originate instructions to men. We may correct and chastise. But we may not become as you are. That is what I did. I must repay."

Do androids abuse corpses? I don't think so; very irrational. Sev survived the "fall". He was unconscious when Sidero pulled him out, as the above establishes. Then Sidero struck him, knocked his teeth out, broke his leg; in short, killed him, as he promised. All because, from Sidero's viewpoint, Sev was an uppity sailor. In a pique of human emotion an android struck and killed a human. This violates Asimov's laws as well as the Increate's. And Wolfe knows the difference between dead and unconscious.

Mark Millman wrote:

<snip>

Surely the "dark lubricant" is actually blood; it would be typical of Severian to misidentify it.<<

<snip>

He does make that mistake once, but when he gets closer to Sidero and sees his arm: "Now that I could see him better, I realized that the dark oozing fluid I had supposed human blood was far too viscid, and a blackish green rather than crimson." It is to stop the loss of this fluid that is the object of Sev's "repairs":

"Thank you," Sidero said. "I have been losing a great deal of pressure." (chapter VIII, _Urth_)

Jonas's metal hand is strong for the same reason Sidero's is: "They wanted to be stronger too, for war and work on deck. Then they put the liquid you saw into us so that our arms and legs would move as they wanted, but with greater force." (ibid.)

I contend that the "dark lubricant" Sev sees is the formerly pressurized fluid from Sidero's damaged arm and/or electrolyte fluid leaked from the damaged fuel cell, the cell having been damaged in the "fall". That the events are out of sequence doesn't matter in "eternity", which is

where the ship travels.

Tony Ellis wrote:

Yes. Sidero is a completely different kind of android to Jonas. The mere fact that Severian can climb inside him tells us that he is far more bulky than a human being. There is also moment in UOTNS when Severian actually sees two androids of Jonas's make.<<

Yes, Sidero is obviously larger than Sev, but not "far more bulky than a human being." In chapter II Sev describes him as "... a figure that might have been that of a massive man in armor complete." These beings were designed to be worn on deck and among the rigging, so they couldn't be bulky. And Sev does have trouble getting inside him, particularly his legs, which is why Sev cons him into lying down first. Once inside, he is able to see through the visor, which is where a human's eyes would be, if Sidero were a man, so he can't be too much taller.

There are two places where Sev says that Jonas was the same sort of android as Sidero: _Urth_, chapter VIII; "Sidero was an android, then, an automaton in human form such as my friend Jonas had once been." And, chapter XIII; "Sidero had been joined by two slender automatons, such creatures as I believe Jonas must once have been. It's stated twice. This second one must be the moment you were referring to.

BTW, I forgot to mention another named android on the ship, Zelezo. The word, in Czech, means, you guessed it, "iron".

As long as I'm out here on this limb, I may as well see if it will bear a little more weight: I suggest that Jonas, at some "time", sailed on Tzadkiel's ship. Further, he may have been aboard *at the same "time" as the blackout*. The textual support comes from chapter XVI of _Claw_.

Remember the change in personality that Jonas affects after being "zapped" by the electrical charge from the "whips" of the juvenile delinquents while in the Antechamber? He seems dazed and later fears he's going "sane". (He's an android; his electrical components have been zapped.) He mutters:

"We must get power to the compressors before the air goes bad." Then:

"I feel weight!" His voice was growing louder. "It must be only the lights."

Sounds like someone on a spaceship during an electrical failure and blackout to me. Why else would Wolfe put it in? Also, any objections to this idea based on what little background Jonas gives about his past life are countered by this statement of Sev's: (_Urth_, chapter XI)

""As the viper told the sow.' So a man called Jonas used to say. He was a sailor too, Purn, but as quick to lie as you are."

One of those lies may have been his name. Jonas knows more of Urth's past than Sev. He was familiar with the Odyssey, which antedates the Book of Jonah. He may have felt justified in borrowing his name from the latter.

Roy

Tony Ellis — 27 Apr 1999, 10:55 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy C Lackey wrote:

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Roy C. Lackey — 27 Apr 1999, 16:28 · follows Tony Ellis

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Uh, if I "can't have it both ways, you know", then neither can you! <g> If the first citation merely establishes that Jonas was an android, not that he was the same size as Sidero, then the same logic applies to the second citation; it was merely reinforcing the fact that Jonas was an android, not that he was the same size as the other two androids. "Such" and "as" are the terms used in both descriptions.

BTW, I went back through all the places in *_Shadow_* and *_Claw_* with Jonas in them and could find no reference to his height, which is odd in itself, as Sev often makes note of the relative height of other characters.

Roy