

Even more iron men

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 28 Apr 1999

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Tony Ellis — 28 Apr 1999, 11:36

At the risk of infinite recursion... Roy C Lackey wrote:

Tony Ellis wrote:

Uh-uh. He isn't saying Sidero is the same -kind- of android as Jonas, merely that -like- Jonas, Sidero is an android too.<<

Just so. Two -slender- automatons. Not two automatons the size of massive men in full armour. Severian isn't saying that Jonas was the same sort of android as Sidero, he's saying that he was the same sort of android as the slender pair that he can now see beside Sidero, which are clearly of a different design.<<

Uh, if I "can't have it both ways, you know", then neither can you!
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;

I'm tempted to respond "but you -still- can't have it both ways" <g>. Say for the sake of argument the second quote did only mean "Jonas was an android too". We're still left with the fact that Sidero is the size not merely of a massive man, but of a suit of armour big enough for that massive man to wear. If Jonas had that build, he couldn't possibly pass himself off as a human being. It's not a question of height, it's a question of general proportion: Jonas's human head would look grotesquely small stuck on top of a body that bulky, as would his human arm sticking out of it. A body that bulky would look ridiculous disguised in human clothes. But Jonas fools everyone effortlessly.

In any case, the same logic does not apply to both quotes. If Sev was merely "reinforcing" the fact that Jonas was an android (and why bother?) why does he invite misinterpretation by going out of his way to distinguish the two robots which Jonas is like as "slender"? Why not say "Sidero had been joined by two other automatons", or "two more automatons"? If you describe a thing as having a particular attribute, and then say that a second thing is like the first, the normal interpretation is that the second thing has that attribute too. If I told you that Whiskers was a fluffy kitten, and then said "Whiskers had been joined by two short-haired kittens, such creatures as I believe Tibbles must once have been", you wouldn't think I just meant that Tibbles had once been a kitten.

Moreover, since the two are slender and we have already been told that Sidero is anything but, we now know unequivocally that there is more than one kind of android. Given that Sidero is the size of a massive man's full suit of armour, and Jonas has never had any trouble passing himself off as human, which kind of android is Jonas more likely to be?

William H. Ansley — 28 Apr 1999, 23:42 · follows Tony Ellis

I have to side emphatically with Tony Ellis here. I think his arguments so far have been more than sufficient to show that the (pre-crash) Jonas was not a hollow "powered armor/space suit" android like Sidero, but I doubt Roy C Lackey will agree.

Here another piece of evidence. In _The Claw of the Conciliator_ on the last page of chapter XVI, entitled "Jonas", (p. 306) of the Orb edition of _Shadow & Claw_, we have this:

With the steel hand I had always thought scarcely more than a hook, he picked up the hand of muscle and bone as a man might lift a bit of filth to cast it away.

Now it strains credulity that even such a poor observer as Severian proves himself again and again to be could call a metal hand that looks like a gauntlet that might fit a large man scarcely more than a hook. Just about anyone, even--I would think--Severian, seeing a man with a normal hand and face whose other hand looks like a large jointed metal glove would assume that there was another normal human hand in the glove. You wouldn't assume that the man was crippled, with the metal hand being a crude prosthetic replacement.

William Ansley