

Hollow men

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 29 Apr 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1592>

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Roy C. Lackey — 29 Apr 1999, 02:37

Okay, Tony Ellis and William Ansley, do not agree with me. Fine. I have already cited the relevant textual quotes in my "Iron men" and "More on Iron Men" posts, so there is no point it doing it again. I think we can all agree that Jonas is/was an android that had been repaired with human parts? I hope so, because that's what the text says. The only real arguments seem to be over:

- (A) Are Jonas's metal parts hollow?
- (B) Relative sizes.

(A) I have already given the citations from Claw which suggest that there is something unusual about Jonas's lightness. Sidero is an android. Sidero is hollow. In chapter VIII of Urth Sidero states how and why his kind came to exist; as protective hard coverings with superhuman attributes to be worn by the "mates". The mates come in all sizes, male and female. Sev mentions *several* difficulties fitting himself inside Sidero (chapter IX), but never mind that. The real point is that *one size does not fit all*. Two "slender" androids are mentioned (their names, very likely, are Hadid and Hierro, BTW). Now, given the fact that Sidero's kind have been in existence long enough to have evolved human-like intelligence, it would be unreasonable, unnecessary, and without textual support to think that there was a second order of androids on the ship built any differently than what we are told by Sidero. Slender compared to what? The two are standing with Sidero "some distance apart from the rest of us". If Sidero is "massive", two beings of average size might well look "slender" in comparison. The two "slender" androids must be hollow, too. Sev saw only a small fraction of Tzad's ship. There is no reason to suppose that there are not other androids, in a variety of sizes, all over the ship.

Jonas served on a space/time traveling ship. Sidero said: "There is only one ship, the captain says. All the ships we hail between the galaxies or the suns are this ship." Therefore, Jonas sailed on Tzad's ship. Jonas is an android. Therefore, Jonas was originally hollow, regardless of which size android he was.

- (B) See (A).

Roy

William H. Ansley — 02 May 1999, 15:25 · follows Roy C. Lackey

There has been a good deal of discussion about this thread and whether it has any critical purpose or perhaps any purpose at all. I don't care about that.

(Although I feel an almost irresistible urge to demand that Jonathan Laidlaw apologize to me too, as the third and last of the "'realists' attempting to decide what kind of android Jonas was" that he objected to in his by now infamous "thoughts on Nigel price's response" posting. Not that it offended me, but I don't want to feel left out.)

One thing I would bet everyone agrees on, however, is that they are glad this thread is over and done with. No such luck!

"Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Okay, Tony Ellis and William Ansley, do not agree with me.

And you'll have to add David Duffy to the list, since he wrote:

I think Jonas is made of

highly advanced light materials, but is not hollow. The Ship of UotNS is not the only vehicle that has ever undertaken star travel (we have the Whorl as one counterexample)

"Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net> continues:

Fine. I have

already cited the relevant textual quotes in my "Iron men" and "More on Iron Men" posts, so there is no point in doing it again. I think we can all agree that Jonas is/was an android that had been repaired with human parts? I hope so, because that's what the text says. The only real arguments seem to be over:

(A) Are Jonas's metal parts hollow?

Not really. The argument, as I understand it, is that you think Jonas was originally an intelligent, powered, armored space suit (IPAS) android like Sidero. If I say that Jonas was never able to contain and protect a human being as Sidero (albeit unwilling) does Severian (I'll ask you to accept, for the sake of argument, that Jonas would have agreed to do so) then it doesn't matter if I say, "Well, Jonas could have had hollow parts, to save weight perhaps." As long as I say Jonas was never an IPAS android, you will say I'm wrong.

(B) Relative sizes.

(A) I have already given the citations from _Claw_ which suggest that there is something unusual about Jonas's lightness. Sidero is an android. Sidero is hollow. In chapter VIII of _Urth_ Sidero states how and why his kind came to exist; as protective hard coverings with superhuman attributes to be worn by the "mates". The mates come in all sizes, male and female. Severian mentions *several* difficulties fitting himself inside Sidero (chapter IX), but never mind that.

No, let's mind it. You have referred to these difficulties several times as if they are telling evidence for your assertion, but you have left out an important piece of information each time. Here are the relevant passages (from the first two pages of Chapter IX, "The Empty Air"):

...I snatched off my cloak and rolled into Sidero's open body. I did not so much as try to see what creature those wings bore until I had thrust my head, with some pain, into his and could look out through his visor.

...

His chest had closed tightly, and I struggled to get my legs into his, pushing with hands braced against the hollows of his shoulders. If I had been able to take a moment more outside, I would have removed my boots; then it would have been easy. As it was, I felt I had already fractured both ankles.

...

My sound leg had at last straightened itself. My lame leg ought to have been easier, because its muscles had shrunk; but I could not summon strength enough to force it down.

...

I felt myself bent forward, as one sometimes is in wrestling; Sidero was sitting up. He stood, and in standing shifted my position just enough for my lame leg to straighten. It was easy then to thrust my left arm into his. My right entered what had been his own right arm equally easily, but emerged from the damaged brassard, protected only at the shoulder.

I count two difficulties, or three, if you count each of Severian's legs as a separate difficulty. But he had trouble getting both his good and bad leg into the legs of the Sidero suit for the same reason: he has his boots on! Now I think it is pretty clear that the designers of an armored space suit would not assume that the wearer would have boots on and would not make allowances for the extra room boots would take up.

Severian does have difficulty fitting his head into Sidero's head shaped cavity. I will speculate that this is because Sidero's head was designed to open, just as his torso was, to allow a person to fit inside. But Sidero, not intending to be worn by Severian, only opened up enough to let Severian access his emergency repair controls. So Severian had to push his head through the neck opening of the Sidero suit.

Finally, Severian is described as being able to fit both of his arms completely and both of his legs partially inside Sidero's chest cavity. Now that, to me, indicates a pretty darn large suit of armor.

The real point is that *one size does not fit all*.

I won't deny you have a point here. It does seem likely that there would have to be different sized IPAS's for different sized people. At least this would have been true when the sailors were allowed to wear the IPAS's. But, from Sidero's testimony, it seems as if the IPAS androids had not allowed that to happen for a long, long time. Therefore, if new IPAS androids were still being built and their specifications were controlled by the IPAS androids themselves, there would be no reason for the new IPAS's to be designed to fit a range of human sizes.

In fact (and here is a nice little present for you) if new IPAS androids, designed and built by IPAS androids, are being made and there is no longer any intention that human beings are going to use them as space suits, then the internal cavity can be shrunk to a space too small for any human being to fit in, leading to a hollow Jonas who is too small to be a usable suit of armor. The cavity could be left out entirely, leading to a non-hollow Jonas who is still, in a sense, the same kind of android as Sidero.

Perhaps we can live in peace and harmony after all <g>.

Of course there is no support in the text for this. If Sidero and the others are IPAS androids built to human design which have become autonomous after the fact, which seems more likely, then my argument above doesn't apply.

Two

"slender" androids are mentioned (their names, very likely, are Hadid and Hierro, BTW). Now, given the fact that Sidero's kind have been in existence long enough to have evolved human-like intelligence,

You make it sound as if you are talking about biological evolution. That isn't what is going on here. The IPAS is a piece of engineering. Each subsequent model has had new features added, including artificial intelligence. Depending on how long it took to develop, design and build each generation of IPAS, it wouldn't necessarily take very long for the intelligent form to emerge. Certainly, it would be a tiny fraction of the time that biological evolution would take.*

(Actually my acronym doesn't work very well in the passage above. The androids started out as mere space suits [S] or armored space suits [AS]. Then they became powered [PAS]. Finally the artificial intelligence components were added to produce what I have been referring to as an IPAS.)

it would be
unreasonable, unnecessary, and without textual support to think that there
was a second order of androids on the ship built any differently than what
we are told by Sidero.

I just can't understand why you insist that there can only be one kind of android on the ship. People build many, many different kinds of machines all the time. Including machines that have similar external appearances but very different internal mechanisms. Think of automobiles: internal combustion engines vs. electric vs. fuel cell, etc. Wolfe, as an engineer, must be especially aware of this fact. There would have to be unequivocal textual support for your assertion of android singularity in the text before I could accept it. And I just don't think it's there.

Slender compared to what? The two are standing with
Sidero "some distance apart from the rest of us". If Sidero is "massive",
two beings of average size might well look "slender" in comparison. The two
"slender" androids must be hollow, too. Sev saw only a small fraction of
Tzad's ship. There is no reason to suppose that there are not other
androids, in a variety of sizes, all over the ship.

I will admit that the passages in _Urth_ comparing Jonas and Sidero and other, slender androids on the ship are ambiguous. They must be or this whole debate wouldn't have started. I think that the interpretation that Tony Ellis and I give them more reasonable than yours. You vehemently disagree. But I think you should at least consider that our interpretation is possible. And allow us to hold it without implying that we are unreasonable people who manufacture unnecessary complications while we ignore the text.

Jonas served on a space/time traveling ship. Sidero said: "There is only
one ship, the captain says. All the ships we hail between the galaxies or
the suns are this ship." Therefore, Jonas sailed on Tzad's ship. Jonas is an
android. Therefore, Jonas was originally hollow, regardless of which size
android he was.

I simply don't agree that Sidero has been given reliable information here or perhaps he has not understood what he was told properly.

I don't expect to change your mind with anything I have said above, Roy. I imagine that if we can agree to disagree, that will be the most I can hope to accomplish. In another post you said:

But I learned many years ago that
religious arguments are fruitless. Believers believe because what they
believe cannot be proven, else it would not be a matter of faith.

Perhaps this applies to nonreligious arguments as well. It seems to in this case. So why did I bother adding another round to this debate if I think it's fruitless? I have to support my faith, don't I?

William Ansley

*Biological evolution doesn't apply to these androids unless they can reproduce themselves, have some kind of genetic material which can undergo spontaneous mutation and their varying offspring are culled by natural selection. I don't think there is enough support for any of this in the text to make it reasonable to believe it is true.

Roy C. Lackey — 03 May 1999, 00:08 · follows William H. Ansley

William H. Ansley wrote:

One thing I would bet everyone agrees on, however, is that they are glad this thread is over and done with. No such luck!<<

Ah, you devil, you! I was going to let this thread die, however ignominiously, but you have given me an excuse to revive it. Let me add that I appreciate your making the effort to look at the evidence, and citing some of it, rather than just dismissing it out of hand. The combined texts of both our posts would be too long to quote the whole thing, so I will try to confine it to the more relevant portions of yours.

And you'll have to add David Duffy to the list, since he wrote:

I think Jonas is made of highly advanced light materials, but is not hollow. The Ship of UotNS is not the only vehicle that has ever undertaken star travel (we have the Whorl as one counterexample)<<

I did not mean to imply that Tzad's ship was the only interstellar or even intergalactic ship. Of course there were others, and the Whorl was one of them, as were the towers of the Citadel, but they were decidedly not the same type as Tzad's ship. Tzad's ship was able to travel backwards and forwards in time, as well as outside of time and even the universe. Sidero's statement that there is only the one ship should be taken, I think, to mean that it is the only one of its kind, able to travel as and where it does.

(A) Are Jonas's metal parts hollow?

Not really. The argument, as I understand it, is that you think Jonas was originally an intelligent, powered, armored space suit (IPAS) android like Sidero. If I say that Jonas was never able to contain and protect a human being as Sidero (albeit unwilling) does Severian (I'll ask you to accept, for the sake of argument, that Jonas would have agreed to do so) then it doesn't matter if I say, "Well, Jonas could have had hollow parts, to save weight perhaps." As long as I say Jonas was never an IPAS android, you will say I'm wrong.<<

No I won't. You might even be right. We are not given enough information in the texts to establish the certitude of this or many, if not most, of the other conclusions people have derived from Wolfe's works which are not explicitly stated in the works. To take but one example out of many: Tony has concluded, elsewhere, that the prisoner in the cell near V.R.T. is V.R.T.'s mother. He may be right. But he can't *prove* it conclusively. (That was a back-handed compliment, Tony, believe it or not. <g>)

to be worn by the "mates". The mates come in all sizes, male and female.

Sev

mentions *several* difficulties fitting himself inside Sidero (chapter IX), but never mind that.

No, let's mind it. You have referred to these difficulties several times as if they are telling evidence for your assertion, but you have left out an important piece of information each time. Here are the relevant passages (from the first two pages of Chapter IX, "The Empty Air"):<<

<snip of quotes from text>

Finally, Severian is described as being able to fit both of his arms completely and both of his legs partially inside Sidero's chest cavity. Now that, to me, indicates a pretty darn large suit of armor.<<

In addition to the quotes you cited there is this, from the last page of ch. VIII:

" ... debating what I might do and judging the cavity inside him. My belt, with the knife and my pistol in its holster, would never fit, I thought; but without those I might go in well enough."

His belt with weapons on it is a consideration in deciding whether he can fit inside at all, so much so that he removes the belt, but, if the question of his boots was even a concern, he didn't mention it then. Farther down the page:

" ... it seemed a mad idea, yet it would give me protection and a disguise, if I succeeded. I had worn armor often. Why not better armor?"

Clearly he regards Sidero, as far as his physical stature is concerned, as just a better suit of armor than he has been accustomed to. Sidero's size is not so far out of bounds as to give him pause to get inside. He wants "protection and a disguise" only from the people who had tried to kill him. He had decided to get inside **before** he heard the sound of the great-winged being. And the clincher is this: after getting inside and struggling with Sidero for control -- a contest which he wins, because he is a human -- he forces Sidero to go back and get his weapons and belt. He then puts the belt on " ... and buckled it around Sidero's waist without a thumb's width to spare." (second page of ch. IX) How much slack would there be in his belt? Six inches? Eight? Bulky, Sidero ain't.

The real point is that **one size does not fit all**.

I won't deny you have a point here. It does seem likely that there would have to be different sized IPAS's for different sized people. At least this would have been true when the sailors were allowed to wear the IPAS's. But, from Sidero's testimony, it seems as if the IPAS androids had not allowed that to happen for a long, long time.<<

Ch. VIII: Sev says: "Do you mean the officers of this ship wear you like clothing?" Sidero answers: "Not often now." So it still happens, even if seldom.

Two "slender" androids are mentioned (their names, very likely, are Hadid and Hierro, BTW). Now, given the fact that Sidero's kind have been in existence long enough to have evolved human-like intelligence,

You make it sound as if you are talking about biological evolution. That isn't what is going on here.<<

No, of course not. I referred only to their "human-like intelligence".

I just can't understand why you insist that there can only be one kind of android on the ship.<<

On the penultimate page of ch. VIII, which is too long to quote here, Sev is asked by Sidero to recount how the human race came to be. Sev gives a synopsis, which serves to remind the reader of the changes that Zak is going through. Then Sidero, in turn, gives the account of his kind's origins. His kind includes Hadid and Hierro (see two pages earlier), who know more about it than Sidero, and who are, I believe, the two slender androids Sidero consults with on the fourth page of ch. XIII. Sev wonders if those two " ... were nearer the captain and upper officers than Sidero ... ". At any rate, all three are "volitional mechanisms", accounted for by Sidero's android genesis. No other kind of "volitional mechanisms" are mentioned on Tzad's ship. (Yes, Ossipago is there, but he is not a member of the ship's crew, is described differently in _Sword_,

and serves an entirely different function.) In fact, only one other android is mentioned in the entire Urth cycle -- Jonas.

I think Jonas has come from too far in Urth's past to be accounted for by travel by "conventional relativistic processes". But it's no problem if the ship he was on that crashed was one of the "tenders" from Tzad's ship, such as Sev was on.

I will admit that the passages in _Urth_ comparing Jonas and Sidero and other, slender androids on the ship are ambiguous. They must be or this whole debate wouldn't have started. I think that the interpretation that Tony Ellis and I give them more reasonable than yours. You vehemently disagree. But I think you should at least consider that our interpretation is possible. And allow us to hold it without implying that we are unreasonable people who manufacture unnecessary complications while we ignore the text.<<

Acknowledged. All I ask is a fair hearing.

Jonas served on a space/time traveling ship. Sidero said: "There is only one ship, the captain says. All the ships we hail between the galaxies or the suns are this ship." Therefore, Jonas sailed on Tzad's ship. Jonas is an android. Therefore, Jonas was originally hollow, regardless of which size android he was.>

I simply don't agree that Sidero has been given reliable information here or perhaps he has not understood what he was told properly.<<

Do angels lie? Do androids? I have always been given to understand they didn't. Sev said Jonas lies, but that I attribute to his humanization. But then Sidero is also undergoing humanization, which I have previously alluded to. But what purpose would be served by lying? If we can't believe the testimony of angels and androids, then who *can* we believe? (That was a rhetorical question.)

I don't expect to change your mind with anything I have said above, Roy. I imagine that if we can agree to disagree, that will be the most I can hope to accomplish. In another post you said:

But I learned many years ago that religious arguments are fruitless. Believers believe because what they believe cannot be proven, else it would not be a matter of faith.

Perhaps this applies to nonreligious arguments as well. It seems to in this case. So why did I bother adding another round to this debate if I think it's fruitless? I have to support my faith, don't I?<<

Amen. And at least you weren't falling asleep in church. <g>

Let me recast my position. I have no ego investment in establishing whether Jonas was hollow in his metal parts or not. The text I have cited is merely suggestive of it, as is the case with so much else in Wolfe's work. The other things I have cited; that he is an android on the same order as those on Tzad's ship; that he has knowledge of elsewhere in time; his utterances after being zapped in the Antechamber; his mention of searching the seven continents for the Hierodules; various things he has said to Sev, and the rest of it, coupled with what Sev learns of Tzad's ship and the androids there, all tend, in my view, to establish that Jonas was at some time in his life a sailor on Tzad's ship. That is what I wanted to establish in the first place.

Roy