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The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 31 May 1999

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Dan Parmenter — 31 May 1999, 10:23

From: "Mark Millman" <Mark_Millman at hmco.com>
" . . . when I was . . . a boy," says Jonas,
whose father was a craftsman.

Poor Pinocchio! He's a puppet again!

Mark Millman

Mantis and I speculated that Jonas is a literary combination of Pinnochio (robot that becomes human) and the Steadfast Tin Soldier (Jonas relates to Jolenta because he thinks they're in the same condition, as when the STS sees the toy ballerina with her leg in the air and thinks she's missing a leg). The Jonas/Pinnochio thing is emphasized by the Jonas = Jonah (a guy in a whale, just like Pinnochio). I've also wondered whether Wolfe ever saw Osamu Tezuka's ASTRO BOY about a little robot boy who wants to be human.

BTW, have I ever mentioned that Jonas is probably my favorite character in the series? He's easily the most down-to-earth, despite his own hassles.

Lex Shellac

Mark Millman — 31 May 1999, 17:13 · follows Dan Parmenter

On Monday 31 May 1999 at 5:23 pm GMT, Dan Parmenter wrote:
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Lex Shellac

Yes, I remember your discussion well, and was referring to it.

I'm not sure that Wolfe intended this, but I'm choosing to interpret Jonas' phrasing here as being an indication that he feels that he actually was closer to the human state (an enlightened robot?) when he was whole, and that he's suffered a certain fall from this previous state due to his need to repair himself with human parts.

I wonder, by the way (and I don't recall whether we've discussed this before) whether Jonas' distress mightn't be exacerbated because he used more human spare parts than was strictly necessary, in an attempt to pass more easily among the low-tech inhabitants of Urth. It's possible that his head wasn't badly (if at all) damaged, and that he's simply using a human face as camou- flage. I realize that this raises questions, among others, of whether a robot's designer would put the CPU in its head or its torso, but assuming Jonas' is in his head, his continued existence would argue that his head couldn't have been very badly damaged. Severian's speculation on Jonas' habit of speech, in which he wonders whether it hadn't been deliberately placed there to make people feel at ease when looking into "a face of metal and glass" (actually, I don't remember whether it was "metal" or "steel"), does suggest that Jonas might have had the same thought when he repaired himself. Voila, Pinocchio lies (in a very big way), turns once again into a puppet, and must struggle to regain his humanity.

Mark Millman