

The two Typhons

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 14 Mar 2000

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Nicholas Gevers — 14 Mar 2000, 06:06

TYPHON AND PAS: A RECONCILIATION OF HISTORIES

One problem that Wolfe's twelve-volume Sun Cycle presents is that of reconciling the details of Typhon's reign given by Severian in THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN with the vast technological achievement required to build the "Whorl" as described in THE BOOK OF THE LONG SUN. Severian's account is of an Urth sufficiently like his own later one that for a long time he cannot see any difference: the language, physical locations, and institutions are very similar, Nessus and Saltus only somewhat less run down, the technological level recognisable in many respects, although the trucks (?) or taluses working on Mount Typhon are entirely unfamiliar. How, then, could Typhon have mustered the technical and economic resources invested in the "Whorl", resources clearly infinitely beyond those available to the Autarchs of one or two thousand years later?

I suggest that the answer is apparent simply in the terms of the question itself. From URTH, we know a number of things about Typhon's policies as a ruler, notably that his "assessors" collect a tax in human children, and that he is fond of huge prestige projects, such as Mount Typhon; we know he desires immortality. So it is easy to conceive of Severian's Typhon wishing to build the "Whorl" and become its presiding god (Pas). And consider further: what would the effect on Urth have been of the construction of the "Whorl", of the stripping away of so many of its people and "chems", its technology, minerals, water? Answer: Urth would have become the ravaged, pillaged, denuded, and depopulated world inherited by the Autarchs. Typhon initially ruled a much richer and more advanced Urth, but asset-stripped it. In order that Silk's Whorl could come to be, Severian's impoverished Urth had to be created.

A corollary: the Typhon Severian encounters in SWORD and in URTH is an abandoned version of the tyrant, left behind when Pas and his innumerable Cargo

departed Urth. He is still Typhon, and still desires to rule, but lacks the continued means necessary, his immortal self having made off with the same. The experiment with two heads was never going to ensure immortality; digitization made far better sense, and the bicephalic ogre of Mount Typhon is a discarded prototype with a futile will of its own.

Thomas Jeenicke — 15 Mar 2000, 09:32 · follows Nicholas Gevers

Nicholas Gevers wrote (message dated 14 Mar 2000 06:06:7):

... How, then, could Typhon have mustered the technical and economic resources invested in the "Whorl", resources clearly infinitely beyond those available to the Autarchs of one or two thousand years later? ...

I mostly agree with Your explanation, but like to add a thought: Typhon and his followers are probably not Urth-natives but came from another planet in the same system (Mars or Venus). While constructing the Whorl, Typhon might very well still rule other worlds besides Urth and could have used their resources, too.

Back to the message:

... the Typhon Severian encounters in SWORD and in URTH is an abandoned version of the tyrant, left behind when Pas and his innumerable Cargo departed Urth ... The experiment with two heads was never going to ensure immortality, digitization made far better sense, and the bicephalic ogre of Mount Typhon is a discarded prototype with a futile will of its own.

That ist possible, but it doesn't seem necessary or even likely to me. The "ogre" obviously works quite well. Probably he was "turned down" only because of the political situatuion, not because of (bio-)technical problems. And if the new body should fail, Typhon could have his head transplated onto another victim. Why should digitalization be better than then this method? Maybe they are both equivalent tries to achieve immortality.

One last thought: These are interesting questions, but maybe we should not take them too serious. I don't know, but I doubt that Wolfe really wanted to create a coherent super-series consisting of the New Sun and Long Sun/Short Sun books and othér works (like Tolkien did with his MiddleEarth stories). Has Wolfe ever said something about the connection between the two/three series (perhaps in an interview)?

Thomas

Matthew Malthouse — 15 Mar 2000, 11:34 · follows Thomas Jeenicke

Thomas Jeenicke wrote:

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I might be dreaming, conflating other stories or just misunderstanding but I have the recollection that Typhon came to and 'conquered' Urth determined to make it the centre of his 'empire' the planet having previously been something of a backwater.

I took this as Typhon wanting to add some grandure or legitimacy to his title by establishing himself on human-kind's ancient homeworld. And at the same time an indication (to us) of the 'retrenchment' of humanity as it (or at least the Urth part of it that we see) withdraws into the near isolation of Severian's time.

It had never occurred to me that Typhon might have difficulty constructing the Whorl - apart from those problems consistent with the narrative itself - because I'd always assumed him to have inter-stella capability anyway.

Am I completely mistaken?

If I am not then the contradiction is not in resources or technology but the question why he might have chosen the ark-ship method of establishing his new colony to which I might suggest (a) sending it beyond previously known space (the time scale is wrong) or that the choices were deliberate to enable the social engineering he wanted for the greater glorification of the god Pas.

Matthew