

Typhon vs. Pas

The Urth list — 8 messages, 6 voices, 05 Nov 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3544>

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Roy C. Lackey — 05 Nov 2002, 21:56

alga wrote:

The notion that Wolfe has borrowed, quite successfully, from Gnosticism is that of the Demiurge (and I don't know why some of you are making a Typhon/Pas split--Wolfe doesn't in his interviews).

Regretfully, I think I started this whole Gnosticism/Demiurge debate a few weeks ago with my irreverent Whorl/Genesis comparison. Mea culpa. I am trying very hard to stay out of it.

I don't recall those interviews, but Pas certainly started put as Typhon, so perhaps Wolfe does think of them/him as one seamless entity. However, as Pas, Typhon has somehow undergone a character transformation. By that I mean that Typhon in the NS always struck me as a cardboard villain, mindlessly evil in the way that the "bad" entity in some Stephen King novel is just expected to be accepted by the reader as evil, without resort to reason. His motives, when they can be determined at all, are arbitrary and insane; but are more often inscrutable. His behavior is so egocentric, so childlike in its lack of selfgovernance (e.g., masturbation in Sev's presence), that it's hard to credit such a person ever living long enough to rise to a position of power, much less as ruler of some sort of Galactic Empire.

Some of those characteristics are evident in the digitized personality of Pas, but Pas in the LS books has become a more benign father figure. Even in the last volume, Pas has not been exposed as the evil tyrant we knew in the NS books. He is regarded as a wise, compassionate, all-father who sought a new beginning for mankind on new worlds. The _Whorl's_ cargo is apparently unaware of _why_ a new beginning is needed or desired; that is, they seem to be ignorant of the fact that Urth's sun is in decline, and that Typhon may, whether directly or indirectly, be responsible for that decline.

If I may push the Biblical analogy further; Typhon, in the NS, seems to me as the God of the Old Testament, while Pas, in the LS, is more like the God of the New Testament. That is, many believers perceive the God of the Old and New Testaments quite differently. Though they may know, on an intellectual level, that it is the same God in both Testaments, the God of the Old is thought to be harsher, often capricious, while God in the New is perceived as more loving and kind.

The analogy can be pushed even further. Silk, in the SS books, becomes a part of Pas, and Pas assumes to himself a part of Silk. God, in the New Testament, becomes Flesh, in the person of Jesus. Jesus, after completing his mission of redemption, returns to God in the mystery of the Trinity that is one. I'm not saying that Silk is a Christ figure, exactly, but there does seem to me to be a parallel.

-Roy

James Wynn — 05 Nov 2002, 23:23 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy said

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Crush interjects:

How interesting that this analogy would come up at this point since this perceived difference between the "God of the OT" and the "God of the NT" was at the very heart of the arguments of Marcion and other second century Gnostics. The god of the OT was the bad Demiurge. The god preached by Jesus was the good God and Jesus was the Hercules, the superman "Savior of the World."

Perhaps at this point someone is remembering Michael Corleone's quote in The Godfather III:

"Just when I thought I was out--they pull me back in!"

This was apparently the feeling 1st and 2nd century Apostolic Christians had about the Gnostic Christians as well.

--- Crush

Jerry Friedman — 06 Nov 2002, 20:06 · follows James Wynn

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

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You guys are really pushing my buttons. Let me just remind you that many believers (Jews) and many non-believers don't think one "knows" that the two Gods are the same, and many perceive the New Testament God as harsher than the Old Testament god. I imagine that Wolfe, however, sees it as you describe.

I agree that Typhon in BotNS seems far harsher than Pas, and I wonder whether Typhon improved the copy of himself. ...

Jerry Friedman

Roy C. Lackey — 07 Nov 2002, 20:43 · follows Jerry Friedman

Jerry Friedman wrote:

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Sorry. It was a common Christian perception I wrote of, not mine. I have no preference among religions.

Adam Stephanides wrote:

Whether or not he makes it in his interviews, it is clearly present in the books. Typhon is the ruler of Urth who built the Whorl; Pas is a copy of Typhon's personality that was downloaded into a computer. One could say that Pas is Typhon in the sense that Silk-in-Mainframe is Silk; but the entity that ordered the Whorl to be built was killed by Severian on Urth.

Yes, and this brings up some interesting questions about exactly when, where, and how the _Whorl_ came to be built. Sev's second meeting with Typhon was the first, chronologically. Sev, while still a prisoner on Mt. Typhon, told his recent converts (his jailers) that, based on what he knew from his other meeting with Typhon, that Typhon would soon die behind his curtain. His followers, too afraid to look behind the curtain unbidden, would wait in vain for orders that would never come; work on the mountain would come to a halt, and the followers drift away. A thousand years later Sev would discover the desiccated body and unwittingly revive it.

Typhon, who had his own head cut off to spite his ego, had his head attached to Piaton's body. It was probably some complication of the surgery, or Piaton's resistance to having his mind and body subordinated to Typhon's will, that led to the death of the body behind the curtain. The cranial graft was to be temporary; when Typhon's nervous system was able to assume the autonomous functions of the body, Piaton's head was to be removed. That process was taking longer than expected, but not so long as it would take to build the _Whorl_. If Sev's prophecy was true, then Typhon had to have already been scanned into Mainframe and the ship launched; that or those things happened fairly soon after Sev made the prophecy.

Either way, it's hard to reconcile the NS and LS texts. We know that Marble and the other servant chems were older than the _Whorl_ itself, and Hammerstone told Silk that the soldier chems were being stockpiled for twenty years before coming aboard the ship. A painted canvas cloth at Orchid's place was "a crude mockery of Campion's celebrated Pas enthroned." The original showed two-headed Pas, along with a couple of mighty taluses "still at work upon the whorl".

Now, the hollowing out of an asteroid and all the work needed to turn it into a giant spaceship, stocking it with flora and fauna, soil, water, etc., would have been the work of years. At what point in the construction of the _Whorl_ did Typhon get his second head? Clearly he had it before the ship was launched, but did he have it before construction started? That doesn't seem possible, because Typhon surely didn't have Piaton's body for twenty years or more; that certainly wasn't his plan.

If Typhon underwent the operation *after* construction started, how did that affect his original intent in building it? If the _Whorl_ took a long time to build, as it surely did, were his seven children the product of his original body or Piaton's?

And how is it that so massive an undertaking as the building, stockpiling, and launch of the _Whorl_ left no lasting echoes on Urth in Sev's day, just a thousand years later? Sev and the Commonwealth seem completely ignorant of it.

-Roy

Jerry Friedman — 08 Nov 2002, 17:29 · follows Roy C. Lackey

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

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Maybe I should apologize--you might have just gotten close to one of my buttons rather than pushing it.

Jerry Friedman

Ryan Thistlethwaite — 10 Nov 2002, 14:03 · follows Jerry Friedman

I agree that Typhon in BotNS seems far harsher than Pas, and I wonder whether Typhon improved the copy of himself.

I've just got online with the urthnet so please forgive my comments if they've been outrageously dismissed!

I've been taking a look at this thread recently and having recently re-read BotLS I had a thought on this... There have been some ideas put forward w/regards to Pas being more benevolent than his two headed counterpart... I've been wondering whether his thoughts at the time, and I think all of us have noble thoughts interspersed with our less admirable ones, may have contributed to this more user-friendly Pas. i.e. When he was scanned into mainframe his thoughts were on a particularly high spirited tilt... any thoughts?

Hubert Rogers — 10 Nov 2002, 16:18 · follows Ryan Thistlethwaite

From TBoTNS we know that Typhon is an extremely clever person, so he probably just knew that it would be better for his avatar Pas to be benevolent so that the cargo of the Whorl wouldn't not rise up against him. And another possibility is that Typhon knew that if Pas was a 100% copy of Typhon but digital, then wouldn't he naturally be a rival and usurp him if ever possible?

----- Original Message -----

From: "Ryan Thistlethwaite" <shintemaster at hotmail.com>

To: <urth at urth.net>

Sent: Sunday, November 10, 2002 2:03 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) Typhon vs. Pas

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Andrew Reeves — 10 Nov 2002, 18:49 · follows Hubert Rogers

----- Original Message -----

From: "Ryan Thistlethwaite" <shintemaster at hotmail.com>

To: <urth at urth.net>

Sent: Sunday, November 10, 2002 8:03 AM

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user-friendly Pas. i.e. When he was scanned into mainframe his thoughts were

on a particularly high spirited tilt... any thoughts?

Well, I'm going to weigh in on this one. The whole question floating around seems to have been "Pas seems to be a better chap than Typhon off whom he was scanned." I disagree, and I will explain why. When even the most evil ruler is in charge of a nation, he has to, to some degree, behave with the well being of his state in mind, if nothing else for the fact that if he destroys his state with his depredations, then he has nothing off of which to live. Almost all leaders must as a rule operate according to their own national interests or else not last long on the throne.

Pas, as a copy of Typhon, would still be megalomaniacal, but still acting in accordance with the best interests of the Whorl, as the Whorl was his raison d'something-or-other.

I do think that another big element of the Whorl going out was Tyhpon's vanity ("look at this big-ass wonder that I have made," but acting in your domain's interests often goes hand in

hand with vanity.

Just my \$.02.

Andrew

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