

# Typhon's vanity and Pas's Two Heads

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 08 Nov 2002

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 08 Nov 2002, 21:20

I dunno, Roy, but it seems to me that the same vanity of Typhon would make him more inclined to create a two-headed Pas.

(I guess this is one of those "It isn't a bug, it is a feature!" answers.)

We know that Typhon planned to be one-headed asap.

We know that Typhon had the mountain carved in the shape of his one-headed form.

We sense, iirc, that Typhon's two-headed phase was something of a secret, something that was disturbing to those who knew and guarded from the bulk of the population.

So it seems easy to imagine Typhon saying, "Yeah, watch this: I'll make them all worship this transitional, inferior form of me!"

That is to say, the Mountain and other things that remain in the solar system are more important to Typhon than the Whorl. The only important thing about the Whorl is that Typhon had the power and prestige to send it out -- it is kind of like a potlatch, in that sense.

It seems to me that a scan of one-headed Typhon might actually threaten Typhon's sense of self: if we get beyond simple narcissism, I think we can agree Typhon is not narcissistic, and if he met a true equal he would react in a kill or be killed sort of way. Because Typhon w/ two heads is a transitional stage, and Typhon fully expects to be much bigger and better in the near future, Typhon would make Pas as a two-headed god.

(As for Typhon's self-stimulation in audience with Severian, Greg Feeley first pointed out many years past that this scene is rather close to a Satanic scene in James Blish's BLACK EASTER. FWIW.)

=mantis=

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 08 Nov 2002, 22:32 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

(I guess this is one of those "It isn't a bug, it is a feature!" answers.)

Well, yeah ... and I think we can also take it that Mr Wolfe's reasons for Pas being two-headed might be quite different from Typhon's reasons for making Pas two-headed ... that is, that Mr

Wolfe has his emotional/thematic/ symbolic/etc. reasons for a two-headed Pas. Given this, Typhon's reasons (presuming that Mr Wolfe bothered to work them out; I don't recollect anything in the text that would really indicate that he did) might be nothing more than after-the-fact rationalizations ... on Mr Wolfe's part, certainly, and even more so on ours.

In fact, I wonder if we're playing the old game of taking the 'reality' and 'consistency' of the fictional world waaay too seriously ... in other words ... acting like a bunch of fanboys (I'd say "and girls," but in fact I don't think any\* of the fems on the list have jumped in on this topic).

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\* Or should that be "either"?)

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The only important thing about the Whorl is that Typhon had the power and prestige to send it out -- it is kind of like a potlatch, in that sense.

Yeah. I think it was important to him as an act of defiance of the Hierodules. Urth had just been quarantined; I envision Typhon muttering, "quarantine \_this\_ assholes..." -- which also helps explain why it was important that he, personally (in some form) be present on the \_Whorl\_. "You won't quarantine \_me\_, suckers!"

simple narcissism, I think we can agree Typhon is not narcissistic,

... no, I don't think we can. The mountain says he is.

(As for Typhon's self-stimulation in audience with Severian, Greg Feeley first pointed out many years past that this scene is rather close to a Satanic scene in James Blish's BLACK EASTER. FWIW.)

Ditto several scenes of the character known only as "the demon" in Arthur Byron Cover's AUTUMN ANGELS. This is a pretty common habit among (literary) demons. It probably symbolizes the sterility of their acts, blablablah.

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Roy C. Lackey — 09 Nov 2002, 05:20 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

mantis wrote:

I dunno, Roy, but it seems to me that the same vanity of Typhon would make him more inclined to create a two-headed Pas.

(I guess this is one of those "It isn't a bug, it is a feature!" answers.)

It's a bug!!

We know that Typhon planned to be one-headed asap.

We know that Typhon had the mountain carved in the shape of his one-headed form.

We sense, iirc, that Typhon's two-headed phase was something of a secret, something that was disturbing to those who knew and guarded from the bulk of the population.

Yes, and that's the problem! "The face--the face!", as he put it. "The face would be lost, and it is the face that men are accustomed to obey!" To his way of thinking, he couldn't afford to be

seen as a freak with a second head, a second head that looked like, as Sev put it, "a species of idiot". That's why he stayed behind the curtain on the mountain. With the peasants in open rebellion, he had all the more reason to avoid the public eye; with his authority already challenged, he couldn't afford to undermine it further by being seen with an idiotic second head on his shoulders.

I suppose it has to do with why he wanted the \_Whorl\_ built in the first place. Typhon didn't have an altruistic bone in Piaton's body. He didn't send the ship out to ensure the survival of all-things-that-had-been-Urth lest the ice-future foreshadowed by the dying sun should snuff it all out. Mankind was long ago seeded all over the galaxy, and beyond. Typhon knew that; he didn't even come from Urth, himself. So why *\*did\** he want the ship built, especially if he never intended to be aboard himself?

As a colossal monument to his own ego is the only reason I can see, just like the carved mountain. Typhon planned to live forever, if he could, by any means he could find. If he could've pulled off his dream of a Second Empire to rival the First, it would've massaged his ego to someday travel to a planet or two where he was worshiped as a god. Blue and Green turned out (whether by accident or design) to be those planets. The decades of delay while the ship orbited the new short sun were not part of the original plan. The rebellion by his family screwed up his plan. Had things gone as planned, I suspect, the gods of Mainframe would have followed the cargo to the new worlds. Typhon would have been top god from day one. If he showed up someday from the heavens, the god in Mainframe come as flesh, he had better look like the image the people were used to seeing in the Sacred Windows and art. "The face--the face!"

So, it all comes back to one question: did Typhon, when he decided to build the \_Whorl\_ and set himself and his family up as gods in it, do so with one head and one face in mind, or with two?

I think the answer is one. Unforeseen circumstances forced him to act in haste. He couldn't rid himself of Piaton when the time came for him to be scanned. It may even be, as Nutria suggested, that Piaton's presence was a mitigating factor in the mellowing of Typhon into Pas.

-Roy

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Joe Cilluffo — 09 Nov 2002, 14:25 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy wrote:

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That is an interesting take on it, Roy. I can't say I disagree with you, but I'll offer my take on it fwiw (and without any promises that it is worth much : ) ). As we know from the descriptions of what Typhon and his children actually looked like vs. what they portrayed themselves as to the populace of the Whorl, they more or less could portray themselves however they wanted. Tartaros moderates this a bit by telling Auk that he is invisible because each of them deified appears incarnate to citizens of the Whorl in a form matching his or her conception of what they should look like. Kypris is preternaturally beautiful (although I'm sure she was attractive if Typhon scanned her into Mainframe) because she conceives of herself as such. Tartaros, being born blind, takes on no physical form whatsoever because he has no mental conception of what he should look like.

Coming to Typhon/Pas, so, why the two heads? I guess on a metaphysical level we could say that Typhon conceives of himself as the Typhon/Piaton hybrid, perhaps because he has had Piaton hanging around for so long ungraciously refusing to die that he can't conceive of his own appearance sans Piaton. However, I don't quite buy this, because of course the Pas that

Whorlizens know doesn't have a species of idiot for a second head but a more robust and strong Piaton. Psychologically perhaps Typhon has a split in his personality, two strongly competing streaks within himself. Or perhaps during the scanning-in phase a little of Piaton sneaked in (as someone, Alga I think, speculated).

Ultimately, though, and this may sound like an easy answer (Occam's Razor again!), I think that Typhon probably simply thought the two-headed monster looked cool and appropriately "father of the gods"-like. : ) I look to Scylla for support here, and for the purposes of the gods in Mainframe really is. Scylla is portrayed as having many arms -- Why, when obviously she didn't on Urth. So, why? There is the Hindu symbolism of it, but I doubt she would know enough about Hinduism to choose this appearance for such reasons (although of course GW knows enough to choose it for her, but GW's purposes vs. the gods' purposes is a different story). IMHO, we know from the description of her personality that she is a ruthless and power seeking person, and she looked at the whole god-thing as an opportunity to dominate her worshippers. She choose an appropriately "more than human" impressive appearance for herself to cow her worshippers. If I'm not mistaken, too, she was described as being equally ruthless as her pop, who, similarly, choose the awe-inspiring dual-headed bodybuilder look for himself.

Although on Urth "the face" is all-important, on the Whorl (or Blue, etc.) that loses its significance because Pas is stuck in Mainframe. Pas may be his "scanned-on" digital self, but this digital version is just a copy of Typhon, it's not Typhon himself even if it has all the mental characteristics of him. We are told they can copy their Mainframe selves again and again and even put the pieces of themselves back together (as the resurrected Pas is to do). If Pas or any other god ever is to leave Mainframe, to take physical form he has to possess someone, like Scylla and Chenille. So it doesn't matter what they make their godself look like to Whorlizens, because the Whorlizens will never see "the face" in the flesh again. If they get to Blue and Pas wants to leave Mainframe, he has to possess someone to do it, so it doesn't matter if Typhon at that point would have one head or two, because the person Pas possess won't look like either version anyway. I think this gets us to who exactly Pas and Family are and why they are there -- IMHO, they are not Typhon and family fleeing Urth. Typhon and family live on on Urth -- he tells Sev he didn't have time to board one of the ships leaving Urth. Pas and family are just digital selves of Thyphon and family put there to keep the Whorlizens from killing themselves until they reach Blue -- that was Typhon's plan (the Plan of Pas) in setting up the physical settings of the cities and how many soldiers each got, etc., and the gods are there (in Typhon/Pas' mind, at least) merely to oversee and make sure nothing goes awry, much like the Fliers. Because of this, it doesn't matter to Typhon whether Pas will look like him when he manages to kill off Piaton, especially because they will have to look different if they're going to leave Mainframe and take on physical form anyway. Typhon simply chooses a form for Pas most suitable in his opinion to his plan, the supra-human two-headed bodybuilder.

That's my two cents on it anyway.

- Joe

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Roy C. Lackey — 09 Nov 2002, 19:48 · follows Joe Cilluffo

Joe wrote:

[snip]

I look to Scylla for support here, and for the purposes of the gods in Mainframe really is. Scylla is portrayed as having many arms -- Why, when obviously she didn't on Urth. So, why?<< [snip]

Typhon's first-born child, Cilinia, didn't have many arms, true. But there is some connection

between her and the Mother on Blue. At any rate, she was a girl who had been scanned when she was near the age of puberty (WHORL, 347). The kids were all presumably scanned at about the same time so, as the eldest of seven, she must have been about the age of 12, which means that the youngest couldn't have been much more than about 6 years old, even if they were stair-step children. (This rapid-fire reproduction may have something to do with Echidna's aversion to things sexual on the \_Whorl\_.) It puts a different perspective on reading the LS books when you realize seven of the nine gods in Mainframe were just scans of little kids, doesn't it? This is getting away from my point, but someone asked recently about when Typhon's children were scanned.

[snip]

I think this

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Yes, this does get back to my repeated, but unanswered, question: Why did Typhon decide to build and launch the \_Whorl\_ in the first place? I have suggested it was just a sop to his monumental ego, for reasons given in an earlier post. Does anyone have a better answer?

-Roy

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matthew.malthouse — 11 Nov 2002, 13:30 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On 09/11/2002 05:20:18 Roy C. Lackey wrote:

I think the answer is one. Unforeseen circumstances forced him to act in haste. He couldn't rid himself of Piaton when the time came for him to be scanned. It may even be, as Nutria suggested, that Piaton's presence was a

mitigating factor in the mellowing of Typhon into Pas.

It's certainly one with a certain degree of plausibility. However remember that Paiton hated Typhon for what had been done to him. The stronger Piaton's influence the less I would expect "The Plan" to figure in Pas' priorities.

Further there has been rebellion in Mainframe. Other influences are possible, perhaps even probable, but without clues we're left in the dark.

Matthew