

The Typhon-Severian Family Tree

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 25 Jun 2005

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4466>

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mournings glory — 25 Jun 2005, 14:56

In marshalling his various arguments about the sons of Typhon, cloned or otherwise, the winsome Mr. Wynn has written "there is still the fact that [Severian's] crypt is Typhon's family mausoleum." But is this really so? I for one have always found this assumption to be more than a little troubling and not just because it smacks of total retconning (I defy anyone to point out a shred of evidence in support of the linked family tree theory in either of the first two Sun series), but also because there's a fair amount of textual evidence that leads me to believe that the mausoleum Severian visits with Horn & company is altogether different from the one he visits in the early chapters of SHADOW.

Please bear with me, as I try to make my case.

First to Chapter 19 of RETURN, as Horn tells Severian:

"This girl was a sort of princess here on your whorl. Her name was Cilinia. Have you heard of her?"

The boy said he had not.

"She died here many years ago--many centuries, I believe. Now she must find her grave...Will you help us?"

He did, too. He took us to an old stone building where there were lots of coffins. They were supposed to be up on stone shelves, but most of them were not, and a lot were empty."

Now then for the necessary followup questions: why would Severian, who has never heard of Princess Cilinia, assume that she is buried in the little crypt he has so come to favor over the years? While he is tall and may perhaps fancy himself the son of an exultant, nowhere that I can remember does he fantasize about being the lost scion of some royal family. Isn't it therefore much more likely that he takes Horn and his group to one of the bigger, fancier mausoleums in the necropolis--one befitting a princess of some centuries past? If there's any sort of correlation with Egyptian tombs, we might also expect such a crypt to have been looted over time, especially in a country where quakes may make sealed doors problematical. Notice as well the rather unspecific "lots of coffins," most of which are not up on the stone shelves, and many of which are empty. In Chapter 2 of SHADOW, however, observe how Severian writes, "Neither the closed coffins nor the open ones constituted the attraction of the place...Rather, it was the smallness of the room, the thick walls of masonry, and the single, narrow window with its one bar, together with the faithless door that remained eternally ajar." Moreover, "two empty coffins lay on the floor. Three more, too heavy for me to shift and still intact, waited on the shelves along one wall." Notice the count here: five coffins total, two of which are empty and lay on the floor--and yet by Hoof's count, the mausoleum visited in WHORL contains *lots* of coffins,

many of which are not on the shelves, and

most of which are empty. Given the size of the two respective crypts and the number of open and closed and shelved caskets in each, clearly they cannot be the same.

In addition, as I believe Marc Arimani has already pointed out, what does the device graved on the bronze door of Severian's crypt (the fountain, ship volant, and rose) have to do with Typhon the Great or his family? Nothing, whereas all three, as we shall see, clearly resonate with events in Severian's life.

So then why does Wolfe plant the suggestion that the two families may be related--an interesting idea in itself and one initially proposed by the long absent Mr. Andre-Driussi? The same reason he locates a gaint undersea wall on Blue and has Horn periodically abstaining from eating. For misdirection, which he loves--apparently as much as red herring.

I may be wrong in this (note to site administrator: the Urth search functions pretty much sucks in my opinion), but hasn't Wolfe written a short story about Typhon, yet to be published in Peter Crowther's POSTSCRIPTS, entitled "Comber?" Perhaps Dr. Nick Gevers could confirm or deny. If so, perhaps it will answer many of the questions resolving around Typhon--or knowing Mr. Wolfe's penchant for devilry generate hundreds more.

MSG (no relation to the Glutamates)

James Wynn — 26 Jun 2005, 13:41 · follows mournings glory

MourningS Glory says:

In marshalling his various arguments about the sons of Typhon, cloned or otherwise, the winsome Mr. Wynn has written "there is still the fact that [Severian's] crypt is Typhon's family mausoleum." But is this really so?

[Then MSG notes the following questions, which I will attempt an answer with the understanding that I'm definitely "behind the eight ball" in this case.]

1) Why would Severian, who has never heard of Princess Cilinia, assume that she is buried in the little crypt he has so come to favor over the years?

Yes, and that was my expectation. But there is something "off" about the narration in this case. They don't "search" for a mausoleum, he *takes* them to one. I would have expected Cilinia, actually, to find it. That's not the way it happens, and if the crypt is not Severians the telling is all wrong.

I'm not certain why they would be in a "little crypt" (Severian says the room was small, not the monument). But I'm most surprised to find her buried with any honors at all considering that she seems to have been executed for betraying her father. And a large mausoleum does not necessarily denote the oldest or most important. There is an infamous amount of "oneupsmanship" in mausoleum building.

2) Isn't it therefore much more likely that he takes Horn and his group to one of the bigger, fancier mausoleums in the necropolis--one befitting a princess of some centuries past?

Yes, something like that is what I would have expected. But then there ought to have been a search *among the large ones* and Severian would not have been expected to take the lead in picking it out, especially with as little to go on regarding Cilinia's past as he had. He couldn't even SEE after all.

3)...As I believe Marc Arimani has already pointed out, what does the device graved on the bronze door of Severian's crypt (the fountain, ship volant, and rose) have to do with Typhon the Great or his family? Nothing, whereas all three, as we shall see, clearly resonate with events in Severian's life.

Well, we don't really know that the symbols on the crypt have NOTHING to do with Typhon's family. Would we know what those symbols meant if Wolfe had not written "Urth of the New Sun"? They are still rather tenuous and it seems to me Severian found meaning IN the symbols rather than the symbols having been designed after the fact. I thought that was the part of meaning of his famous quote about symbols: "We believe that we invent symbols. The truth is that they invent us; we are their creatures, shaped by their hard, defining edges."

And has anyone theorized how this person in the tomb is *actually* Severian? (perhaps if it were Apu Punchau's crypt...)

4) Notice as well the rather unspecific "lots of coffins," most of which are not up on the stone shelves, and many of which are empty. Given the size of the two respective crypts and the number of open and closed and shelved caskets in each, clearly they cannot be the same.

Ouch.

The "size of the crypt" is not described in the text, however Hoof's overall take on the number and his description of the layout of the coffins is a difficult (although not insurmountable) difference. It would be cheating for me to say "well, Wolfe made a mistake, here". I don't have answer to this. Nor can I relinquish my discomfort with the description of how the crypt was found. However, you have proven that fingering Severian's crypt as Cilinia's is not as obvious as I asserted.

So then why does Wolfe plant the suggestion that the two families may be related--an interesting idea in itself and one initially proposed by the long absent Mr. Andre-Driussi? The same reason he locates a gaint undersea wall on Blue and has Horn periodically abstaining from eating. For misdirection, which he loves--apparently as much as red herring.

I certainly agree he loves misdirection in his answers to questions regarding his books, however, now we are stuck in a loop like the one Chris accused me of making from Wolfe's answer regarding Silk's "ancestry". If the hints of connection between Severian and Typhon, the giant undersea wall on Blue, and the Rajan's fasting (until the Spring) are misdirections, then they are red-herrings. If they are clues, then they have narrative import. And vice versa vice versa.

btw: I still don't think *my* loop is as eternal as this one.

But if it is cheating for me to wave my hands and say "Wolfe goofed here", how can we permit every reference that gives us serious difficulty to be chunked in the "red-herring" bin?

I may be wrong in this (note to site administrator: the Urth search functions pretty much sucks in my opinion), but hasn't Wolfe written a short story about Typhon, yet to be published in Peter Crowther's POSTSCRIPTS, entitled "Comber?" Perhaps Dr. Nick Gevers could confirm or deny. If so, perhaps it will answer many of the questions resolving around Typhon--or knowing Mr. Wolfe's penchant for devilry generate hundreds more.

I remember Michael Andre-Driussi saying he had convinced Wolfe to write such a story. I was not aware he had started such a story.

Apparently "Comber" is published, and I remember some discussion about it.

<http://www.pspublishing.co.uk/cat/ps3.asp>

I don't think it was Typhon-related.

~ James Wynn

"I examined his face and meditated on my own as I saw it in the polished metal. My straight nose, deep-set eyes, and sunken cheeks were much like his, and I longed to know if he too had dard hair."

-- Severian contemplating a corpse in his mausoleum

don doggett — 26 Jun 2005, 21:36 · in reply to James Wynn

--- James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net> wrote:
MourningS Glory says:

3)...As I believe Marc Arimani has already pointed out, what does the device graved on the bronze door of Severian's crypt (the fountain, ship volant, and rose) have to do with Typhon the Great or his family? Nothing, whereas all three, as we shall see, clearly resonate with events in Severian's life.

Well, we don't really know that the symbols on the crypt have NOTHING to do with Typhon's family. Would we know what those symbols meant if Wolfe had not written "Urth of the New Sun"? They are still rather tenuous and it seems to me Severian found meaning IN the symbols rather than the symbols having been designed after the fact. >

And has anyone theorized how this person in the tomb is **actually** Severian?
(perhaps if it were Apu Punchau's crypt...)

Yes, I have. It is Ymar's tomb, he's the only other Autarch to fly to Yesod, he was a member of the Guild, and he and Severian are **somehow** the same person, if not a clone then somehow the way Able and Arnthor are the same in WK. This "twinning" is a persistent theme of Wolfe's. Ymar is surely the bastard son of Typhon. Why else would anyone support him as autarch? Legitimacy of succession is very important and almost the only way for a boy to become a ruler.

Don

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 27 Jun 2005, 09:27 · in reply to don doggett

On 6/26/05, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote:
And has anyone theorized how this person in the tomb is **actually** Severian?
(perhaps if it were Apu Punchau's crypt...)

Yes, I have. It is Ymar's tomb, he's the only other
Autarch to fly to Yesod,

Ummmm no, Sev's immediate predecessor did, and
got his nuts nipped.

--Dan'l

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.

-- St Teresa of Avila

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

Chris — 30 Jun 2005, 11:22 · in reply to James Wynn

MSG asked:

1)Why would Severian, who has
never heard of Princess Cilinia, assume that she is buried in the little
crypt he has so come to favor over the years?

Crush responds:

Yes, and that was my expectation. But there is something "off" about the
narration in this case. They don't "search" for a mausoleum,
he *takes* them to one. I would have expected Cilinia, actually, to
find it. That's not the way it happens, and if the crypt is not Severians
the telling is all wrong.

If we take Severian's memory for granted, then he should remember *all* of the tombs he's
been around with a high degree of detail, and could lead them to one of those just as easily as
he could lead them to his own, given a basic description (and one can assume that Typhon's
tomb will be distinctive in some way). And I think this is a fairly unproblematic answer.

Aesthetically I prefer a slightly less unproblematic answer. I like to think that there is a deep
(and possibly unplanned) logic to the way things work in Nessus. Thus the passage of time can
be inferred by the movement of the border between populated/unpopulated areas of the city,
etc. It wouldn't be unreasonable to suggest that burials follow a pattern as well, such that given
certain details of a person and when they lived, you might predict where they'd be buried. I
admit this is unlikely, but it presents a picture of a sort of well-ordered Library of the Dead that
somehow feels in accord with my overall impression of the city.

Ouch.

The "size of the crypt" is not described in the text, however Hoof's
overall take on the number and his description of the layout of the coffins
is a difficult (although not insurmountable) difference. It would be
cheating

for me to say "well, Wolfe made a mistake, here". I don't have answer to
this. Nor can I relinquish my discomfort with the description of how the
crypt

was found. However, you have proven that fingering Severian's crypt as
Cilinia's is not as obvious as I asserted.

I do find this point entirely convincing. I do not see any way you can reasonably hold on to the
idea that the two tombs are the same. On the other hand I also don't see why you should need
to hold on to it. Severian may well have several crypts (or unmarked burial plots) within the
city, not to mention Apu Punchau's, etc. This element seems to be one that you like because it
adds depth to your interpretation, rather than being a necessary support.

of making from Wolfe's answer regarding Silk's "ancestry". If the hints of
connection between Severian and Typhon, the giant undersea wall on Blue,
and the Rajan's fasting (until the Spring) are misdirections, then they are

red-herrings. If they are clues, then they have narrative import.
And vice versa vice versa.

Apropos of nothing (much), I wasn't aware there was even a controversy regarding the Rajan's fasting. It always seemed to me straightforward that he was disciplining his appetites, out of awareness that the inhumani picked up their excessive appetites from us.

But if it is cheating for me to wave my hands and say "Wolfe goofed here",
how can we permit every reference that gives us serious difficulty to be
chunked in the "red-herring" bin?

With great trepidation? I don't know, I don't think there's a good answer for this. All we can do is try to be as sensitive as possible to how serious a goof we are ascribing to him, and how likely/unlikely it is for such a thing to be deliberate or not. On one end of the scale I would put items like the "Garsecg/Garvaon" typo. Beyond that I don't think there is any place we can draw the line with full confidence.

With the case of the tombs, if there is an error it is non-trivial; there is no flat textual contradiction involved; and even with the theory-bound objection you have, the objection itself is non-critical to the theory. So I don't see any real motivation to say that the tomb description is a goof.

James Wynn — 30 Jun 2005, 14:21 · follows Chris

Chris said:

If we take Severian's memory for granted, then he should remember **all** of the tombs he's been around with a high degree of detail, and could lead them to one of those just as easily as he could lead them to his own, given a basic description (and one can assume that Typhon's tomb will be distinctive in some way). And I think this is a fairly unproblematic answer.

If we presume Sev investigated every tomb, perhaps his memory is the key. Why presume that? For that matter, why presume that Cilinia's tomb is written a script that Severian can read?

I said:

It would be cheating for me to say "well, Wolfe made a mistake, here".
I don't have answer to this. Nor can I relinquish my discomfort with the description of how the crypt was found. However, you have proven that fingering Severian's crypt as Cilinia's is not as obvious as I asserted.

To which Chris responded:

I do find this point [the number and his description of the layout of the coffins] entirely convincing. I do not see any way you can reasonably hold on to the idea that the two tombs are the same. On the other hand I also don't see why you should need to hold on to it. Severian may well have several crypts (or unmarked burial plots) within the city, not to mention Apu Punchau's, etc.

The reason why I hold it...is for the reason I gave: The description of its finding is not as it should be. I won't argue Wolfe did not carefully read his "New Sun" description of the tomb carefully before writing Hoof's, but that is not inconceivable. Another option, is that this is not a tomb we have met before in the Sun cycle, but the passage is badly written...which is also conceivable.

This element seems to be one that you like
because it adds depth to your interpretation, rather than being a
necessary support.

With the case of the tombs, if there is an error it is non-trivial; there is
no flat textual contradiction involved; and even with the theory-bound

objection you have, the objection itself is non-critical to the theory. So I don't see any real motivation to say that the tomb description is a goof.

You didn't require this proof to believe the tombs were separate in the first place. It is unself-reflective to say this and not to consider that you find MSG's reference "entirely convincing" only because it helps bring the narrative back to a normative keel for you.

I accept the reference, yet I'm still unsatisfied by the narration of the event which is what led me in the first place (and for no other reason) to conclude the tomb was Severian's.

It IS an added benefit that the tomb "adds depth to my interpretation", but Severian being in Typhon's family is not at all necessary for any theory regarding clones on the Whorl, and I did not expect to find it. It *did*, I grant, explain why the Rajan meeting Severian was "necessary" in a literary sense, but I've lived with things that don't make sense in the Sun Cycle before and I will in the future.

I also grant that the "clones on Urth" theory has had a couple of wide holes kicked in it over the last week. But any theory that does not convince one, appears to be founded on cobwebs of some psychoanalytical need. That's not true in this case, but I can't make it stop looking like I'm trying to fit the evidence to my case. All I can say is I did not arrive at the conclusion that the tomb was Severian's with a theory in mind and nothing that led me to it has changed. I simply can't resolve it.

I wasn't aware there was even a controversy regarding the Rajan's fasting. It always seemed to me straightforward that he was disciplining his appetites, out of awareness that the inhumis picked up their excessive appetites from us.

I think only Marc Aramini has used it as an important foundation of a theory. Silk didn't eat *much* but he was quite hungry most of the time. The Rajan on the other hand explicitly states (I can't remember where right now) that he frequently pretends to eat and is quite good at it, otherwise he seems uninterested in eating. It might be interesting to start a thread on his appetite since the references are extensive and, I grant, contradictory. But a search of the books in Amazon.com for "eat" and "hungry" will provide plenty of grist for advocates and detractors (I checked to be sure). The sheer number of the relevant references should at least convince that the Rajan's lack of eating or lack of NEED for eating is no insignificant subplot. For the record, I say he lacks a need to eat (much or at all) in the winter because he is largely extent a Neighbor. <http://lists.urth.net/htdig.cgi/urth-urth.net/2004-December/000274.html> He's gets hungry in the Spring because the Neighbors are SOMEHOW associated with the trees/are the trees just as the same is true for the inhumis and the vines.

It seems that it is unavoidable that some will see meaning and purpose in Wolfe's fiction where others see naturalistic exposition.

~ James Wynn