

The significance of Dr. Talos and Baldanders in Book of the New Sun

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 02 Apr 2007

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4805>

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Joshua Mattson — 02 Apr 2007, 02:49

I recently finished Book of the New Sun for the first time, and, today, Robert Borski's Solar Labyrinth. Absent from it was specific information on Baldanders and Dr. Talos. These two, to me, are two of the most compelling characters in BotNS.

I've heard that Baldanders in some sense is a Satanic/Luciferic figure and is aligned with the alien monsters of Urth. But how does Dr. Talos fit into the story? Why exactly is Baldanders an alternate candidate to bring the New Sun? I thought that only Autrarchs could be candidates.

Thank you.

Jeff Wilson — 02 Apr 2007, 03:13 · in reply to Joshua Mattson

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Within the context of the Book + Urth's cosmology (as I and most listers understand it), there are no "candidates", only Severian, Who is the New Sun. The various powers and posers who have imperfect knowledge of the New Sun's nature of course do not realize this, and they believe it is possible for a sufficiently powerful person or faction to sieze divine favor by fulfilling the prophecy, similar to the Nazis trying manipulate moral authority by seizing the Holy Grail or the Ark of the Covenant in the Indian Jones films.

So it's not the lack of being Autarch that is holding Baldanders back; he could eat brains along with the best of them. It is the lack of his being the Theoanthropos; that is, he's not God.

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 02 Apr 2007, 05:12 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Whoa, there, Jeff. I agree with much of what you say, but this ...

On 4/1/07, Jeff Wilson <[jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)> wrote:

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... requires some serious reconsideration, for Severian is **not** the Theoanthropos either. Wolfe has gone to great pains to be clear on that; Severian is purely human -- at least, until he is bonded to the White Fountain = New Sun after his trial. (That this bonding takes place in such a way that he has always already been bonded to it makes matters a bit more confusing, but he definitely wasn't until he was, then he always had been. If you see what I mean.)

At any rate, I'm fairly sure that the only case of the Theoanthropos actually appearing in Wolfe's fiction is in "The Detective of Dreams"

-- and now you can all tell me what I've missed, but anyway, to return to Joshua's original question:

I've heard that Baldanders in some sense is a Satanic/Luciferic figure and is aligned with the alien monsters of Urth. But how does Dr. Talos fit into the story? Why exactly is Baldanders an alternate candidate to bring the New Sun? I thought that only Autrarchs could be candidates.

How does Talos fit in?

Well, one of Baldanders's projects is to make himself more-or-less immortal by having his body continually grow. It is mentioned that he must in time become aquatic, for his bones would not be able to support his weight after a certain size: as Homer Simpson might say, "In this household, we obey the Square-Cube Law." At any rate, what he seems to be doing is a very advanced and perverted form of the "Great Work" of alchemy.

The alien monsters -- the Megatherians, who may or may not all be "aliens"; some may be like Baldanders -- appear to be a demonic faction in the same sense that the Cacogens are angelic: the Cacogens serve (or seek to) the Increate; the Megatherians seem to oppose His will. Certainly they seek to frustrate the plan by which Urth will be reborn with a New Sun. They seek dominion over the Urth, but their power seems to be constrained in some interesting ways, aside from the limits placed on them by their size, so that they must act through intermediaries. Among these are/have been Typhon and the Ascians; whether Baldanders is one of their tools or merely seeks to be one is unclear.

Doctor Talos is a creation of Baldanders; the two of them say as much. Talos was created to do the parts of Baldanders's projects -- most of which focus on Baldanders -- that he himself could not do, either because there's a limit to how much surgery you can perform upon yourself, or because as Baldanders's body grows it has new needs and limits. One of these limits seems to be a high energy consumption, so that he is tired much of the time, and Talos is responsible for rousing him in the morning.

As for Satanic/Luciferic, one thing to consider is "Byronic." Dr. Talos himself draws attention to the thematic links between the two of them and the Frankenstein story, though of course the parallels are highly inexact. Recall, then, that the subtitle of Mary Shelley's book is "The New Prometheus," and recall also that when she conceived it the Shelleys were hanging out at Byron's place in Switzerland. To a reasonably-orthodox Christian like Wolfe, the mistake of Byronism can be summed up simply: the belief that "Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven," the words Milton put into Satan's mouth, is somehow a noble idea -- that rebellion and self-willedness are inherently good things. (Note that I do not claim that Byron himself made this mistake, though for all of me he may have; but his clique did, and his legions of black-cloaked imitators down the years since certainly have.)

I'm not sure Baldanders is Satanic/Luciferic **as such**; it is, after all, Typhon and not Baldanders who puts Severian through his "temptation in the wilderness." But he clearly isn't on the side of

the angels. He is self-seeking, and while that ultimately serves the side of the devils, it appears that he is also a tool of the Cacogens to some extent.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

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Soon, where Toon Town once stood will be a string of gas stations, inexpensive motels, restaurants that serve rapidly prepared food. Tire salons, automobile dealerships and wonderful, wonderful billboards reaching as far as the eye can see. My God, it'll be beautiful.