

Pas[sing] as Urthling

The Whorl list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 12 Mar 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1265>

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Robert Borski — 12 Mar 2001, 17:00

First Alex Groce wrote:

<Fine and well, but you still haven't dealt with the fact that when Severian meets Typhon in SWORD, Typhon doesn't remotely resemble a Neighbor, in any way, form, or fashion. Indeed, if he's a Neighbor, the grafting of a human's head onto his shoulder seems unlikely in the extreme.>

Then batting second Kevin Maroney added:

<Pas's second head is artificial. This is explicitly stated in _New Sun_. Typhon doesn't show any evidence of having any other attribute of the Neighbors, including a long nose, an excess of limbs, etc. I wouldn't presume to call something that obvious a "coincidence", but I think that the connection is more subtle than that.>

Gentlemen, you both need to reread SWORD or increase your dosage of ginkgo biloba because your memory apparatus is slightly skewed.

Observe what Typhon tells Severian near the end of Chapter XXV:

"No, I was not born as I am, or born at all, as you meant it. Nor was Piaton grafted to me. _I was grafted to him._"

So no, of course, Piaton-Typhon doesn't resemble a Neighbor in any way, form or fashion because Piaton is a human and Typhon's head is grafted to him, not Piaton's head to Typhon's body.

For all we know Typhon's body--the part we never see (although I hear the autopsy photos may soon appear on FOX)--could have any number of limbs, or even one hundred heads, like the Typhon of Classical Mythology.

Factoring in the "I was not born as I am, or born at all" leaves even more wriggle room, no?

Robert Borski

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 12 Mar 2001, 16:06 · follows Robert Borski

For all we know Typhon's body--the part we never see (although I hear the autopsy photos may soon appear on FOX)--could have any number of limbs, or even one hundred heads, like the Typhon of Classical Mythology.

Some of us, as it happens, _have_ reread SWORD recently. My copy isn't here at work with me, but... Do you recall _why_ he did a head transplant instead of just putting his brain into Piaton's body? "The face." One. People were accustomed to obeying this one face. Reasonable conclusion: Typhon-pre-surgery had one face and thus, most likely, one head.

Supporting evidence: A race with two or more heads (in, at least, the usual meaning of this phrase) and only one personality would _not_ have the personality "stored" in a single head. Either it would be distributed among heads, or it would be somewhere else (cf. Pierson's Puppeteers). But Typhon is a single, apparently normal human, head, grafted onto Piaton's body.

Factoring in the "I was not born as I am, or born at all" leaves even more wiggle room, no?

Yes, but not for the "Typhon is a Neighbor" theory. (When a theory starts needing wiggle room, it's probably time to abandon it.) Much more plausible (particularly given the level of biotech that produced Silk and Mucor) is the idea that he was a gengineered in-vitro "birth."

Actually, I picture him as looking like Ricardo Montalban...

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Alex David Groce — 13 Mar 2001, 03:05 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Robert said:

Gentlemen, you both need to reread SWORD or increase your dosage of ginkgo biloba because your memory apparatus is slightly skewed.

Observe what Typhon tells Severian near the end of Chapter XXV:

"No, I was not born as I am, or born at all, as you meant it. Nor was Piaton grafted to me. _I_ was grafted to him._"

OK, you (sort of) have us here. Kevin & I were thinking of Piaton's head being the graft-on, but of course it's the other way around (otherwise Typhon doesn't get a studly young body out of the deal, and the nervous system isn't in Piaton's control so Severian can kill Typhon). BUT, this doesn't really change things much. Is your claim that Neighbor's faces look human enough that Severian notices nothing odd? That "The _man_ had two heads, like an ogre..." is notable, but that one of these heads is alien is not? Severian mentions both heads when he discusses the corpse in chapter XXIV, and the distinguishing feature is hair color.

Blattid gives a pretty strong rebuttal of the idea that old Typhon had two heads (if Neighbors have two heads) and the explanation of the "born as I am" he gives seems dead-on to me.

Sorry, but I still don't understand how the Mother, Silk or Seawrack comprehends the language of the Vanished People.

Well, again, there is a question of what is meant when Urth Scylla tells Silkhorn how to contact the Mother, but that's a question about Scylla's knowledge of the language(*). It would be pretty strange if the Mother, who is a goddess of the Neighbors and has been on the planet before the arrival of the Whorl, I assume, did NOT know their language. From that to Seawrack's knowledge is obvious. Now, why Horn has to ask Urth Scylla, if Seawrack has taught him something of this language (which the translation in IGJ indicates) is a bit puzzling, but I'm not sure that "how to communicate" necessarily means "how to speak her language." If I give you someone's email or phone number, it could be said I'm telling you how to communicate with them, even you already share a common tongue with them.

(*) Well, she's her "sister." I take it that Abaia, Erebus, Scylla, etc. are all definitely

space-travelers. So if it is a common language that's the issue here, they might have both learned Neighbor from their "Fodor's Blue/Green System for Great Old Ones" or Neighbor may be linguistically derived from the tongue of the Space Monsters.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

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