

The Conciliator's ho-hum career

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 23 Nov 1999

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Dan Rabin — 23 Nov 1999, 23:26

Rostrum writes:

What's he going to do, other than wander around healing people and turning water to wine that will make him such a mythic figure? Not that miracles aren't notable, but most of the world's religious figures are remembered for something more than a bunch of magic tricks.

If we go back to the scene in which Canog overhears Severian explaining his role to his "followers" in his cell, I think we can start to put some of this together.

Presumably, the Hierodules, Hierogrammates, and Hieros were unknown in detail to the populace in Typhon's day. Typhon probably had a cult of personality: let us imagine him to be as frightening and ever-present to his subjects as was Stalin in his day. A wonder-worker appears out of the sky, behaving ethically, survives a beating at the hands of Typhon's goon squad, calls down an earthquake as he is about to be treacherously executed, and kills the hated prefect of the torturers. While in prison awaiting almost certain execution, he reveals that he is on a mission to reconcile the sky people with the Urth people, and is bringing a New Sun (the old one having faded appreciably in Typhon's day, as he reveals in Sword). There's hope! The tyrant may be challenged, and perhaps the sun can be renewed as the Conciliator renewed himself after his beating!

As the Conciliator is escorted from his cell to be taken to see the Monarch, he prophesies that the ragged apprentice Ymar will become the ruler, and he repeats the prophecy of Typhon's downfall to the Monarch's face! The angry ruler imprisons the Conciliator, who tames wild animals, wins over some of Typhon's soldiers, and vanishes when true danger approaches. The Conciliator could have killed Typhon with the concealed knife, but declines to do so, and he rescues the officer whose negligence let him retain the knife.

This is POWERFUL STUFF! These events would not seem to their witnesses to be just a sequence of unconnected supernatural-appearing tricks. Rather, they would seem to be a divine intervention against Typhon by a power far greater that heals and succors rather than imposing rule. Ymar's rule, prophesied by the Conciliator, would derive its legitimacy from the connection. Indeed, we learn over the course of New Sun that the quest to bring the New Sun is the central feature of the Autarchy. The fact that the Autarches have Hierodules as advisors is an enactment of Severians "conciliation".

And a thousand years later, when the Conciliator is remembered and Typhon forgotten, the former kills the latter in the course of utterly refusing to rule via the tyrant's power. Of course, it's ten years earlier for Severian, and Typhon doesn't know that Severian doesn't know that he will become the Conciliator.

Perhaps the fact that we see these events through Severian's eyes rather than those of the populace is what makes all seem so inconsequential.

-- Dan Rabin