

Severian = Conciliator hint in BOTNS

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 28 Jun 1998

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Dan Rabin — 28 Jun 1998, 17:46

We have recently been discussing whether the identity of Severian, the New Sun, and the Conciliator is deducible from The Book of the New Sun.

I offer the following citations:

Citadel, X, end of chapter:

As Ava prays, Severian remarks:

``I, knowing no prayers, spoke without sound to someone who seemed at times within me and at times, as the angel had said, infinitely remote."

Citadel, XIV, 8th and 9th paragraphs:

Severian prays (just before affixing the Claw to the altar of the Pelerines in the lazaret), and describes the experience thus:

``... I remained conscious of my kneeling body, but only as a peripheral burden. My mind was among the starry wastes, far from Urth and indeed far from Urth's archipelago of island worlds, and it seemed to me that that to which I spoke was farther still--I had come, as it were, to the walls of the universe, and now shouted through the walls to one who waited outside.

`Shouted,' I said, but perhaps that is the wrong word
[...]

I asked only that I might lead myself; and as I did so, I seemed to see, with a vision increasingly clear, through the chink in the universe to a new universe bathed in golden light, where my listener knelt to hear me. What had seemed a crevice in the world had expanded until I could see a face and folded hands, and the opening, like a tunnel, running deep into a human head that for a time seemed larger than the head of Typhon carved upon the mountain. I was whispering into my own ear, and when I realized it I flew into it like a bee and stood up."

The latter passage is a personal favorite. I tend to skip the hard parts on first reading, and it seems like a typical Wolfean paradox on light reading, like the Botanical Gardens transcending space and time. The first time I read it after reading The Urth of the New Sun, of course, it hit me like a bolt of lightning (and a breath of air from Yesod).

The bit about locating his consciousness in a remote location is clearly the same as the portrayal in Urth. The second paragraph contains a sort of Enlightenment, granted in response to the humility of Severian's petition. And it's all hidden in this reflective moment before the plot resumes.

-- Dan Rabin

Michael Straight — 30 Jun 1998, 09:30 · follows Dan Rabin

On Sun, 28 Jun 1998, Dan Rabin wrote:

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``I, knowing no prayers, spoke without sound to someone who seemed at times within me and at times, as the angel had said, infinitely remote."

I don't think this bit says much about Severian's identity. It sounds to me like the way many people might describe their experience of prayer, but few if any would mean by it that they are themselves Jesus. It seems to me more an expression of the paradox of God's immanence and transcendence.

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This part takes on lots of significance in retrospect having read Urth, but again, I can think of several ways to interpret it other than "Severian will leave the universe, become the New Sun, then go back in time to become the Conciliator." I think alga would have labeled that "fan fiction" back before Urth came out.

So far, the parallelism of the titles seems like the most concrete clue to Severian's destiny. But even with that, I can see imagining that the title of CLAW refers to Severian following in the footsteps of the Conciliator, doing deeds like his, rather than thinking Severian would eventually go back and be the Conciliator.

-Rostrum

Tony Ellis — 30 Jun 1998, 16:05 · follows Michael Straight

Rostrum wrote:

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I can clearly remember appreciating that Severian was both Conciliator and New Sun long before URTH was even published. For me, all the conclusive evidence was in the chapter entitled "The Key to the Universe", which effectively says that in the future Severian "already has" brought the New Sun, and that he will acquire the power to walk the corridors of time.

It may have helped that I have never distinguished between New Sun and Conciliator. For me they were always two different names for the same thing: the Conciliator was the New Sun in

the past, the New Sun was the Conciliator come again.