

ZANDY'S VIEW

“Religion’s cute,” said Zandy, rustling her ears and enjoying the pleasant little crackling sensation as she did so. “It’s kind of neat the way that people believing in a supreme being who represents everything that’s Good leads to all these wonderful, vicious, wars.”

Her mother looked up from what she was doing - putting away some knives and forks into an intricately carved burnt-wood dresser. She admired in passing the elegant blackened metal and the delicate barbs on each of the three tines of one of the forks. She gave Zandy a quizzical glance and smiled slightly. Her daughter was coming on. “It’s much better than neat, Zandy – it’s one of the greatest ideas the Lord has ever had!” Reflecting for a moment, her mother went on. “But it hasn’t worked out quite so well as we might have hoped.”

Zandy curled her still rather short tail around her waist and absent-mindedly scratched her lower rib with its tip. She looked around the capacious kitchen and comforted herself with the familiarity of its cosy nooks and crannies. Zandy thought about the history she had been learning recently and wondered quite what her mother might mean. She thought about the magnificent wars centuries ago where great hordes of men had made their way through what they now called Europe to the East of the Mid-Land Sea. They had gathered in the West and made their way along the north coast, gathering strength at the beginning of their journey as they met with like-minded people, but waning in strength as the journey continued, decimated by the hardship of the journey and demoralised by the increasing hostility of the people whose lands they passed through.

Eventually, they had arrived at their goal - a city, infested in their eyes, by a host of other men who worshipped a different (though still Good) supreme being. Then came the moment of reckoning. Commonly, the invading Westerners were destroyed, demoralised and scattered, but sometimes they had their ephemeral victories. Either way, the suffering was truly spectacular – the starvation and disease on the long route eastwards, the casual killing by bandits in treacherous mountain regions, and last of all, the orgy of destruction in the final confrontation. The Great Lie had worked so well!

Her mother looked at Zandy with amused bright eyes. She was a smart kid. “Where have you got to in history – the Crusades?” Zandy looked up, wondering what her mother was going to say next. “Things haven’t always gone quite so well with the Lie, you know. I’ve heard stories from Folk who have spent time in the Humans’ world.

Troubling stories. You know we use humans called priests to spread the God idea? Well, one story was about one of these people. Most of them just get rich and fat – spreading the Word is an easy living – but this one started to spend the money he made on no-hopers who didn't have any or, would you believe it, on sick people! Somehow or other, the habit spread and there was a whole colony of them helping each other out and generally being nice to each other. Some of them even started to become content and happy!”

Zandy looked at her mother with a mixture of fright and disbelief. The consequences of things like that happening were too bad to think about. Soul-food was already in short supply.

“What had happened, apparently, was that they had started to take the God idea too literally – they were trying to behave the way they thought He would.” She stopped. Privately, she was worried about how little they heard about what actually happened in the world of men. “I don't think that kind of thing happens very often,” she said with a forced smile, “but don't believe everything they teach you at school!”

Zandy picked up her bag from the corner, and went to the door. She lazily stretched her wings as she stepped outside – they were still rather stubby, but she was pleased with the deep shine the leather had recently taken on. She slowly made her way to school, comforting herself with the familiar screams of the damned coming from the lower pits. She skilfully negotiated the complex pattern of thermals, and neatly skirted around a gout of flame which shot up unexpectedly from a deep fissure. The world was perhaps more complicated than she thought. And nagging away at a corner of her mind was a very odd thought. Surely something like God couldn't really exist?