

Lives and Times of the Master Torturers II

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 19 Aug 2000

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Talarican — 19 Aug 2000, 13:42

The Palaemon Elevated After Restoration/Young Prodigy Gurloes Scenario

Malrubius as remembered by Severian is described as seeming quite old, but he was also very ill with something that suspiciously resembles tuberculosis or lung cancer (Citadel). We assume he is elderly at the time of his death, but he could indeed have been no more than middle aged and racked with disease. Sev did not state exactly how old he was when Malrubius died, but indications are that Sev was well along with what we would think of as primary school but not yet a teenager. As of 1 p.s. Sev stated he had been dead "several" years. And we are told Malrubius died when Sev was a young boy, well before his term as captain. So it seems safe to hypothesize that Malrubius died around 11 p.s., give or take a couple of years. Palaemon apparently succeeded Malrubius as the sole master of apprentices when Malrubius took to his deathbed.

Palaemon is described in terms which we generally understand to mean he is quite elderly and has been so for as long as Sev can remember. In Palaemon's life of course is found that wonderful puzzling data point indicating that around 30 p.s. he was a hale and healthy journeyman in his prime if not young, exiled for who-knows-what, who whipped the young Winnoc. If we figure "journeyman" Palaemon could have been as old as sixty when he flogged Winnoc, he would be a bit less than eighty when Malrubius died and ninety at the time he gave Terminus Est to the disgraced Severian. Sometime in the decade between Winnoc's flogging and Severian's birth, Palaemon was readmitted to the bosom of his guild brothers and elevated to mastership. Quite a turnabout in attitude, wouldn't you say? Also, his eyesight deteriorated or was damaged during that period. (aside - like Ultan, could he have sacrificed his eyesight with too much reading?) But so far, no particular problem with the timeline.

Trying to fit Gurloes into this scheme without making him absurdly young becomes a problem. Severian states that Gurloes has been a master at least since Sev's birth. LU presumes that Gurloes is about sixty in 0 a.s., and that is quite reasonable if it is axiomatic that master torturers are never elevated younger than forty, and Gurloes had been a master at least all of Sev's life. The only hint offered of Gurloes' age is that statement he made "It was much harder, believe me, forty years ago..." (Shadow VII). LU seems to interpret this as saying Gurloes was Sev's age, eighteenish , forty years previously, making him sixtyish when Sev is exiled.

The problem that arises is that Palaemon plainly indicates Gurloes was once one of his pupils "Since Gurloes rose to journeyman I have had no better scholar"(Shadow XIV). This implies that Palaemon was a master teaching apprentices at the time Gurloes was nineteen or twenty. Well, Gurloes would have to be no older than forty-something in p.s. 1, if Palaemon was not elevated and appointed a teacher of apprentices until after the unspecified time he returned from exile, perhaps a year or two after he whipped Winnoc. In that scenario Gurloes could not have been much older than around twenty seven when Sev was born; therefore we would have to conclude that Gurloes was elevated as a quite young man. This is a stretch, but, considering what I will propose to be the probable state of the guild at the time, maybe not impossible. Palaemon

hinted that Gurloes was something of a prodigy.

We might speculate we can fudge a bit, invoking Sev's questionable memory, that Gurloes might not have been elevated until Sev was, say, about five years old, prior to which I doubt most children would be aware of rank. However, Gurloes' elevation would have occasioned a 'lofty' feast, presumably the only such occasion within young Sev's lifetime had such occurred. It is unlikely he would have forgotten or misunderstood the significance; to impress such memory and sense of significance is indeed the purpose and function of such ceremonies.

Furthermore, we must now reconcile the fact that Palaemon was not appointed Master of Apprentices until Malrubius took sick, about the time Sev was seven or eight perhaps, by which time Gurloes must already long since have been elevated to master. Clearly, Palaemon was Gurloes' tutor in some capacity other than that of Master of Apprentices.

Evidently Palaemon must have been a co-teacher along with Malrubius at least since his return. Since Sev plainly remembers Malrubius as the tutor of the younger lads, himself included, perhaps Palaemon specialized in teaching more advanced and arcane topics to the older apprentices and interested journeymen for so long as Malrubius was well enough to teach the young'uns. When Malrubius took to his bed, Palaemon simply assumed responsibility for the younger apprentices' primary education as well, there being no one else.

The other effect Palaemon's exile had on the timeline is more subtle, but profound in its ramifications to the chronology. It puts a huge immovable datum in the chronology which definitely fixes Palaemon's situation at that time, with the implication that certain other events definitely took place before or after that point. It requires we assume Palaemon was either rehabilitated, elevated to master, and taught apprentice Gurloes during that decade between Winnoc's whipping and Severian's birth, or else that Palaemon had already been a master, and Gurloes' tutor, prior to his disgrace. In the latter case, Winnoc's statement that Palaemon identified himself as a journeyman needs an explanation.

Whether or not Malrubius ever headed the guild before Sev's birth, it seems likely there were one or more other masters Severian never knew, never named in the text, still living during that decade between Palaemon's exile and Sev's birth. We can safely conjecture that any masters other than Malrubius at that time probably were already elderly and/or ill while Palaemon was still in exile, and felt the approach of death. They may have decided to embark on a desperate strategy to perpetuate the guild. They probably considered candidates for mastership from among younger if promising journeymen, and brothers with unorthodox, checkered pasts who in times past would have been unthinkable as masters, if not pariahs forever.

Finding evidently no promising candidates in the Matachin Tower pool of journeymen of that time, they recall Palaemon from his exile intending to rehabilitate him and eventually elevate him to master, though not to place him in the chain of command. Palaemon evidently had been a scholar from youth. Since Malrubius was already the tutor of the young apprentices, Palaemon must have specialized in research and the guild equivalent of higher education. In due time Palaemon takes charge of an exceptionally apt apprentice named Gurloes until he is masked some seven to two years prior to Sev's birth, c.25 p.s. in the LU convention. In this scenario, he would have been around forty-five in 1 p.s. when Gurloes made that reference to his own boyhood forty years previously. So (to disagree in this instance with the LU version) the time Gurloes had in mind with that statement would not have been his own senior year as an apprentice, but his early childhood.

Years pass and any masters other than chronically ill Malrubius and aging Palaemon are dead or dying. Neither probably has the temperament or stamina to take on the responsibility of the

headship of the guild, and of course Palaemon remains under a cloud. The masters again decide that the survival of the guild requires an even more serious break with tradition and protocol. They promote the talented but eccentric and very young journeyman Gurloes not only to mastership, but to be groomed to quickly assume the headship of the guild. Soon afterward, all masters other than Gurloes, Malrubius, and Palaemon are dead, and infant Severian comes into the hands of the guild.

Chronology of the 3 guild masters

c. 90? p.s. birth of Palaemon (& Malrubius?)

c. 70? p.s. Palaemon (and Malrubius?) masked.

c. 70? p.s. Autarch Maruthas closes the roads "that was when I [Palaemon] was your [Severian's, in 1 p.s.] age"

c. 44 p.s. latest probable date of Gurloes' birth

c. 40 p.s. as Gurloes remembers, "things were harder, much harder, forty years ago". Gurloes is a small child at this time, one of the little apprentices proud to run up and down steps on errands for the brothers.

c.35? p.s. Malrubius elevated to master

c. 32? p.s. senior Journeyman Palaemon exiled for unspecified offences against the guild.

c. 30 p.s. Journeyman Palaemon flogs Winnoc, tells him he is exiled from the guild for an unspecified offense.

c. 27? To preserve the guild(?), Malrubius and unnamed elderly dying masters decide to recall Palaemon. Palaemon reinstated in Matachin Tower, elevated to master, assumes responsibility to teach older apprentices and does research.

c. 27? Promising senior apprentice Gurloes cranks the generator under Palaemon's tutelage

c. 25? Gurloes masked

c. 21? p.s. ?Last master, other than Malrubius and Palaemon, dying. In an act of sheer desperation on the guild's part, Gurloes elevated to master in his twenties, and installed as head of the guild.

c. 20 p.s. Severian born.

c. 11? p.s. Malrubius dies, after being bedridden with a long illness. Palaemon becomes master of apprentices.

2 p.s., summer and fall Severian nearly drowns, saves Vodalus in the necropolis, encounters Triskele, Valeria, Thecla, Rundesind, Ultan, etc

2 p.s. spring Drotte and Roche masked. Severian becomes captain of apprentices.

1 p.s. Severian masked, proceeds to screw up royally