

Brother Cook and Brother Porter: Robots or Crappy Torturers?

The Urth list — 10 messages, 5 voices, 03 Jul 2010

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Jeff Wilson — 03 Jul 2010, 22:45

Are Brother Porter and Brother Cook journeymen who never became masters? Or could they even be apprentices that never became journeymen?

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< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

David Stockhoff — 04 Jul 2010, 03:09 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Presumably they never became journeymen---maybe they were lousy torturers.

Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Lee Berman — 04 Jul 2010, 04:33 · follows David Stockhoff

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My guess is that they are a bit higher in status than journeyman but (of course) below masters. They go by the title of "Brother". Journeymen seem to call each other by first name.(though Drotte does say to Severian after his elevation and masking, "can't you recognize all the brothers by their eyes....").

Monks call each other "Brother" but they must first pass through the stages of postulant then novice. Very few go on to become Father.

I wouldn't be surprised if Brother Porter and Brother Cook are fully trained and capable torturers who are ready to perform those duties if needed. There are some similar characters in the wizard school in Le Guin's 1968 A Wizard of Earthsea. Wolfe surely read that story before writing BotNS.

Jeff Wilson — 04 Jul 2010, 06:35 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 7/3/2010 10:09 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

Presumably they never became journeymen---maybe they were lousy torturers.

I'm looking over references to them and otherwise to brothers. While writing of his apprentice days, Sev refers to brother apprentices and journeymen. After his elevation, it is brother journeymen and apprentices, but he still refers to passing Brother Porter on the day of his expulsion. Could they be something like midshipmen?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
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David Stockhoff — 04 Jul 2010, 11:31 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

They could also just be titles---whoever is the cook is Brother Cook.

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Jeff Wilson — 04 Jul 2010, 12:03 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 7/4/2010 6:31 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

They could also just be titles---whoever is the cook is Brother Cook.

Brother Cook doesn't even do all the cooking, though. "Soon there is scrubbing and kitchen work. Brother Cook performs such cooking as might be interesting or pleasurable, and the apprentice is left to pare vegetables, serve the journeymen, and carry an endless succession of stacks of trays down the stairs to the oubliette."

And Brother Porter is *old*. "But, oh, how much it cost me to walk past the open tower door and looking out see the corpse door in the curtain wall, and old Brother Porter lounging there."

Looking back over Severian's elevation, I think it might be that they declined the fuligin but asked to remain and serve the Order.

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David Stockhoff — 04 Jul 2010, 12:07 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Good catch. Perhaps being Cook is not actually a duty. Since the Porter is old, he may not actually do much work either.

But this means they could just as well be full brothers. The Porter simply directs whatever portage needs to be done.

Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Jerry Friedman — 04 Jul 2010, 14:05 · in reply to David Stockhoff

"According to Wolfe he [Brother Porter] is a regular torturer of the Guild who does not actually do any torturing."

/Lexicon Urthus/, 2nd ed., p. 288. Michael Andre-Driussi says the same thing, but without the "according to Wolfe", about Brother Cook, Brother Aybert (who may be Brother Cook), and Brother Corbinian the apothecary. He also notes the Brother Porter in Typhon's time in TUotNS, ch. 36.

This shoots down my theory that Brother Cook is really Hercule Flambeau and Brother Porter is really the Chatelaine Mannea.

Jerry Friedman

Jeff Wilson — 04 Jul 2010, 16:14 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 7/4/2010 9:05 AM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

"According to Wolfe he [Brother Porter] is a regular torturer of the Guild who does not actually do any torturing."

Shades of The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything! I wonder if the producers of VeggieTales would consider Wolfe one of their influences.

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< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

António Pedro Marques — 04 Jul 2010, 19:49 · in reply to David Stockhoff

My view on this has always been similar to David's.

There should be someone directing the kitchen and the parlour. Whoever do so might be called Cook and Porter. It wouldn't actually expected that they do torturing, but they must be members of the order anyway. Such titles could be held for decades.