

Ymar The Almost Just

The Urth list — 27 messages, 13 voices, 19 Jul 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5667>

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António Pedro Marques — 19 Jul 2010, 13:04

I put that in the subject because it's one of the things that made me laugh when I first read the books.

Wasn't Ymar a torturer? Has anyone analyzed the significance of both the first and the last Autarchs (and two we know did take the test) being torturers?

Adam Thornton — 19 Jul 2010, 13:16 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 07/19/2010 08:04 AM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

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They know their actions (if successful) will bring death to millions, but unlike most other citizens of the Commonwealth, they are keenly aware that there are things much, much worse than death?

Adam

Lee Berman — 19 Jul 2010, 13:23 · follows Adam Thornton

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That is a funny name. Like something from Monty Python, I think.

And yes, the comparison of Severian to Ymar has been made in the past. Some even think perhaps Ymar was the first version of Severian which was mentioned.

In an interview Gene Wolfe says something like, "considering his scourging of the money changers in the Temple, even Jesus knew what it was to be a torturer".

James Wynn — 19 Jul 2010, 19:09 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 7/19/2010 8:04 AM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

Wasn't Ymar a torturer? Has anyone analyzed the significance of both the first and the last Autarchs (and two we know did take the test) being torturers?

Do we know anything about the other Autarchs? Perhaps they were all reared at the Order of the Seekers of Truth and Penitence.

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John Watkins — 19 Jul 2010, 19:14 · in reply to James Wynn

On Mon, Jul 19, 2010 at 3:09 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

Do we know anything about the other Autarchs? Perhaps they were all reared at the Order of the Seekers of Truth and Penitence.

I think we can be certain they weren't, unless they were reared by the Order outside the Citadel. Rudesind's report of the general euphoria about Severian's elevation to Autarch within and around the Citadel suggests that his immediate predecessors had been unknown to the Citadel-dwellers.

u+16b9

Jeff Wilson — 19 Jul 2010, 21:35 · in reply to James Wynn

On 7/19/2010 2:09 PM, James Wynn wrote:

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Do we know anything about the other Autarchs? Perhaps they were all reared at the Order of the Seekers of Truth and Penitence.

The Old Autarch was apprentice honey steward, and spent his childhood in a town near or perhaps above the House Absolute. Immediately previous autarchs probably weren't torturers, "Severian the Torturer", as Sev reports his enemies called him, wouldn't have any bite.

There were also apparently one or more pre-Typhon rulers of some status called "autarch", since the resurrected Typhon accepts the title from the ignorant Severian when they "first" meet in Citadel. Or perhaps Typhon takes it as the local form of "autocrat".

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Jane Delawney — 28 Jul 2010, 23:40 · in reply to Ant?nio Pedro Marques

On 19/07/10 14:04, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

I put that in the subject because it's one of the things that made me laugh when I first read the books.

It's kind of like the medieval Bulgarian (I think?) monarch who was known as 'Theophylact the Unbearable'! May have gotten the country wrong there; for those who want to check, Theophylact is referenced in Stephen Runciman's 'The Medieval Manichee'.

Wasn't Ymar a torturer?

Uh no, he wasn't. At least, not in the way Severian is a torturer. Ymar was an apprentice in the very earliest days of the guild, when it is remembered that the Towers are actually spacecraft, though also accepted that they are craft that due to circumstances will never be able to venture into space and have already been re-purposed to some extent (what will later be Severian's

Matachin Tower is known as 'the hulk', for instance). The function that Ymar and his seniors seem to fulfill here is not that of torturer, but of gaoler. I think it is more appropriate to speak of Ymar as an apprentice gaoler rather than an apprentice torturer.

To expand: There is no suggestion in the relevant passages in UOTNS that Ymar's organization is a 'guild' in the way that the goldsmiths, upholsterers, witches, curators, beast-masters, bombardiers (matrosses), healers, torturers, jewellers (of whom the cloisonne-makers appear to be a division), whatever are 'guilds' in Severian's time (nor indeed that any of these guilds are in existence in anything like their later forms); Ymar's crew are more like a military formation, perhaps comparable to military police responsible for a prison. The Conciliator is imprisoned, but there is no suggestion that I can recall that he is liable to be tortured as a punishment (though he probably thought he might well be executed - MPs do that on occasion, without necessarily becoming 'torturers' in the process).

Having said that, there's textual evidence that Ymar's organisation both is, and is not the same guild as Severian's. Ymar's "guild" or military formation accepts both men and women, even has a female boss - actually it's probably this unpleasant boss who is ultimately responsible for men and women being separated by Ymar as Autarch into torturers and witches, ie. for the Autarchial decision which gives birth to the Seekers of Truth and Penitence (and of course to their sister guild, the Witches) as Severian knows them.

I know that Sev speaks of the historical cruelty of female guild-members and their predilection to go beyond the sentences handed out by the courts, and states that this is the reason for the absence of female torturers and also for the handing over of female children to be raised by the witches instead - but this in itself does not prove that the primary function of the pre-separation "guild" was torture. There's plenty of opportunity in running a gaol to go beyond judicial sentences, if you are the sole boss and not subject to all that much scrutiny. Severian himself discovers this during his brief tenure as Lictor of Thrax - though to his credit he chose the opposite path, and did what he could to mitigate the miserable lot of the Vincula prisoners so that their confinement would provide the exact punishment prescribed, no more and no less.

JD

brunians at brunians.org — 01 Aug 2010, 06:21 · in reply to Jane Delawney

A torturer insists upon being told the truth, and has various means to ensure that he is being told the truth.

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JD

Dave Lebling — 04 Aug 2010, 23:57 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

It is specifically stated that torture in the Commonwealth is a punishment, not a means of obtaining truth. The Guild performs exactly the tortures ordered, and the torturers are taught to completely ignore anything their victims say. Severian is chided for listening to a victim at one point during his apprenticeship.

Torturers in our time may ostensibly be in search of truth, but the Guild is inflicting judicial

punishment.

-- Dave Lebling, aka vizcacha

brunians at brunians.org wrote:

A torturer insists upon being told the truth, and has various means to ensure that he is being told the truth.

These seem to me to be useful qualifications for a successful monarch.

David Stockhoff — 05 Aug 2010, 00:08 · in reply to Dave Lebling

For the most part, yes. There are exceptions as noted by Gurloes.

Let's say 20% Truth and 80% Penitence. Initially, the ratio may have been different.

Dave Lebling wrote:

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Jeff Wilson — 05 Aug 2010, 00:09 · in reply to Dave Lebling

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I don't believe that this is the whole story. They are still the Seekers of Truth as well as Penitence, and some interrogation takes place, if I remember correctly, including the occasion of the maid being given the full boot. Perhaps the queries of the interrogating authority are also disregarded and thus not recorded.

Jack Smith — 05 Aug 2010, 00:25 · in reply to Dave Lebling

Yeah. Torture is a good way to gain confessions, but not necessarily a way of getting the truth. If you waterboard me, I'll confess to the Lincoln assassination to make you stop.

However, the guild is called the "Order of the Seekers for Truth and Penitence." Does this imply

that once torture was used to try to get the truth out of suspects?

On Wed, Aug 4, 2010 at 7:57 PM, Dave Lebling <dlebling at hyraxes.com> wrote:

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John Watkins — 05 Aug 2010, 00:46 · in reply to Jack Smith

On Wed, Aug 4, 2010 at 8:25 PM, Jack Smith <jack.smith.1946 at gmail.com> wrote:

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I think so. It's also a neat parallel, as many have noted, with the Church and many other religious groups, which are organizations for people who seek truth and penitence.

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James Wynn — 05 Aug 2010, 01:19 · in reply to Jack Smith

On 8/4/2010 7:25 PM, Jack Smith wrote:

Yeah. Torture is a good way to gain confessions, but not necessarily a way of getting the truth. If you waterboard me, I'll confess to the Lincoln assassination to make you stop.

Well, if a "confession" is all that is sought, then, yeah, torture isn't useful for ascertaining the truth. But if the goal is information, and the subject has that information, then I suppose torture would work just fine. I mean, if one would confess to the Lincoln assassination under duress, I suppose he might also give up his actual co-conspirators and their future plans.

It would be easy enough to learn whether the subject is making things up just to make you stop.

On 8/4/2010 6:57 PM, Dave Lebling wrote:

It is specifically stated that torture in the Commonwealth is a punishment, not a means of obtaining truth. The Guild performs exactly the tortures ordered, and the torturers are taught to completely ignore anything their victims say. Severian is chided for listening to a victim at one point during his apprenticeship.

I presumed it was only apprentices who were taught to ignore victims words. Master tortures are those assigned to seeking truth.

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David Stockhoff — 05 Aug 2010, 02:44 · in reply to John Watkins

Of course, there is your own penitence, and then there is other peoples' penitence.

John Watkins wrote:

On Wed, Aug 4, 2010 at 8:25 PM, Jack Smith <jack.smith.1946 at gmail.com
<mailto:jack.smith.1946 at gmail.com>> wrote:

Yeah. Torture is a good way to gain confessions, but not necessarily a way of getting the truth. If you waterboard me, I'll confess to the Lincoln assassination to make you stop.

However, the guild is called the "Order of the Seekers for Truth and Penitence." Does this imply that once torture was used to try to get the truth out of suspects?

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Jane Delawney — 06 Aug 2010, 00:37 · in reply to James Wynn

On 05/08/10 02:19, James Wynn wrote:

I presumed it was only apprentices who were taught to ignore victims words. Master tortures are those assigned to seeking truth.

I don't think this can be quite accurate since in the context of Severian pretending to have forgotten the rule about 'clients' words, Master Gurloes reminds him of the 'bad old days' when journeymen of the Guild were deafened (possibly as a part of the ritual of elevation) - precisely, one is given to suppose, in order that they should not attend to anything said by the 'client'. The implication is that the condition is permanent, and so a deaf journeyman will make a deaf Master, who will not consequently be in a position to act as interrogator.

Also I am sure there is a place in the early chapters of **Shadow** which mentions the possible presence at an 'excruciation' of a judicial official (what was the term? I'm sure it wasn't 'inquisitor' - far too obvious!- but none the less it was fairly clear that the person's role involved interrogation; I can't find the place right now but I'm sure someone will remember it) who appears to be tasked with the interrogation of the accused.

As someone else said, the Guild's purpose at Severian's time involves judicial punishment and nothing else. They do not determine sentences, they do not question them, they are not interrogators; they just do what the courts require them to do.

In fact - it has to be said - they are 'just obeying orders'. One of the notable things Severian does during his odyssey is break free of the early conditioning that has brought so many of his 'brothers' to accept what they do and continue on the path of the torturer.

jd

u+16b9

Jeff Wilson — 06 Aug 2010, 01:03 · in reply to Jane Delawney

On 8/5/2010 7:37 PM, Jane Delawney wrote:

Also I am sure there is a place in the early chapters of *Shadow* which mentions the possible presence at an 'excruciation' of a judicial official (what was the term? I'm sure it wasn't 'inquisitor' - far too obvious!- but none the less it was fairly clear that the person's role involved interrogation; I can't find the place right now but I'm sure someone will remember it) who appears to be tasked with the interrogation of the accused.

SHADOW, VII: "At last the time would come, to men and women alike, when instead of a journeyman with food, Master Gurloes would appear trailing three or four journeymen and perhaps an examiner and a fulgurator."

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Jane Delawney — 06 Aug 2010, 01:20 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 06/08/10 02:03, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 8/5/2010 7:37 PM, Jane Delawney wrote:

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thank you thank you thank you that's it of course.

should never post without the book of course, apologies.

jd

Ryan Dunn — 06 Aug 2010, 02:43 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Fulgurator as in someone who practices diathermy? What would the examiner do? Is it a good cop/bad cop thing? One's doing the flaying, one's relieving the pain enough to keep the excruciation going?

Whose the interrogator?

...ryan

On Aug 5, 2010, at 9:03 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

SHADOW, VII: "At last the time would come, to men and women alike, when instead of a journeyman with food, Master Gurloes would appear trailing three or four journeymen and perhaps an examiner and a fulgurator."

Jeff Wilson — 06 Aug 2010, 03:36 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

On 8/5/2010 9:43 PM, Ryan Dunn wrote:

Fulgurator as in someone who practices diathermy? What would the examiner do? Is it a good

cop/bad cop thing? One's doing the flaying, one's relieving the pain enough to keep the excruciation going?

Whose the interrogator?

My guess would be that the examiner is the crown's representative, the way medical examiners / coroners determine the cause of death, and that a fulgurator who uses "lightning" for divination, is a polygraph examiner writ large.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Ryan Dunn — 06 Aug 2010, 03:56 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Aug 5, 2010, at 11:36 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

My guess would be that the examiner is the crown's representative, the way medical examiners / coroners determine the cause of death, and that a fulgurator who uses "lightning" for divination, is a polygraph examiner writ large.

Really? I wouldn't have guessed polygraph examiner from fulgurator, but I could be off target. I see traces to the Latin root fulgur which means a flash of lightning. In Latin, a fulgurator can be a hurler of lightning, as in Jupiter. But it also can mean a person who interprets flashes of lightning.

But perhaps more appropriately I see the medicinal "fulguration" which uses diathermy to destroy areas of tissue. Diathermy uses electrical currents to heat up parts of the body (skin, etc.). This can be used to clot bleeding vessels, relieve pain, or kill dead tissue.

...ryan

Ryan Dunn — 06 Aug 2010, 04:09 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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From "Roman and European Mythologies" by Yves Bonnefoy, 1991:

"The observation and interpretation of lightning bolts was left to a special priest called a fulgurator."

Apparently there were gods who threw lightning bolts from the heavens down to earth, and a fulgurator would investigate where they struck alleging them to be divinations. There were good and bad bolts, public and private ones, bolts that gave advice, others that gave orders. Some fulgurators would perform purification rites at the lightning strike sites, setting small stones down where the energy was said to remain trapped under the surface.

...ryan

Jeff Wilson — 06 Aug 2010, 04:50 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

On 8/5/2010 10:56 PM, Ryan Dunn wrote:

On Aug 5, 2010, at 11:36 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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We already know that the torturers supply medical attention to clients, so that would not be a separate specialty. There is also an association of electrical gear with lightning in Gurloes' misremembrance of what makes The Revolutionary go.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
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Ryan Dunn — 06 Aug 2010, 04:54 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Aug 6, 2010, at 12:50 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Sure, so is your idea that the fulgurator "divines" the truth the way the priests of old divined the meaning of lightning strikes from the gods? Or do you see the fulgurator as an interrogator who uses some electrodes and a polygraph to get intel? Or neither? Or both?

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Jeff Wilson — 06 Aug 2010, 05:35 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

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I think the fulgurator uses electronic technology to determine if the client is speaking truthfully. They probably monitor and discretely relay the level of verity to the examiner proper, who concentrates on questioning and applying duress through the torturers.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
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David Stockhoff — 06 Aug 2010, 12:11 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

All of those, I'm sure.

Ryan Dunn wrote:

On Aug 5, 2010, at 11:36 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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...ryan

Jerry Friedman — 06 Aug 2010, 15:35 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com>

On 8/5/2010 9:43 PM, Ryan Dunn wrote:

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thing? One's doing the flaying, one's relieving the pain enough to keep the excruciation going?

Whose the interrogator?

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I'll agree if his job in this case is to determine the guilt for a crime. In other words, I think the examiner is the interrogator.

and that a fulgurator who uses "lightning" for divination, is a polygraph examiner writ large.

I'd assumed that the fulgurator was an electrician (and was amused by the idea that the word Gurloes can't remember might be "fulgor" or some such rather than "electricity"). But I like your suggestion better.

Jerry Friedman