

Roy's Notes on "Hour of Trust"

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 19 Feb 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2969>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 19 Feb 2002, 19:57

Roy Lackey wrote a solid message, beginning:

I think mantis was on the right path to interpreting this story when he viewed the suicide-bomber tactics of the rebels as unacceptably barbaric. In the context of the story, I doubt that Wolfe's sympathies lay with either the de facto corporate government or the rebels. Neither side was "right", but one may have been more wrong than the other. Clio's final paragraph decrying the ethos of corporate America echoes Ben Free, who, I think, was expressing Wolfe's sentiments regarding the 20th century governmental/corporate stifling of individual initiative and freedom.

Roy went on to point out more notes on the title, saying that the "hour" in question is pinpointed at the death of the three ken-kins; and supposition of further infiltration of the corporates by Tredgold.

So Roy, I can see you position on this, but what do you make of the ending? Does it seem "foreshadowed but still somewhat off" (in my first sense of "Why would a mole go kablooie on they guy like that?") or does it make perfect sense?

Roy wrote:

None of the three ken-kins (is the hyphen there just because of the line break?) we are told anything about appear in any way noble or even well grounded in reality. They seem to have no common cause except a willingness to die and kill others in the process.

I agree completely: as presented at this stage in the story they are clearly pawns being coopted, if not coerced, by the rebels. Things are different if one sees Clio's act as leadership leading by example.

Part of the problem in answering these questions is we don't see any of the rebels: we see the ken-kins, who seem like something worse than cannon-fodder, and we see masked Clio (and probably Tredgold) who are higher up, but of nebulous category/rank. So we don't have a sense of what the mass of rebels is like, what they want, what they are willing to do.

Roy wrote:

Then there is Tredgold, who gets too much ink in the story to be ignored. He is the same age as Peters, but seems much older. He opens Peters' eyes to the realities of corporate life, and is at least partly responsible for Peters' change from a good corporation "yes" man at the beginning of the evening to the wannabe, boat-rocking corporate soldier at the end. (The irony is that Clio [who presumably is on the side of the rebels against the corporations] kills Peters when he continues to talk of making a difference, of exercising personal initiative to change the way corporations do things, right after lecturing him about what was wrong with corporations/big government--that they were mindless, bureaucratic entities who only wanted to preserve the status quo--which is what the rebels were rebelling against in the first place.)

While I agree about Clio, still I think she really is urging Peters to go along with the flow of history, if you will, and if he agrees then she would spare him. (Then again, having writ that, I wonder if I'm still attaching too much importance to Peters as a hero having any kind of effect on his own fate?) From her point, it is too late for the type of change you are talking about: the revolution is in full bloom, the corporations are mortally wounded (even if they don't know it yet), the tide of history has moved onto whatever the rebels will do for their time on the stage (having won the war it remains to be seen whether they succeed at the cultural challenge or not).

Back to the telescreens: we are told that the one in the main room has no curtain, and can only give privacy when it is turned off. We don't see Peters turn off the screen in the bedroom (this also ties into the "did they do the nasty or are they still just starting?" question). But then again, are the many calls on hold (I envision each as a little window with a face) able to see Peters even when they are on hold?

In any event, the sense that Clio's speech on corporate sloth is less for Peters than for a rebel audience. Yes, no, maybe, other.

Finally, Roy, which side do you think was more wrong? Every example points to the rebels, but that Ben Free ref . . . oh, I see: that ref is to show Wolfe's sympathy to the rebels. That they have a moral point (corporations being stupid), but this does not entitle them to barbaric solutions (suicide bombers).

=mantis=

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Roy C. Lackey — 20 Feb 2002, 02:26 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis wrote:

So Roy, I can see your position on this, but what do you make of the ending?

Does it seem "foreshadowed but still somewhat off" (in my first sense of "Why would a mole go kablooie on the guy like that?") or does it make perfect sense?

It doesn't make sense to me either; as you have pointed out, if Clio is a rebel with the cause, she is more valuable to the cause alive than Peters is, dead or alive. The reactions of Donovan and Burglund to Peters' overtures make clear that the corporations' elite have no intentions of getting their hands dirty doing whatever was needed to insure survival of the corporate state. The corporations are therefore an evolutionary dead end. Contrast them with the bureaucratic state (the Library of Congress), the first law of which is survival, which continues to function while the world goes to hell around it, and does so without pay.

Part of the problem in answering these questions is we don't see any of the rebels: we see the ken-kins, who seem like something worse than cannon-fodder, and we see masked Clio (and probably Tredgold) who are higher up, but of nebulous category/rank. So we don't have a sense of what the mass of rebels is like, what they want, what they are willing to do.

I suspect that the apparent lack of focus on the rebels' objectives is deliberate on Wolfe's part. Remember, this story had to have been written during the Carter era. It was in part Wolfe's reaction to the '60s, the liberal bent of which, and the various "protest" movements of, he probably had little empathy for or even understood. Post Vietnam, Watergate, Women's Lib,

"free love", "save the whale", etc., the world Wolfe grew up in must have seemed to one of his generation devolving into anarchy, without fixed rules or boundaries. The opinions of a pimple-faced geek on the corner--about anything--were held to be as valid as any others, regardless of ability or experience. The rebel-without-a-clue syndrome writ large.

While I agree about Clio, still I think she really is urging Peters to go along with the flow of history, if you will, and if he agrees then she would spare him. (Then again, having writ that, I wonder if I'm still attaching too much importance to Peters as a hero having any kind of effect on his own fate?)

From her point, it is too late for the type of change you are talking about: the revolution is in full bloom, the corporations are mortally wounded (even if they don't know it yet), the tide of history has moved onto whatever the rebels will do for their time on the stage (having won the war it remains to be seen whether they succeed at the cultural challenge or not).

As you say, Clio perceives that the corporations will lose the war, so there is no good reason for her to kill Peters, if she is a mole. But is she? There is really no good evidence to suppose she is. To make sense of the ending, I think we have to look to the earlier examples of the ken-kins. As I said before, they have no unifying creed. Their reasons for 'sharing' their suicides vary from idealistic to religious to nutty to who-knows-what. The only thing each may have in common is trust violated in some way. What trust did Peters violate? That he hoped to rock the boat with change? Both she and he knew it wouldn't work. That wasn't it; her reasons were more personal. Could it be that Peters' actions belied his words, that history was being repeated? Clio had recently stopped being Lewis's lover; now she found herself in bed with his heir-apparent, and couldn't "figure out why". Exit stage center.

Back to the telescreens: we are told that the one in the main room has no curtain, and can only give privacy when it is turned off. We don't see Peters turn off the screen in the bedroom (this also ties into the "did they do the nasty or are they still just starting?" question). But then again, are the many calls on hold (I envision each as a little window with a face) able to see Peters even when they are on hold?

No, the callers can't see into the bedroom when on hold; neither can they be seen.

"Then he hit Release, wondering if Tredgold had bothered to wait." (148)

Adam is right; Clio exploded *after* having sex with Peters. The lights and, presumably, the vid screen were turned off.

"He took her hand in the dark." (last paragraph)

Finally, Roy, which side do you think was more wrong? Every example points to the rebels, but that Ben Free ref . . . oh, I see: that ref is to show Wolfe's sympathy to the rebels. That they have a moral point (corporations being stupid), but this does not entitle them to barbaric solutions (suicide bombers).

Uh, the rebels seem to be worse, but there aren't any good guys in this story.

-Roy

Adam Stephanides — 22 Feb 2002, 20:11 · follows Roy C. Lackey

I've been following the discussion with interest, but been busy; it's nice to be remembered. Anyway, I'll try to catch up.

on 2/19/02 1:57 PM, Michael Andre-Driussi at mantis at siriusfiction.com wrote:
Roy wrote:

None of the three ken-kins (is the hyphen
there just because of the line break?)

Yes; on p. 154 (Orb edition) the word occurs without a hyphen.

we are told anything about appear in
any way noble or even well grounded in reality. They seem to have no common
cause except a willingness to die and kill others in the process.

I agree completely: as presented at this stage in the story they are
clearly pawns being coopted, if not coerced, by the rebels. Things are
different if one sees Clio's act as leadership leading by example.

Rereading these sections, I'm not sure how we're supposed to respond to the suicide bombers. I'm sure Wolfe finds the tactic immoral, but the kenkins don't strike me as being pawns, or coerced. They don't seem to have been indoctrinated--I have the sense that the only form of "recruitment" is showing footage like the footage we see--and the "emcee" repeatedly states that they can back out at any time. Perhaps we should see this scene, and this tactic, as indicating the aimlessness of the "hippies" of the story, and by extension of Wolfe's time; they're so directionless that the only meaningful act they can conceive of is essentially random murder-suicide. (A point Roy has already made.)

Part of the problem in answering these questions is we don't see any of the
rebels: we see the ken-kins, who seem like something worse than
cannon-fodder, and we see masked Clio (and probably Tredgold) who are
higher up, but of nebulous category/rank. So we don't have a sense of what
the mass of rebels is like, what they want, what they are willing to do.

We don't know what any of the rebels want; iirc none of them presents any political philosophy or program at all. They're clearly descended from the counterculture, and are referred to as "radical" (153), but that's not specific; Peters says "A great part of the population of Detroit is still loyal to free enterpris" (152), but that's ironic, since the corporations clearly don't represent "free enterprise."

Roy wrote:

Remember, this story had to have been written
during the Carter era. It was in part Wolfe's reaction to the '60s, the
liberal bent of which, and the various "protest" movements of, he probably
had little empathy for or even understood.

Actually, it was copyright 1973, which of course strengthens your point. (Lowell Lewis as Nixon? It's not as absurd as it may seem; Nixon was quite liberal compared to today's Republicans, and he instituted wage-price controls, which must have been anathema to Wolfe.)

mantis wrote:

So wow, your reading of the ending is: a pure form of nihilism. That is,
you are saying that Clio is not a mole (agent of the rebels), she really is
a loyal worker like the rest, but she got the mental infection a little
while ago (days, weeks--maybe when she stopped sleeping with Lewis), mixed
up the firebomb ingredients on her own, put them on her person (or in the
bedroom?), and then killed herself and Peters for no reason any better than
that of the ken-kins in the earlier part. It is the internal chaos and
spiritual-vacuum of the individual, not any political or moral or
historical (even "millennial") sense.

That's pretty much how I now read it. She was a true believer in the "government" cause until recently, but from her exposure to Lewis has come to recognize that it's hopeless, so she kills herself out of despair. Although it is a "historical" judgment in a sense: history has nothing to offer her any more. Why she takes Peters with her I don't know; possibly a last poke in the eye

for the corporations which betrayed her.

mantis wrote:

Also: how odd that the beginning has that flash-forward to Clio lighting the candles later in the evening to cheer things up when the fighting was going badly. Definitely sets up the ending, and much of the story, as well, but still it is odd. Seems to be the point of view of Peters, or a blend of Peters and narrator.

And the following sentence is significant too: "Clio (that stenographic muse of history) was good for lighting such things: she was tall, and wore high heels and short skirts..." The government side uses history merely as a decoration, which is one reason why they're losing: recall that Virdon cites Vietnam as evidence that "what matters in combat is organization and fire support" (152).

mantis wrote:

Yes, I think this is the reading that satisfied our friend Adam Stephanides (whom we haven't heard from since, hmmm . . . check for burn marks!).

That is to say (my sense of it, until Adam returns): Clio is History. She is a supernatural force breaking through into the mundane world without any bells and whistles except for this implausible immolation bomb-thing. She has been on the side of the corporations but now she is switching.

Well, no; that's an interesting reading, but it wasn't in my mind at all. Clio is History only in the sense that Moby Dick is the universe, or God, or whatever; in realistic terms she's just an ordinary woman who's an employee and ex-mistress of Lewis's (and possibly a mole, though I tend to doubt it). How she manages to burst into flame like that I have no idea; the description makes it sound like she's covered in gasoline or napalm or some such, rather than having a bomb taped to her, but you'd think Peters would have noticed something like that. Perhaps they've developed a new improved incendiary. (About that ending: my edition reads "The girl's body blossomed fire that engulfed and scared and clung..."; "scared" is a typo for "seared," I take it. And is there some significance to Clio's being referred to, here and on the preceding page, as "the girl"?)

--Adam

Michael Straight — 22 Feb 2002, 20:37 · follows Adam Stephanides

On Fri, 22 Feb 2002, Adam Stephanides wrote:

fire that engulfed and scared and clung..."; "scared" is a typo for "seared," I take it.

I thought it was a typo for "scarred."

-Rostrum

Adam Stephanides — 24 Feb 2002, 00:51 · follows Michael Straight

on 2/22/02 2:37 PM, Michael Straight at straight at email.unc.edu wrote:

fire that engulfed and scared and clung..."; "scared" is a typo for "seared," I take it.

I thought it was a typo for "scarred."

That was my first thought too, but it doesn't really fit; if Peters dies where he falls there's no time for the fire to "scar" him.

--Adam