

"Hour of Trust" series 2

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 20 Feb 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2971>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 20 Feb 2002, 04:12

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 they 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.

Good point, to bring in the Library as another group/mode. But eek, we're lost on that ending again!

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.

Definitely--I tried to make clear that it was our questions that were causing problems; that if we tried different questions, the solution might resolve.

Because the story seems to be about History (he asks for the tape on the last 30 years, meaning what--1965 to 1995?), it is perhaps too easy to see it as analogous to the fall of the Western Roman Empire, as I've done in earlier messages. So the corporations are the decadent Imperialists (who took over from the Republic), the hairies are the barbarian tribes, the immolators are like . . . well, like the Nihilists in Czarist Russia. The immolators are kind of like early Christian martyrs, except that, as we keep saying, they have no unifying beliefs, and rather than martyrdom they are killing others . . . which, hmmm, makes them anti-martyrs. Or Fifth Column: yes, they are rather like a Fifth Column-style (mole/deep agent) suicide/psych ops corps. But again, no belief system beyond "take as many with you as possible when you suicide."

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.

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.

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)

I thought the room was dark because the room was dark: it wasn't that he turned out the lights to try, but that he had never turned the lights on when he came into the dark room: "The bedroom was empty and dark. The vidlink screen was flashing the identity of some caller" (p. 167 of my first edition paperback).

It is while he is sitting there, in the dark room, and the librarian has faded like Cheshire Cat over that Wolfen helmeted astronaut, and Peters wants to know if this is the beginning or the end of the tape, that Clio enters the room.

=mantis=

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Roy C. Lackey — 21 Feb 2002, 08:32 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis wrote:

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Yes, nihilism. There seems to be consensus that, if Clio is an agent of the rebels, her suicide, with or without taking Peters with her, makes no sense. We see very little of the organization of the rebels, but what we do see of the war seems to indicate that there *isn't* much organization. They are winning the war, not because they are good at it, but because the government/corporations are so inept, and the masses seem indifferent. The self-immolation-with-prejudice tactic is too small-scale and haphazard to be effective as a weapon of war. The ken-kins may sympathize with the rebels, but they seem to have individual

agendas only peripherally related to the rebellion. The bearded young man specifically denies that he is doing it for any larger cause. The young girl is doing it because she isn't happy with the world as it is. The bald guy does it because the Dodgers left Brooklyn, or the designated-hitter rule, or something equally worthwhile. I doubt that Clio's motives would make any more sense to me or you or, more importantly, to Wolfe--which is why he doesn't give them.

(Where **do** those people hide the explosive? The bearded man at least, and possibly Clio, were naked. The explosive acts like napalm but . . .)

As for the light in the room: yes, it was dark when he entered, but that doesn't mean it stayed that way; in fact, it couldn't have. He opened the drapes (though it was night outside), used the bathroom, had enough light to use the keyboard, be seen by viewers on the vidlink, could discern who entered the room, read facial expressions, etc. Clio could see him shake his head and see his hand between her thighs. "And later . . ." in the last paragraph implies that some amount of time has passed since he touched her. How much time is problematic, but it must have been quite a while, because the tepid water that was poured on him came from the melted ice in the ice buckets. I wouldn't belabor the point about whether or not they engaged in sex but for how it influences my view of the ending.

I infer that the lights (and vidlink) were turned off prior to sexual activity, which is a common enough practice. After sex, something set Clio off. Of course, this brings up the problem of how they could have engaged in such intimate activity without Peters being aware that she was primed to explode; but then a similar objection could be raised with another story in the same collection, "Seven American Nights", where the female had reason to want the lights kept off and the male was equally oblivious.

In an earlier post I brought up the subject of violated trust and its relation to the title and the self-immolators. Maybe I'm looking at the ending the wrong way. Maybe the trust that was violated was not Clio's trust of Peters, but his of her. He had absolutely no reason to expect such a reaction from her. It wasn't the sex she objected to, or she would have blown herself up before it happened. Whatever her reasons, she had no moral authority to kill Peters in the process. If you can't trust the woman you've just made love to not to kill you, who can you trust at any hour?

-Roy

Michael Andre-Driussi — 21 Feb 2002, 18:10 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy wrote:

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I guess it only really matters in the sense of "where's the bomb?" which, as you note, even granted the difficulty of the naked ken-kin, becomes somewhat more difficult post-coitus.

But as for my sense of the darkened room: it is just like watching tv in a room when the lights are out--surely this is a common experience. So the vid-phoners can see his face by the light cast by the vidphone itself, and he can see in the room by the same light. Opening the curtains at night, looking out to see the street and the ocean, makes more sense to me if the room is dark (it is harder to see out when there is both light glare in the room and one's eyes are light adapted rather than dark adapted).

Enough on that and back to the beginning: what can we make of those two photos, "Viana do Castelo" and "Miro"?

Viana do Castelo is a city in the far north of Portugal. Looking at their web page I didn't find mention of any castle ruins, but there probably are some. I'm not sure what Miro' is, aside from a family name (I don't know what it means).

The v photo seems to show the ruins of a castle on a barren hill. The m photo shows different ruins on a different hill, but it is similar enough that one would easily confuse the two. Wherever the place of the m photo is, it is also in Portugal.

These ruins date from The Reconquista, or something prior to that? Was there some particular historical turning point associated with these ruins (if so, it doesn't seem to be a huge one--that is, nothing in the encyclopedia under history of Portugal)? (Then again, if nihilism is the key, then those old joke historical markers "Nothing Happened Here in 1852" would be appropriate: that is, there are ruins, but nobody knows their stories nor cares.) Is the story set in Portugal because the voyages of discovery started there (tying in with the astronaut image)? And then the overseas colonial empires which grew, exploited, died?

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.

=mantis=

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Andy Robertson — 21 Feb 2002, 21:50 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

----- Original Message -----

From: "Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net>

(Where *do* those people hide the explosive? The bearded man at least, and possibly Clio, were naked. The explosive acts like napalm but . . .)

That is a subtle thought.

Maybe here is something actually "supernatural" here? Maybe the religion of the rebels, if that is what it is, actually allows them to turn their bodies into bombs, through meditation or feedback or something?

It's a wild thought, but then I disagree about the human flammers being "minor". As I have posted

before, I think they are expressing and proving a faith.

hartshorn