

Blue Mouse, Night Chough, uncollected stories

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 07 Mar 2002

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Adam Stephanides — 07 Mar 2002, 04:58

I finally got around to (re)reading "The Blue Mouse," and I'm kind of sorry I did: it left an unpleasant taste in my mouth. The story oozes contempt for the Techs, "soldiers" psychologically unable to fight, who believe themselves morally superior to the Marksmen who do the actual fighting, but are really just cowardly, and treacherous to boot. Since the story was published during the Vietnam War, and the war in the story, as in "Hour of Trust," is modelled after the Vietnam war, I suspect that the Techs are intended to represent conscientious objectors or draft evaders. (I'm not objecting to Wolfe's disapproval of COs or draft evaders, if that's what it is, but to the lack of subtlety with which it's expressed.)

I have a hard time seeing the political background as anything more than window-dressing for the story's main point, though Wolfe would undoubtedly be opposed to the UN superseding nations, or (probably) to American soldiers serving in a UN-controlled force.

On interesting point is that in both this story and "Hour of Trust," the word "peace" is used as part of a dishonest euphemism. The occupying force here is known as the "Peace Force," and in "Hour of Trust" the rebel who first mentions the suicide bombers refers to them as "donat[ing] their bodies to Peace." (154, Orb ed.) I wonder if this has any significance for PEACE, which was published two years after "Hour of Trust."

I also finally got around to reading "The Night Chough," since I found the CROW anthology at my local public library. It's a very good story, much better than I'd expected it to be, and may be one of his best stories of recent years. It's connected to BOTLS and BOTSS, but can be read independently of both of them (and of the Crow mythos, whatever that is), and is well worth seeking out.

Speaking of seeking things out, I was in a used bookstore and glanced at the Wolfe books, and to my amazement they had a copy of CASTLE OF THE OTTER for only \$3. (A book club edition, but still.) Even though I own CASTLE OF DAYS, I bought it, just to have it. It also has a bibliography in the back, though only going up to 1980. Anyway, looking at the bibliography I saw seven stories by Wolfe which I'd never read: Mountains Like Mice, Screen Test, Volksweapon, The Green Wall Said, It's Very Clean, Thou Spark of Blood, and King under the Mountain. The first four of these are collected in YOUNG WOLFE, which I don't have; It's Very Clean was in an anthology called GENERATION, which I don't recall ever seeing; but the last two, according to the ISFDB, only appeared in magazines. Has anybody read any of these? What are they like? Are any of them unsung gems, or at least worth hunting down?

--Adam

Roy C. Lackey — 07 Mar 2002, 06:50 · follows Adam Stephanides

From: Adam Stephanides <adamsteph at earthlink.net>

Date: Wednesday, March 06, 2002 10:58 PM

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I did: it left an unpleasant taste in my mouth. The story oozes contempt for the Techs, "soldiers" psychologically unable to fight, who believe themselves morally superior to the Marksmen who do the actual fighting, but are really just cowardly, and treacherous to boot.

But in the end Lonnie underwent a battlefield conversion; when push came to shove, he decided that to kill was better than to die. He was gung-ho at the end, mowing down the enemy like a regular John Wayne.

Since the story was published during the Vietnam War, and the war in the story, as in "Hour of Trust," is modelled after the Vietnam war, I suspect that the Techs are intended to represent conscientious objectors or draft evaders. (I'm not objecting to Wolfe's disapproval of COs or draft evaders, if that's what it is, but to the lack of subtlety with which it's expressed.)

What, then, was Wolfe saying with that ending?

-Roy

tom — 07 Mar 2002, 18:50 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey writes:

From: Adam Stephanides <adamsteph at earthlink.net>

Date: Wednesday, March 06, 2002 10:58 PM

Since the story was published during the Vietnam War, and the war in the story, as in "Hour of Trust," is modelled after the Vietnam war, I suspect that the Techs are intended to represent conscientious objectors or draft evaders. (I'm not objecting to Wolfe's disapproval of COs or draft evaders, if that's what it is, but to the lack of subtlety with which it's expressed.)

What, then, was Wolfe saying with that ending?

That CO's and draft evaders are no different than the soldiers who actually fight; that deep down inside we're all killers; and that CO's and draft evaders pile hypocrisy and cowardice on top of an unjustified feeling of superiority.

It may be that Wolfe is aiming straight at the college crowd and their deferments. If I remember correctly the Techs were chosen based on a governmental criterion (a test), not on introspective or religious grounds.

It's hard to see Wolfe getting on the Amish for not bearing arms. It's easy to see a veteran of Korea mad at college students during Vietnam.

-Roy

Tom

Adam Stephanides — 09 Mar 2002, 15:55 · follows tom

on 3/7/02 12:50 AM, Roy C. Lackey at rclackey at stic.net wrote:

But in the end Lonnie underwent a battlefield conversion; when push came to shove, he decided that to kill was better than to die. He was gung-ho at the end, mowing down the enemy like a regular John Wayne.

He could have run away; his choice is not between killing and dying, but between risking his life (by killing) and preserving it. But you're right that he undergoes a conversion.

What, then, was Wolfe saying with that ending?

Lonnie isn't a real Tech (i.e. a coward). The psychological tests got him wrong, presumably because he'd been thinking about his mice (another dig at applying "scientific management" to war). Even before his conversion, he sees through the rationalizations the Techs use to maintain their self-esteem, and is ashamed of himself and his fellow Techs.

By showing Lonnie rejecting his Tech-hood and acting courageously, Wolfe is highlighting the cowardice of the other Techs.

on 3/7/02 12:50 PM, tom at tom at bitterman.net wrote:

What, then, was Wolfe saying with that ending?

That CO's and draft evaders are no different than the soldiers who actually fight;

They are; they're inferior.

that deep down inside we're all killers;

I don't think Wolfe would put it this way; he'd probably say that we all have the capacity to be killers.

and that

CO's and draft evaders pile hypocrisy and cowardice on top of an unjustified feeling of superiority.

Yes.

It may be that Wolfe is aiming straight at the college crowd and their deferments.

This occurred to me after my earlier post.

If I remember correctly the Techs were chosen based on a governmental criterion (a test), not on introspective or religious grounds.

Well, the test was to see whether they were psychologically able to fight, not to determine what special skills they have (which they don't, for the most part). But it is true that their technical skills are the excuse for not using them in combat.

It's hard to see Wolfe getting on the Amish for not bearing arms.

Yes, but during the Vietnam War the Amish weren't what most people would have thought of first when they thought of conscientious objectors. Wolfe would be going after people who claimed moral objections to fighting without belonging to a pacifist denomination.

It's easy to see a veteran of Korea mad at college students during Vietnam.

Or even more so students with grad-school deferments.

--Adam