

Ending of Wolfe's FREE LIVE FREE

The SF-Lovers list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 10 Sep 1996

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/sflovers/138>

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Michael Straight — 10 Sep 1996, 16:24

SPOILERS

At the end, what did the salesman see that was the "sign" that the old man had told him about? I love Wolfe's subtlety, but occasionally I just totally don't get it.

Also, am I alone in interpreting that last scene as the other three having already used the device and become their "improved" selves, whereas the salesman had waited to get his son first and was about to "merge" with himself by stepping through the door?

Michael Straight

adam louis stephanides — 13 Sep 1996, 01:42 · follows Michael Straight

SPOILERS

Maybe there's a subtlety I'm missing (it's been a long time since I've read it) but my guess would be that the "sign" is just the literal sign saying FREE LIVE FREE referred to on the last page.

Adam

adam louis stephanides — 14 Sep 1996, 01:54 · follows adam louis stephanides

SPOILERS

straight at email.unc.edu (Michael Straight) writes:

Also, am I alone in interpreting that last scene as the other three having already used the device and become their "improved" selves, whereas the salesman had waited to get his son first and was about to "merge" with himself by stepping through the door?

That's my interpretation too.

While we're on the subject, I have to admit that certain aspects of the ending, and of the chronology of Whitten's life, puzzled me.

1) Why are there two Whittens (in addition to "Ben Free") in 1983? The younger Whitten (the man in the duffle coat) is there on his second trip with the gizmo for the government. What is the older Whitten doing there?

2) When "Ben Free" reappears on January 14, 1983, where did he come from? He didn't come from the frontier, because he left the frontier for the last time before he hid the gizmo in the wall, and that was presumably before January 14, 1983.

3) A minor point, but the witch tells the others that "Today I defrauded a certain one, the namesake of one who possesses much authority, below" in Chapter 52. Is there a demon named McAlister? Or is there some joke regarding McAlister's first name (which I don't remember ever being stated) which I missed? Or did she defraud somebody else that day?

Adam