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The Urth list — 12 messages, 4 voices, 25 Jan 2000

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Michael Straight — 25 Jan 2000, 22:57

(Spoilers)

I just read this book again, and once again enjoyed it. I think it's one of Wolfe's most fun books.

I was wondering if the Quadrumvirate's temptations can be mapped to the seven deadly sins. Candy's is obviously Gluttony and Barnes's is Lust, but what about the other two? Stubb and Serpentina might both be Pride. Or maybe Stubb is Pride and Serpentina is Covetousness, if you think of her coveting power. Interesting, for a group that is down-on-their-luck, none of them seems particularly slothful. Stubb is so diligent and competent, I had a hard time believing he couldn't find a good job, his height notwithstanding.

I counted four mentions of The Wizard of Oz - Two by Candy, and two that actually mention the musical The Wiz.

The timeline at the end in my edition was a big help, but I'm still left trying to puzzle out Whitten/Free's timeline from his own perspective. Can anyone fill in the stuff I haven't figured out?

Whitten joins the Army

May 1942 Whitten briefly disappears when his future self comes back early. Aug 1942 Whitten goes to High Country and goes to the future 1952

(presumably the 1952 Whitten disappears when this happens? Is this ever mentioned?)

Whitten returns to May 42, waits til Aug to make his report

Whitten makes a few more trips into the future

[is it at this point he goes back to 1803?]

1982 Whitten buys the Magic Carpet (has he been living all that time or did he jump to 1982?)

1983 Whitten disappears when Free appears, and reappears after Kip kills Free.

1983 Whitten kidnaps the quadrumvirate

Whitten briefly disappears while the quad are talking to Free in the cockpit of High Country

Whitten reappears and uses Ben Free's device to "desert"

(is this where he goes to 1803?)

An older Whitten comes back to 1983 and talks to the quad. in the cockpit of High Country (and then he goes where/when?)

Whitten reappears a few days earlier as Ben Free and lives with the quad in his house until it is torn down.

Free disappears (goes somewhere in the device? Where/When?)

Free comes back a day later, and is killed by Kip.

-Rostrum

Peter Westlake — 26 Jan 2000, 10:16 · follows Michael Straight

At 22:57 2000-01-25 -0500, Michael wrote:

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Not fair! Not fair! *My* copy hasn't got a timeline!

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trying to puzzle out Whitten/Free's timeline from his own perspective.
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I was going to ask the same myself. You're ahead of me, though:

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Whitten returns to May 42, waits til Aug to make his report
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I don't think so; see below.

1982 Whitten buys the Magic Carpet (has he been living all that time or did he jump to 1982?)
1983 Whitten disappears when Free appears, and reappears after Kip kills Free.

Now this is the bit I didn't understand. How does he reappear?

He would have to, really, in order to do all the stuff below.

But I thought Wolfean time travel involved a kind of "short circuit", a folding back, with the combined traveller being the only one left. You go back in time, "absorb" your former self, and carry on from there. It never occurred to me that reappearing was allowed. So, do the four also reappear? The big jet that they all hear during their temptations is, I always assumed, their ride home, though I don't see why such a big plane would be needed or even sensible. They don't disappear then, so either this isn't them landing, or it's different because we are still on the "first" iteration round the timelines.

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Whitten briefly disappears while the quad are talking to Free

in the cockpit of High Country
Whitten reappears and uses Ben Free's device to "desert"
(is this where he goes to 1803?)

Isn't it *after* he talks to them?

An older Whitten comes back to 1983 and talks to the quad. in the cockpit of High Country (and then he goes where/when?)

I think this is where he goes back to 1803, though I didn't notice the date - where was that mentioned? He stays there a long time, and grows old. Is that what he meant by it being too late to return?

Whitten reappears a few days earlier as Ben Free and lives with the quad in his house until it is torn down.
Free disappears (goes somewhere in the device? Where/When?)
Free comes back a day later, and is killed by Kip.

And another question: at the end, Ozzie and Little Ozzie arrive at the house (from where? did Ozzie land, go and find Little Ozzie, and come back? It sounded as though he had been away for longer when the witch greeted him, though I could be wrong) and go in through the back door. This is the other gizmo, of course, and evidently it is still working, just as it was when Free swept a load of rubbish into an un-wintry garden; the house is ruined and empty, but they go in to find everyone there and the kitchen usable. So, to what time do they travel, and with what effect?

SBear, who has reason to believe that there is an imported copy of _On Blue's Waters_ wrapped in birthday paper somewhere in his house :-)

Michael Straight — 26 Jan 2000, 11:09 · follows Peter Westlake

On Wed, 26 Jan 2000, Peter Westlake wrote:
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Nice idea, but there are only four of them, and most temptations are covered by the seven.

What I meant was, can we choose one of the seven that names each of the four's "main" temptation? I think Stubb is pride, but you could make a case for anger. I'm not sure about the witch.

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Not fair! Not fair! **My** copy hasn't got a timeline!

Would it be "fair use" for me to post it to the mailing list? Did we discuss this before?

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I agree that this seems to be how Whitten explains it, but Kip's motive for shooting Free was that "she must have known she would never get her father back as long as I--Free--refused to go back" (from Chapter 59). So she must have expected her father to reappear.

But this would imply that if someone goes back in time, absorbs his former self, then dies, then the former self would reappear. X lives? (where X is the number of times you've re-doubled yourself?)

Also, as I mentioned above, what happens when you go forward in time? Do you "absorb" your future self? Maybe there's only an absorption when an older self goes back to the time of a younger self.

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Whitten briefly disappears while the quad are talking to Free
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Isn't it *after* he talks to them?

I messed that part up (but not the way you think) here's excerpts from the timeline:

Friday, Jan 14, 1983 - Free comes back to his house, Whitten disappears. Thu, Jan 20, 1983 - Kip kidnaps Free (he didn't escape the demolition via the time machine, Kip nabbed him) Fri, Jan 21, 1983 - Kip and Free search the basement, Kip kills Free, Whitten reappears in his office Sat, Jan 22, 1983 - The man in the duffle coat (Whitten as Kip knows him) vanishes and the quad talk to Whitten ("Free") in High Country. Mon, Jan 24, 1983 - the man in the duffle coat deserts, using Free's hidden device

So the younger Whitten, Kip's dad "deserts", not the older version we meet in High Country. But does Kip's dad go to 1803? The older version in High Country says of his still older, future self, "I think he must have gone to some other time, although I have no idea what that time might be. To the Lewis and Clark expedition, I hope." (end of ch. 59). So where/when does Kip's dad go?

And another question: at the end, Ozzie and Little Ozzie arrive at the house (from where? did Ozzie land, go and find Little Ozzie, and come back? It sounded as though he had been away for longer when the witch greeted him, though I could be wrong) and go in through the back door. This is the other gizmo, of course, and evidently it is still working, just as it was when Free swept a load of rubbish into an un-wintry garden; the house is ruined and empty, but they go in to find everyone there and the kitchen usable. So, to what time do they travel, and with what effect?

My take on this scene is that, after they talk to Free in the cockpit, Stubb, Candy, and Serpentina immediately go back in time via the High Country's device. Stubb decides to go back down in the shuttle airplane, gets his son, then takes him to Free's house to use that device to

go back in time to whatever point the other three have gone back to. Evidence: the other three all immediately say yes to Free's offer, but Stubb says "Swee'pea--" (Popeye's little kid).

So presumably, they go back and fold in to their earlier selves, and the original lives they lived (everything we read) are gone except in their own memories.

-Rostrum

Jim Jordan — 26 Jan 2000, 10:54 · follows Michael Straight

At 10:57 PM 1/25/00 -0500, you wrote:

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I was wondering if the Quadrumvirate's temptations can be mapped to the seven deadly sins. Candy's is obviously Gluttony and Barnes's is Lust, but what about the other two? Stubb and Serpentina might both be Pride. Or maybe Stubb is Pride and Serpentina is Covetousness, if you think of her coveting power. Interesting, for a group that is down-on-their-luck, none of them seems particularly slothful. Stubb is so diligent and competent, I had a hard time believing he couldn't find a good job, his height notwithstanding.

I counted four mentions of The Wizard of Oz - Two by Candy, and two that actually mention the musical The Wiz.

The four main characters are from the Wizard. Ben Free is the Wizard. Glinda (note spelling) is also the name of one of the good witches. It's been years since I read it, but I do recall that the father and son (Barnes and Kip?) are Dorothy and Toto. The others can be seen as needing courage, brains, and heart. Of course, it's all transposed, as in Niven's Ringworld, but it's definitely there. Also, I suspect that the narrative follows Wizard of Oz to a degree, with the madhouse scene equivalent to the visit to the Wizard, the journey to High Frontier as the visit to the west (?), etc.

Since I've not read this in years, someone else will have to correct the errors in the above paragraph; but I've given enough to go on.

As for the Deadly Sins: this looks very much right-on to me, even though putting seven together with four will complicate matters a bit. It's very Wolfean in concept, and *prima facie* looks right. Of course, this is one of Wolfe's "American" stories, with Ben Free as the old America before socialism (like it or not, Wolfe is pretty libertarian). Thus, to use the Wizard of Oz as a scaffold is entirely appropriate. The characters are living in "fallen America" and search for "true America," and the story goes from there. I need to re-read this, of course, because since they only find an empty airplane (old America), the question is: What is the REAL thing they are looking for? Well, we know Wolfe will answer: Christianity. But how is that presented? I don't recall.

Oh, the original English publication does not have the timeline, but the American edition(s) do. I don't have every single printing, so I cannot be more specific. As I dimly recall, Wolfe was persuaded to include the timeline by the publishers, who thought it was needed. I'd say: Take it cum grano salis (with a grain of salt). Since Wolfe originally intended the timeline as a puzzle for the reader, I doubt if he completely solved it in his appendix -- that would be very UN-Wolfean!!

Nutria

Jim Jordan — 26 Jan 2000, 10:58 · follows Jim Jordan

Dadgummit. I always forget something.

The Quadrumvirate alludes to the Triumvirate that took over in Rome after the collapse of the decadent Old Roman Republic. That's also part of Wolfe's "American" story. The collapse of America into licentiousness and tyranny will eventuate in some new order. Ben Free "prepares" his new "triumvirate" for this purpose.

Nutria

Michael Straight — 26 Jan 2000, 12:13 · follows Jim Jordan

On Wed, 26 Jan 2000, Jim Jordan wrote:

The four main characters are from the Wizard. Ben Free is the Wizard.

Glinda (note spelling) is also the name of one of the good witches. It's been years since I read it, but I do recall that the father and son (Barnes and Kip?) are Dorothy and Toto. The others can be seen as needing courage, brains, and heart.

From all the mentions of the movie, Wolfe obviously had it in mind. I can see Free as the wizard, but I can't make the other characters fit. None of the characters seem particularly lacking in courage, brains, or heart. Their faults seem more moral: Stubb is vain, worried about his height, proud, always trying to prove himself. Candy lacks self-control regarding food (she acts bravely, cleverly, and has a heart (of gold?)). You might say the witch needs more heart, but it seems her real turning point is where she realizes that her pursuit of power has been misguided:

"Wealth and power we have already too much of--we suffocate. Longer life? We outstay the lion and elephant. Hardly a day passes that we do not meet some man or woman who should be dead, who has outlasted his own time by decades...As for healing, it is not we who require it but the world, which requires to be cured of us. Serenity would indeed be a benefit, but we do not seek it; if we did we might find it required us to abandon wealth and power, and we love them too much. No, what we require from whatever Powers may be entitled to give it is some indication of how far we may go...we do not know what is permitted to us, and that ignorance paralyzes those who might otherwise refrain, while the worst of us kill every living thing and ruin all they reach." (from Chapter 47).

Maybe it's just a general four-on-a-quest allusion to Oz.

-Rostrum

Peter Westlake — 26 Jan 2000, 17:31 · follows Michael Straight

At 11:09 2000-01-26 -0500, Michael wrote:

On Wed, 26 Jan 2000, Peter Westlake wrote:

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Nice idea, but there are only four of them, and most temptations are covered by the seven.

What I meant was, can we choose one of the seven that names each of the four's "main" temptation? I think Stubb is pride, but you could make a case for anger. I'm not sure about the witch.

Me either, and because of that and Stubb I don't think there's much in this, despite Candy and Ozzie being so clear-cut.

The timeline at the end in my edition was a big help,

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I hope so :-)

Aug 1942 Whitten goes to High Country and goes to the future 1952 (presumably the 1952 Whitten disappears when this happens? Is this ever mentioned?)

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In your list you have:

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==> Whitten makes a few more trips into the future
[is it at this point he goes back to 1803?]
1982 Whitten buys the Magic Carpet

I'm suggesting that in 1952, Whitten makes one of those trips into the future, leaving before the arrival of his younger self and returning after his younger self has gone back to the 1940s. His younger self is the only one present in those particular days of 1952.

1983 Whitten disappears when Free appears, and reappears after Kip kills Free.

Now this is the bit I didn't understand. How does he reappear? He would have to, really, in order to do all the stuff below. But I thought Wolfean time travel involved a kind of "short circuit", a folding back, with the combined traveller being the only one left. You go back in time, "absorb" your former self, and carry on from there. It never occurred to me that reappearing was allowed.

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But this would imply that if someone goes back in time, absorbs his former self, then dies, then the former self would reappear. X lives? (where X is the number of times you've re-doubled yourself?)

(!) The whole theory is rather unsatisfactory, I've always thought. You only need this kind of time travel, where you can only be in one place at a time, if you believe in the soul. Duplication of souls is a theologically tricky area. Is it Malrubius who explains to Severian near the end of BotNS, about aquastors and writing? The bit where Severian comes to understand why the witches ran away and Hildegryn got caught in the metaphysical blast, or whatever.

Also, as I mentioned above, what happens when you go forward in time? Do you "absorb" your future self? Maybe there's only an absorption when an older self goes back to the time of a younger self.

We never actually see this, do we? And it's easily avoidable.

Good question, though. Why does the composite appear in the location of the time traveller? Has to appear somewhere, I suppose.

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I see what you mean. And I see why I didn't remember 1803, which presumably is the date of Lewis and Clark.

And another question: at the end, Ozzie and Little Ozzie arrive at the house (from where? did Ozzie land, go and find Little Ozzie, and come back? It sounded as though he had been away for longer when the witch greeted him, though I could be wrong) and go in through the back door. This is the other gizmo, of course, and evidently it is still working, just as it was when Free swept a load of rubbish into an un-wintery garden; the house is ruined and empty, but they go in to find everyone there and the kitchen usable. So, to what time do they travel, and with what effect?

[s/Stubb/Barnes to avoid confusion]

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Interesting idea. So Barnes goes back in the present to find Little Ozzie, who was last seen in the care of Sandy Duck. Why are they "ragged" when they get back to the house? I've been assuming that the jet they all see was another shuttle, marking the point to which they travel back. Then the raggedness is accounted for, because both Ozzies are in something of a mess at that stage. Hmm... thinking about it, if he really was on that jet, Barnes would have to get to the club from the airport. He would arrive too late.

So I'm still confused. Why is the big jet in the story at all? It serves to synchronize the separate story threads, but that hardly seems necessary. This is Wolfe, so there *must* be a reason for it.

So presumably, they go back and fold in to their earlier selves, and the original lives they lived (everything we read) are gone except in their own memories.

That's what I always assumed. The reappearing business doesn't really affect this, since their original lives only run up to late Jan 1983. If the older and improved versions live through that date, the originals never get a chance to pop up again.

How far back do you think they do go, anyway? Is the absorption process sufficiently magical to take two fat adult Candys and combine them into a slim one, and likewise to make two short Stubbs into a tall one? Or would they have to go back far enough to grow up slimmer (Candy) or grow taller (Stubb)? I think that would be too literal (Stubb's height in particular; he would have to have a different genetic makeup!), so they don't necessarily have to go far. As I say, I always assumed the folding back point was when the jet appears in the sky, but you've cast that into doubt and me into confusion!

SBear.

Jim Jordan — 26 Jan 2000, 12:28 · follows Peter Westlake

At 12:13 PM 1/26/00 -0500, you wrote:

On Wed, 26 Jan 2000, Jim Jordan wrote:

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I recall being struck by and convinced of this paradigm when I read the book, but I just can't recall enough at the moment to argue the point. If my aging longterm memory is serving me, I think I was thinking that each character has a kind of perverted form of the virtue that is "lacking." I.e., that Stubbs (maybe) has a courage of the wrong sort; Candy has a heart of the wrong sort; the witch has a mind of the wrong sort. They are each out of balance in a certain direction. (Recall how Wolfe uses the mind, emotion, will paradigm in "The God and His Man.") They don't perceive that they lack the better form of these virtues -- that's for the reader to perceive -- thus providing a more sophisticated variant on the Oz scenario. That's off the top of my head and based on memories that have mostly flown away. Maybe it'll be of help to those currently reading the book. (There are just too many Wolfe books to re-read!!!)

Nutria

William H. Ansley — 26 Jan 2000, 23:32 · follows Jim Jordan

Jim Jordan <jbjordan at gnt.net> wrote:

Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu> wrote:

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I have fairly recently (re)read the first 14 Oz books (as all regular long-term readers of this list know only too well) and I have read FLF at least three times although not very recently (partly because I just plain enjoy it and partly to try to pin down the time travel stuff). I have read several times in this list and elsewhere that FLF is a "retelling" of the story of the Wizard of Oz but I have always felt that this was wrong (unless you are going to define retelling in such a vague way as to allow FLF to be a retelling of virtually every other book you care to name as well -- Free is Captain Ahab, Free is the Mad Hatter, etc.).

I am still far from convinced that there is much merit to this theory, but Jim Jordan's explanation of the version of the FLF=WOZ theory that he is familiar with (I don't know if this is THE theory or if there are different versions) is the first time I don't feel I can dismiss it out of hand. Since I am the self-proclaimed Oz expert on this list (although there are others on this list at least as knowledgeable as I--you know who you are, alga), I'll have to try to re-read FLF with this in mind.

You know, if Jim Jordan is right, then Ozzie Barnes somehow embodies both Dorothy Gale and Popeye the Sailor simultaneously. It does seem like something Wolfe might do, doesn't it?

William Ansley

Michael Straight — 27 Jan 2000, 10:23 · follows William H. Ansley

On Wed, 26 Jan 2000, William H. Ansley wrote:

You know, if Jim Jordan is right, then Ozzie Barnes somehow embodies both Dorothy Gale and Popeye the Sailor simultaneously. It does seem like something Wolfe might do, doesn't it?

Except they're operating on different levels. Ozzie calls himself Popeye (because he has an eye that pops), humming the "strong to the finish" song, calling his son "Swee' pea". There's no sign that he thinks of himself as Dorothy, though.

-Rostrum

Jim Jordan — 27 Jan 2000, 12:59 · follows Michael Straight

At 11:32 PM 1/26/00 -0500, you wrote:

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I am still far from convinced that there is much merit to this theory, but Jim Jordan's explanation of the version of the FLF=WOZ theory that he is familiar with (I don't know if this is THE theory or if there are different versions) is the first time I don't feel I can dismiss it out of hand. Since I am the self-proclaimed Oz expert on this list (although there are others on this list at least as knowledgeable as I--you know who you are, alga), I'll have to try to re-read FLF with this in mind.

What set me to thinking was the name Glinda with an eye, as well as the other allusions. When I cast my mind back over the book, the Oz connection seemed right. I'd already seen that Ringworld was an Oz rework, so I was open to the thought. Also Oz figures in other Wolfe stories. It would only be the first book, and probably with the film's changes also in the background. Of course, with Wolfe you also have political and religious themes interacting as well, and other allusions. But it sure looked like the Wizard of Oz was providing a big input, and to a considerable degree, a structural one as well. Consider that the arrival at the four at the house at the beginning is a journey to Oz, for instance.

As for whose theory this is, it's mine. Others may have caught the same thing, but I don't recall any discussion of this here, so I can speak only for myself. (Though there is a year's worth of posts I haven't read yet. I've been out of pocket.)

Well, I'll be interested in your thinking after you re-read FLF (if you can find the time). I'm sure we all will. You're the expert!

And since you're the expert, what do you think of the economic interpretation of the first book, that the road is the "cross of gold," the fake-emerald city (seen through green eyeglasses) is greenbacks, etc. Sounds quite plausible to me. (I didn't see anything in FLF that indicates Wolfe is familiar with, or accepts, this reading, though.)

Nutria

Michael Straight — 28 Jan 2000, 11:59 · follows Jim Jordan

On Wed, 26 Jan 2000, Peter Westlake wrote:

(!) The whole theory is rather unsatisfactory, I've always thought. You only need this kind of time travel, where you can only be in one place at a time, if you believe in the soul. Duplication of souls is a theologically tricky area.

While I can understand thinking of it this way, it doesn't seem to be necessarily the only solution. If you can have the same soul at this place at 4:00 and at this place at 5:00 without worrying about it having split into two different souls, why can't you have the same soul at this place at 4:00 and at that place at 4:00?

-Rostrum