

focus on PEACE

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 26 Sep 2000

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 26 Sep 2000, 14:12

Fellow Wolfe-readers, I'm going to be chatting here about PEACE. Not all at once, in one message, but over a period of time. Since I have the old Berkley paperback, that's the source for page citations--but if necessary, approximate page numbers for different editions can be provided.

Timelines are important. I like them a lot, I enjoy seeing them, I enjoy creating them; from this flows my sense that they are important.

The first timeline I saw for PEACE was created by Gregory Feeley in the early 90s. I saved it but didn't comment on it at the time because I was working on more Urthly things; I didn't have the time to re-read PEACE with timeline in hand. It looked okay, the timeline did: the trick about PEACE is that there are so very few historical markers in plain sight. Feeley latched onto the most prominent one, which appears in the last section where we are told that the coldhouse prank which resulted in the young man's death happened in 1938; in the text Den tells Dan French that he was two years out of college at that time.

So Feeley plugged these points together, ran forward and back, and created his timeline (barest outline here): Den was born in 1915 and thus injured Bobby Black in 1919, did various things and was working at the plant as a young engineer in 1938, died in 1975.

Next timeline. William Schuyler, Jr. (having not yet seen Feeley's) presented his own timeline in NYRSF #91 (March 1996). (At this point I still hadn't read PEACE a third time, but I had read "The Changeling" (a short story set in the same town, published before PEACE) and made a timeline of that.) Schuyler gets points for finding another historical anchor in the text, the death of Yuan Shih-k'ai; but unfortunately for other reasons (complications arising within the timeline) he has to discard the 1938 anchor as being ten years off, so rather than having two solid historical anchor points, he has the one.

Anyway, another barest outline: Den born in 1904, coldhouse prank in 1928, died in 1974.

Wouldn't you know it, at this late date I've just created an outline of my own. And here is how I did it: on one page I made a list of Den's life, one line per year of age, entering what we know and including fuzzy areas for things that are not given in precise terms; on a separate page I wrote the calendar years from 1900 to 1980, flush right, and then added historical notes, like "Yuan Shih-k'ai dies; Chinese Warlord Period V 1916" (the down-arrow meaning "begins"), and "Prohibition V 1920" (since I was curious about Julius Smart's attitude toward alcohol), etc.

Then I put the pages side by side and move Den's life up and down the history line.

I found two more "solid" historical anchors, both of a fuzzy variety. The first stems from my timeline on "The Changeling," which I had placed as happening in the early 1960s. Den makes reference to the protagonist of "The Changeling" as living on the island in the river, which is

where Pete is at the end of the story, and says Pete was living there at the time of Den's visit to Dr. Van Ness (Van Ness makes comments suggesting that Den is 40 to 45 years old).

The second anchor I found comes from examining the magazines in the two waiting rooms of Doctor Black and Doctor Van Ness. "Life" magazine is no help, since it has been published throughout the period in question, but ah--"Liberty" magazine! It was only published from 1924 to 1950; and Den was four years old when his mother took him to Doctor Black and she read "Liberty" magazine while they waited.

My timeline uses four historical anchors: Chinese Warlord Period (fuzzy: 1916-1930), Liberty Magazine (fuzzy:1924-1950), Coldhouse ghost 1938 (precise), and Crazy Pete (fuzzy: around 1963). Used together, they seem to lock tight into the following briefest form: Den born 1920; visits Dr. Black 1924; the year of Olivia's egg hunt is 1929; Den is 18 years old (the liar!) in 1938 when the prank kills the other 18 year old fellow; Den is 43 in 1963, when Crazy Pete is on his island; Den has his non-lethal stroke in 1980.

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In the same issue of NYRSF that had Schuyler's timeline there was an essay by Damien Broderick which had a number of good and useful points. Broderick ended by asking a question about the mysterious events reported by Aunt Bella, in her non-fiction ghost chaser piece: "A tiny, beautiful enigma. I'd like to learn what other readers have made of its significance."

As chance would have it, I wrote to Schuyler about his timeline, and in his reply he also mentioned that he thought that scene was set in 1909 and was a glimpse of the future (she was seeing night automobile traffic), just as the other side was happening, too: a glimpse of the past (future visitor seeing the hovering candle lights of Aunt Bella's vigil).

(This might be axed if the date of Bella's adventure is 1925). But anyway, Damien, there's one response.

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Items to come: "The Princess and Her Four Suitors"; what does Den see in Lois, anyway?; unlocking the Tale of ben Yahya and the marid; Frametale in the House of the Ax; and others.

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