

Free Live Free Revisited

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 09 Nov 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3554>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

John Barach — 09 Nov 2002, 23:05

Yesterday night (well, early this morning), I finished reading Free Live Free (for the first time). I noticed the frequent references to both Oz and Popeye in the book, though, if I remember correctly, it's only in connection with Barnes that Popeye references show up.

The book did remind me a bit of a Chesterton fantasy. It's been a while since I read The Man Who Was Thursday or The Ball and the Cross, but I recall that the latter had an episode in an asylum, too.

The similarity may simply be that the book starts with some fairly normal events and people and then moves through some bewildering episodes toward an apocalyptic conclusion, by which I mean a conclusion where there's a revelation of what has really been going on all along in the world and in the lives of the characters. (I suppose, to some degree, though, you could say that that's the plot-structure of a great number of novels....)

Anyone else feel a sense of Chestertonism here?

SPOILER

I noticed in the archives that there was some question about the location of the gizmo, which is said to be "in a wall" and (I think, though I can't find the reference now) "under a sign." At the very least, a sign is mentioned in connection with it. Barnes recognizes it on the last page of the book. The gizmo is a wall, all right. It's the door and the sign connected to it says FREE LIVE FREE. At least, that's how I understood it.

John

Roy C. Lackey — 10 Nov 2002, 07:35 · follows John Barach

John Barach wrote:

I noticed in the archives that there was some question about the location of
the gizmo, which is said to be "in a wall" and (I think, though I can't find
the reference now) "under a sign." At the very least, a sign is mentioned in
connection with it. Barnes recognizes it on the last page of the book.

The

gizmo is a wall, all right. It's the door and the sign connected to it says
FREE LIVE FREE. At least, that's how I understood it.

Correct, the gizmo was built into the back (kitchen) door of his house. Note the morning glories visible outside that door when he swept the kitchen floor near the beginning of chapter 6. The

sign reference is at the end of chapter 7. Since the sign read FREE LIVE FREE, which was the bold print in the newspaper ad, I don't think those words were put on that sign until *after* the old man was murdered. That is, an earlier, younger iteration of Free, the general, "deserted" and went to the frontier of the early 19th century, three days after the murder. The sign was weatherworn when Barnes saw it because it had been painted some years before he saw it, by the general, when he put the gizmo in the wall when he left the frontier for good in 1819. The reason old Free told Barnes he wasn't sure if Barnes would ever see that sign is because the 'trials' the four boarders would be subjected to wouldn't take place until after he (Free) was dead. He couldn't be sure of the outcome, even though his younger self had set up those trials, because they hadn't happened yet, and the sign wasn't on the back door when the boarders were living there, either, because the general wouldn't desert for the frontier until a week after they moved in, using the gizmo in the back door, which wouldn't be there until he put it there when he left the frontier, about twenty years older than when he arrived. That's all clear enough, isn't it? <g>

Even with the aid of the chronology at the end of my edition, the time travel stuff is riddled with paradox.

-Roy