

# Free Live Free round table part 3

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 01 Dec 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3627>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 01 Dec 2002, 00:30

Rostrum wrote:

The Four Thrones of Narnia, occupied

by two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve who walk through a magical door which does something weird to time and changes them from children to adults and back again.

That is an interesting parallel, and I'll leave it to our Oz experts to say how Narnia might be a British "Oz." For the couples I was mentioning before, well, the Narnia four are all siblings, iirc, and that would be incest.

Adam Stephanides wrote:

I always took it for granted that the four would become the quadrumvirate of the prediction who, having improved themselves by merging with their past selves, would take power and overthrow the forces of Big Government who had destroyed Free's house, killed Free and set out to crush the dreams of the four. As you say, it can hardly be a coincidence that Madame Serpentina uses the same word both times; and the book as a whole seems to lead up to this conclusion.

Well . . . maybe. This "Libertarian" reading holds up well until it becomes clear that Free is killed by his own daughter (the "anti-Electra," I guess); and that the "big rich powerful conspiracy group" is not Big Government at all, but Whitten and his merry band, who are mostly acting in the dark trying to find their own Whitten. One begins to suspect that Whitten/Free may have been acitvely responsible for getting the wrecking ball to come in the first place, as opposed to just passively allowing the taxes to go unpaid or whatever while he was jaunting about through time.

It also seems to me that if "frontier living" were the answer, the four would simply escape into the past and happily live out their natural lives in the 19th century. But if this were the case, then Candy would be wearing a calico dress or something like that in the epilogue.

On to the tricky business of having three Whittens in 1983:

My question centers around the Whitten they talk to in High Country. At first I thought that his presence would cause the second disappearance of "the man in the duffle coat" (whose first disappearance when Free appeared caused the time-patrol crisis), but Whitten says that isn't so, that duffle-coat deserted. (But in the timeline Wolfe wrote, duffle-coat disappears a second time about the time that the four interview Whitten at High Country; duffle-coat doesn't desert until two days later.) I've said that there are, say, seven years of subjective time between duffle-coat Whitten and High Country interview Whitten. So, following the logic, duffle-coat Whitten spent seven years optimizing the scenario and ended up by arriving at High Country to do the interview.

But then High Country interview (HCI) Whitten says that he hopes that when duffle-coat Whitten deserted (wouldn't that be "will desert"?), he went to "a better time."

So who is HCI Whitten? Is he a bubble-persona who is about to be loped off in a time-loop implosion? Or is he Free, fresh from the frontier for this one job in 1983, then back to the 19th century frontier until he leaves it for good in 1819? But if he is fresh from the frontier, then why the ambiguity over where duffle-coat went/will go? (I start to wonder if HCI Whitten is the Whitten who followed orders the original orders and stayed at High Country as long as possible.)

I'm trying to track the gizmos. When Whitten & co. came to 1982 from 1942, they bought the Magic Carpet and kept their portable gizmo there. When duffle-coat deserts, he takes the portable from Magic Carpet and walks through the gizmo at Free's house (according to the Wolfe timeline) . . . which would do what for him, exactly? Send him back to Summer 1983? So what. He is trying to get to 1803, as far as I can tell.

Once he gets to 1803, then it is easy enough to see how he can go back and forth from frontier to house, since the portable gizmo is in the 1800s and the house gizmo is in the 1900s.

It gets a little tricky when the timeline says in 1819 Free leaves the frontier and conceals the portable gizmo in the wall of the house. What is the timeframe of the house where the gizmo goes into the wall? If it is 1819, then that makes sense, in that the portable gizmo and the house gizmo are the same gizmo at different stages: but they are linked, so it is 1819 in the kitchen and 1983 on the back porch..

OTOH, if Free put it into the house as he was =leaving= the frontier, then how was there a gizmo in place for him to jump to the house from the frontier . . . oh, wait, because he was =going= to put it in the wall when he left the frontier . . . so that it had a presence in 1980s even though he had not actually done the deed until 1819 . . .

Okay, so the house is a time station with endpoints 1819 and 1983? Well how can that be, since Free seems to exit it at 1982 if not also some times before then. So the doorways, though linked, march forward through time together (always maintaining a fixed separation of maybe 150 years: thus 19th century house 1819-1833 and 20th century house 1969-1983)? Otherwise every time Free goes through he would rewrite himself the last time he went through. And, very importantly, the system breaks down if the house is demolished! If the traveler walks his way forward by going from 1983 to 1833 and then re-enters 1834 to go to 1984, he will become stranded in 1984 if there is no house there.

Hmmm.

=mantis=

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Michael Straight — 02 Dec 2002, 22:01 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

On Sat, 30 Nov 2002, Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

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Yeah, but you don't really want me to start comparing Free Live Free with Heinlein's \_Number of the Beast\_, do you?

-Rostrum

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 02 Dec 2002, 22:05 · follows Michael Straight

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iirc, and that would be incest.

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Live Free with Heinlein's Number of the Beast, do you?

Hardly a fair comparison. The two couples in "The Number of the Beast--" are all the same Person.

(That's not a slam; that is what RAH intended ... if in doubt, go reread the passage where they "invent" pantheistic multiple-person solipsism.)

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Adam Stephanides — 16 Dec 2002, 14:55 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

This response is way late, but...

on 11/30/02 6:30 PM, Michael Andre-Driussi at mantis at siriusfiction.com wrote:  
Adam Stephanides wrote:

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Well . . . maybe. This "Libertarian" reading holds up well until it becomes clear that Free is killed by his own daughter (the "anti-Electra," I guess); and that the "big rich powerful conspiracy group" is not Big Government at all, but Whitten and his merry band, who are mostly acting in the dark trying to find their own Whitten.

Having reread the end of FLF (from the man in the duffel coat's speech), I see that I'd gotten the circumstances of Free's death wrong, and that the U.S. government is no longer being run from the High Country. But nevertheless I think my reading still holds up. When the man in the duffel coat arranges to have the four's dreams crushed, he is acting (he thinks) as an agent of Big Government; granted, it's the Big Government of 1942, but I very much doubt that Wolfe thinks the federal government has improved since then. And the man in the duffel coat's speech, it seems to me, establishes Big Government as the book's philosophical antagonist, whether or not he believes it himself at this point.

I see the revelation that Whitten who will become Free is on the High Country, and that he has been "conspiring" to help the four (unknown to his past self as well as to his subordinates), not as undermining the anti-Big Government position, but as Wolfe's way of giving the story a fairy-tale happy ending -- like Dorothy learning that she can still get home even though the balloon is gone, if you will.

And if the four will not become the quadrumvirate of Madame Serpentina's prediction, what was the point of including the prediction at all?

--Adam