

FLF: Q & A

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 01 Dec 2002

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Roy C. Lackey — 01 Dec 2002, 04:50

I originally posted the following about twelve hours ago, but it never showed up. My apologies if it should now turn up twice on the list.

mantis wrote:

1. The nature of the house: what year is it in that final kitchen? If it is 1982, then Ben Free has not died yet! Talk about complicated time-travel paradoxes. (Or is it really so complicated, given that we know that Free's doctrine is to "go along" and repeat history?)

When Barnes and his son came down the alley, it was sometime after Jan. 22, 1983, but not too long after (still snow on the ground). Barnes mentions that the back of the house hadn't been fenced off (as it was in front), referring to the way the house was left after the partial demolition of Jan.

20. Free is dead. As he told the four on the plane, he knew both when and how he would die. He hadn't the will to try to escape his fate, even if that had been possible.

There's no way to tell what year it is after Barnes stepped through the backdoor gizmo and entered the kitchen; we are given no clues, beyond the improved Candy and Stubb. (Who adjusted the controls of the gizmo in the wall, set it to jump how far in which direction?)

The plot is full of unavoidable logical holes, no matter how hard Wolfe tried to plug them. He avoided one time-travel complication by not allowing two versions of Free to exist simultaneously, but allows two instances of the same portable gizmo at the same time. The one in the backdoor is the same one Whitten took with him when he deserted on Jan. 24, using the backdoor gizmo, that he later used (while bringing it with him) to get back to the future when he left the frontier for good, then concealed in the wall in the backdoor.

2. The nature of the world of that house. Candy is wearing a shimmering dress, what's that all about? I remember 16 years ago one reader who was online was really bugged by that dress -- it seemed to signify something, but what was it? At one level it certainly reminds me of the Arthurian Lady of the Lake. But with time-travel involved, that is, a sfnal explanation for everything (even supernatural events become "psionic" or whathaveyou), then it seems as though the trio has been travelling through time and "fixing" things, just as the General had travelled past the 1950s to get tape recorders and other off-the-shelf wonders from later decades. OTOH, the trio might be limited in what they can accomplish in short time: as I understand it, the trio opted for the gizmo door on High Country and Ozzie elected to go back by the B-17, in order to find his son and then try to find their way together through the gizmo door on the ground. Has it been a week, a month, or just a few days?

It had never occurred to me before that Barnes might have left the _High Country_ via the B-17, but you may be right. I had always assumed that he was just the last to show up for a scheduled meeting of the quadrumvirate in Free's kitchen. In fact, you must be right, because both he and

the boy are still ragged. And that answers your question: it's after daylight on the same day as the predawn talk in the cockpit. Barnes just collected his kid from Sandy Duck before going to the house.

In any case, while Candy's slimness might be due to simple amphetamines <g>, Stubb's increased height is presumably more than inner-shoe lifters could provide . . . other than the results of being alloyed (which might cover everything by itself), maybe they have additional genetic therapy?

The trio who left the _High Country_ together went somewhere together and have had time to meld differing versions of themselves into improved models.

3. But is that final house really part of the mundane world, or is it "Oz," a bubble universe separate from the mundane world as Oz is separate from Kansas? That is, at the end of the first Oz book, the heroine Dorothy gets to go home, the semi-hero/semi-villain Oz is last seen in a balloon in the sky (like Free/Whitten in High Country) and the four helper-heroes each get one of the four subject-kingdoms of Oz (I'm simplifying a bit, but bear with), forming a sort of quadrumvirate. This quadrumvirate is a good thing for the land of Oz (simplifying, but bear with), since each individual recognized that he was lacking something and has been made complete. Being the lords of the Land of Oz is different than being the Gang of Four. (But I agree the possibility that the four are remaking the external world is a fairly strong one.)

I never read the OZ books, and I'm not going to, but I've seen the old movie. In an earlier post you mentioned the movie, the classic one, but I don't think that's the same movie Candy is referring to on the last page of chapter 57, with her remark about "Whores of a different color, remember?" I didn't see that version, so I'll refrain from comment. <g>

Time to point out that Free is looking for a better world that he =doesn't= find in the Old Frontier: he, too, is looking for something, but it seems to be something more than just bringing "little house on the prairie" values into the inner city (i.e., bringing the best of the frontier life back to homestead the urban jungle). With this in mind, it seems as though his quest is completed by having the four living in his house, which has become him (to a greater or lesser degree).

I don't know about Free being or becoming in some sense his house; after all, the four couldn't save it, it was partially demolished, and has no real future. You can't stop "progress", and that freeway isn't going to move somewhere else. Free got his greatest desire when he went to the frontier, sort of, just as the four got theirs, sort of. It just turned out that what they got didn't turn out to be quite what they wanted or needed, sort of. Candy and Stubb, at least, in the epilogue, got some degree of personal, physical benefit from their "second chances". What did Free get? He was too old to get the most out of his frontier days by the time he got there. When he spoke to the four in the cockpit he told them that he didn't "know who you four are", but that he knew he would let them live with him at the end of his life. He knew because Kip reported to him after she killed him. So what? They were still strangers to him, who did nothing for him. The crisis about demolishing the house was contrived. Free's apparent poverty wasn't real. (He told them he used time travel to make plenty of money.) All he had to do was move to another house and take the gizmo with him. Buy himself a pair of glasses; have his cataracts removed. But he didn't do any of those things, whether because he was a fatalist who didn't think he could (or should) avoid death in the basement, or because he didn't care.

-Roy