

Free Live Free round table part 4

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

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 01 Dec 2002, 17:40

Roy wrote:

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?)

My impression was that the house gizmo is not adjusted, it is set to a fixed time, which might be less of a year A.D. than it is a span of years (for example, going from 1942 to 1952 was a setting of "plus ten years").

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.

There may be holes, I don't assert otherwise. But honestly, the story isn't really a time travel story, in the sense that everything is laid out like "Time Tunnel": it is Oz with some sfnal trappings. I'm just trying to get a grip on how the gizmos seem to work -- to assemble a model based on the few clues we have in the text.

I don't recall any suggestion in the text that inanimate objects were displaced when a future version arrived on the scene, or that objects were "folded" onto themselves, and so I do not see any prohibition for having two gizmos (the same gizmo of two different ages) in the same timeframe.

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.

I agree it is likely that it is Jan. 22 or maybe 23. If this is the case then it adds a bit more pressure to the Jan. 24 desertion date, maybe. Because Whitten could and probably had to adjust the house gizmo (unless it leads straight back to 1809 already): to do this he would probably have to break open the wall.

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

Right, which brings us back to how the gizmos seem to work. Applying the logic I've been using, if duffle-coat Whitten could have seven subjective years in a few objective hours, then sure, the trio could do the same.

But where did the big gizmo send them? Apparently the gizmo can send a person anywhere -- the trick is that the gizmo doesn't travel with the traveller, and if a traveller goes to a timeframe where a gizmo does not exist, then the traveller is stuck in time. So duffle-coat deserter, taking the portable gizmo through the house gizmo (same gizmo, different ages) to 1803, establishes a link to travel. Still, the gizmo is a time machine, not a teleporter: so the trio would end up in an earlier timeframe of High Country and need the B-17 to take them down.

So there are two separate time-travel circuits: the airplane-access High Country one (1942-1983) and the house one (1809-1983), with ground access.

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>

Sure, you kiddier: she's just punning on the "horse of a different color" scene of the classic musical movie, but this joke of Candy's has deep echoes in the text. The way that Mrs. Baker confuses the identities of the two women (and the two men); the way that Ozzie's dream does the same; the way that Stubbs says they are sisters under the skin when Candy wants to borrow tweezers in the hotel room and the witch shows her how to use clamshells.

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.

I don't know about that. It was partially demolished in a timeline that may soon be rewritten, if the four are now reunited in the kitchen of summer 1982, but this is a victory for the four in that it was not completely demolished (at the very least they have access to the house gizmo since it wasn't lost in a total demolition). If they follow the Whitten doctrine, they will go along with repeating history until they reach the juncture point (Jan 24, 1983?) at which point they are free to deviate: halt the demolition, begin the repair work, etc.

Free-as-house is mainly in chapter 3, but with the notion in mind, many of Free's "otherworldly utterances" take on new meaning. Just as when Free says he expects to "see his daughter soon," he is not exactly talking about seeing her in heaven (that is, it is not a euphemism for "death"), he is talking about her coming in and kidnapping him. Really quite literal!

Free-as-house seems validated by the fact that Free causes the roof tile to fall (chapter 3).

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.

This is a valid interpretation, of course, but I find it fits better with the "dreary Kansas" landscape of the early part of the novel, rather than the numinous and wonderful happy "Oz" ending. Granted I'm not sure where in time the kitchen is, or if Free is the building, or how the four might change the world outside the building (self-help gurus?) if they will do such a thing at all (that is, I am skeptical that the witch's prophesy about the quadrumvirate will prove to be 100% accurate in all surface details: it could well be a microcosm rather than the whole of America), but the ending seems happy to me, and somewhat happier than the grim happiness at the end of THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH (where one suspects that Severian will somehow bring the New Sun that will also wipe out most of humanity on Urth).

What do the companions do for Dorothy in Oz? They help her get home (and they inadvertently help Wizard Oz return to the real world). It really seems to me that the four are doing the same for Free, in a novel which is clearly patterned upon Oz. Perhaps they help him become home.

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