

FLF: timeline problem

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 03 Dec 2002

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Roy C. Lackey — 03 Dec 2002, 07:00

One of the problems with making a personal timeline for Free (that is, one made from his viewpoint), is Wolfe's first entry in the chronology at the end of the book. It states that Free, age 60 but looking younger than that, joined the Lewis & Clark Expedition in 1803. However, the version of Free in the cockpit conversation told the four boarders that he was unsure of his exact age then, but that he was somewhere between 60 and 70. The problem is that he also told them that when he (when he was younger, as Whitten) came to their time (Nov. 1982), Free wasn't there and that "I think that he must have gone to some other time, although I have no idea what that time might be. To the Lewis and Clark expedition, I hope." How can that sixty-something-year-old version of Free (who looked his age; when they first saw him in the pilot's chair it was the "familiar, bearded face of Ben Free" they saw) not know what he had done when he was 60?

-Roy

Michael Andre-Driussi — 03 Dec 2002, 13:41 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy wrote:

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This is another piece of what I was writing about before, where I wondered how Whitten could be vague about his own desertion:

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.)

But I think that in the example Roy is looking at, it "resolves" as

1982 -- Ben Free's last trip to frontier (tentatively October 1982 to 1803)

1983 -- Ben Free returns to the 1980s (Jan 14) from 1806? (end of expedition) or 1819?, with cataracts and all.

That is a diagram of what Whitten seems to be saying, at least. It may not be accurate to the overall reality, though. That High Country interview Whitten is unsure about his own age would seem to be a pointer to more time travelling activity, but his age-appropriate appearance (to the four, at least) suggests that he has not been further "alloyed" (makes sense if his trips have been in the past, in the 19th century, visiting time before he was born) during these trips.

The Free who joined Lewis & Clark was not only alloyed (the 1942 episode), he was also a citizen of the 20th century, so to the people of the early 19th century his health might seem miraculous.

Whitten seems to be saying that the trips for Free came in this order:

1983 -- Whitten (age 53?) deserts, becomes Ben Free.

1807-1818 -- Ben Free lives in the frontier (ageing 7 years in 11 years?), with vacations in 1979-1982.

1983 -- Ben Free/Whitten interviewed in High Country by the four?

1803 -- Ben Free "aged 60 but looks younger" joins the Lewis & Clark expedition (1804-1806).

1806 -- At the end of the expedition (all in realtime, so age = age+3), Free travels to 1819.

1819 -- Free gathers up his treasures and leaves for 1983.

1983 -- Free arrives/Whitten disappears (another alloying for Free?)

Whereas, because of that "aged 60" deal (in the first entry of Wolfe's timeline), we had assumed that the L&C expedition came sooner. Hence, the problem.

OTOH the benefit of this one is that it suggests where the several years of realtime living separating duffle-coat from High Country interview Whitten/Free might be: that 1807-1818 period. This causes problems: what would be the trigger for Whitten to come to High Country for

the interview . . . ? Aside from the memory of "that's the way it happened," which might cover all.

=mantis=