

Death's Sentence

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 20 Apr 2000

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Tony Ellis — 20 Apr 2000, 15:13

Rostrum wrote:

But then Dr. Death's statement makes no sense. No matter how many times we read the story, Tackman will never be a minute older than he was at the end of Death's sentence (heh, accidental double entendre there).

<g> but...

...you're assuming Tackman has no life outside the story on the page. I'm not sure that GW does. As I've said, this is a story about stories: Wolfe's written a few of those, and most of them include the idea that, at some level, stories have a life of their own.

Personally I don't see how Dr. Death's statement makes any sense -except- the way I've always interpreted it. Apart from anything else, it's the custom to end short stories with something of a twist or a shock - which we get by this sudden shift in perspective. All this time we've been treating poor Tackman as "real" in the sense in which we see all fictional protagonists as real, temporarily suspending our disbelief. Now we realise that he's ultimately no more "real" than the characters in the pulp novel.

I suspect that this is the significance of Tackman writing his name in the sand at the start of the story, too.

Adam Stephanides — 21 Apr 2000, 23:22 · follows Tony Ellis

Here's my take on the meaning of Dr. Death's closing words. Just as Ransom will temporarily destroy Dr. Death and escape the island, but will relive his ordeal every time Tackman rereads the story, so Tackman's escape at the end of the story from his damaging home life is only temporary. When his mother recovers, he will be sent back to her and she will continue neglecting him and exposing him to her lovers and her drug-filled parties.

I don't deny that there are overtones of Tackman's fictionality, but I don't think that's the primary meaning.

--Adam