

Short Story 117: Read Me

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 26 Jan 2015

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6714>

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Marc Aramini — 26 Jan 2015, 17:32

READ ME

"Read Me" first appeared in *The Drabble Project* in 1988 and has not been reprinted.

The story is only one hundred words long, as seen below:

Alice looked about her. "You're the most curious cards I've seen."

"That's because we're a tarot pack. If we weren't curious, we wouldn't have troubled the future, and so couldn't tell it."

"You mean troubled *to learn of* the future," Alice corrected him.

The Fool appeared offended. "I mean what I said. If we hadn't troubled the Future, we couldn't tell it how sorry we are."

Alice was puzzled by that, though she proceeded bravely. "But you foretell the future."

"No," said the Fool, "We four tell it." And he indicated the Falling Tower, the Devil, the Magician and himself. (Wolfe)

DISCUSSION:

Included in *The Drabble Project*, consisting entirely of exactly 100 word short stories by SF writers, the brief "Read Me" employs Wolfe's cryptic and ambiguous wordplay to full effect. The verb and object combination the Fool uses to "tell the future" flirts with slipping between an indirect object and a direct object depending on perspective (The Fool wants to tell the future he is sorry, but Alice wants him to tell the future to her). The punning on troubling and foretelling is obvious.

Of course, given the idea that Alice is talking to a Tarot Deck with four cards in the future position, we should do a reading. Since The Fool is talking, and it represents 0 in the tarot, we should also explore its relationship to the person seeking the reading. Generally, the Fool stands in for that person (as the title also reinforces). It represents a zero or fresh starting point, almost childlike in nature. It can also represent foolishness or an immature understanding of events.

The Tower in the future position usually indicates an immediate future, days or hours away. It represents the decimation of some structure in life completely and totally. Because of its pertinent description of the spiritual significance of The Tower and those falling from its battlements, a further description is enlightening:

The Tower shows a tall tower pitched atop a craggy mountain. Lightning strikes and flames burst from the building's windows. People are seen to be leaping from the tower in desperation, wanting to flee such destruction and turmoil. The Tower signifies darkness and destruction on a physical scale, as opposed to a spiritual scale. The Tower itself represents ambitions built on false premises. The lightning bolt breaks down existing forms in order to make room for new ones. It represents a sudden, momentary glimpse of truth, a flash of inspiration that breaks down structures of ignorance and false reasoning ? the lightning bolt is oriented left to right (from the perspective of the card), from heaven to earth, and from Spirit to material. The falling figures correspond to the chained prisoners in the Devil card. They fall headfirst, because the sudden influx of spiritual consciousness represented by the lightning flash completely upsets all our old notions about the relations between subconsciousness and self-consciousness. The flames are actually the Hebrew yods. There are 22 flames, representing the 22 Major Arcana. The gray clouds are the clouds of misfortune that rain on everyone indiscriminately. The ruling planet of this card is Mars. ("Tower Tarot Card Meanings")

Since the people falling from The Tower correspond with the chained figures depicted on The Devil's, these cards are thematically linked. The Devil forebodes ill fortune and defeat in the future, but if it is paired with The Fool (which it is) then its meaning is augmented and might even indicate that the person being read is safe and separate from the disaster about to unfold, though the world and the external surroundings are facing a situation with a dark agenda. The Magician in the future position represents achieving the power and influence one craves. In conjunction with the Fool, it represents success when one passively avoids it as long as the Magician is identified with the person seeking the reading instead of someone else. As previously hinted, when the Fool shows up, it represents free will, creation and, especially in the future position, a new life. Since the Fool appears in conjunction with both the Magician and the Devil in the future, there are some contradictory signs from a standard reading:

When The Devil is near The Fool in a reading, your pleasure-seeking ways are about to create a disaster. ? The Fool is a great card when The Magician is paired with it as long as a sensitive Tarot reader can assure you that both cards apply to you. If this is the case, the chance to break free and create a new reality will be a success. If it is determined that The Magician represents someone else, beware. ("The Fool Tarot Card").

Michael Thayer — 26 Jan 2015, 23:23 · follows Marc Aramini

Mark - Thanks for the interesting explication of this curious short short story (I hadn't encountered it before). In your review, you allude to some Lewis Carroll allusion in TBOTNS. I think I missed this and would be curious to know what specifically you have in mind?

Marc Aramini — 27 Jan 2015, 01:45 · in reply to Michael Thayer

Sure - in claw of the conciliator when jonas and sev are taken to the antechamber where people spend their whole lives waiting for sentencing, jonas starts quoting carroll about the knight sliding up the poker or something. I mention it in the Cat short story writeup as well i think ... even alluding to the cat as something like the cheshire variety. The mirrors of inire attain a quality like the looking glass in that scene as well, i think. Clearly jonas has read lewis carroll.

On Jan 26, 2015 4:23 PM, "Michael Thayer" <michael.o.thayer at gmail.com> wrote:

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Jeffery Wilson clueland.com — 27 Jan 2015, 05:02 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 1/26/2015 7:45 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

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"I used to read, aboard ship. Once I read a history. I don't suppose you know anything about it. So many chiliads have elapsed here." I said, "I suppose not."

"So different from this, but so much like it too. Queer little customs and usages . . . some that weren't so little. Strange institutions. I asked the ship and she gave me another book."

He was still perspiring, and I thought his mind was wandering. I used the square of flannel I carried to wipe my sword blade to dry his forehead.

"Hereditary rulers and hereditary subordinates, and all sorts of strange officials. Lancers with long, white mustaches." For an instant the ghost of his old humorous smile appeared. "The White Knight is sliding down the poker. He balances very badly, as the King's notebook told him."

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