

Never Upon A Time An Exercise in Synopsis

This is an exercise in synopsis, the encapsulation of all that may be perceived by all, the essence of the reality within the fiction. That statement describes not only this document but also the story to which it relates as economy of words is of the essence.

The story follows the life of Graham, a young motor mechanic who takes on a mysterious part-time second job to widen his horizons and discovers that he has done exactly that. He joins a team of people working in a secret building known as The Pumpkin, the precise past origin of which is unknown. This structure can apparently stand outside of normal time, encapsulating its own reality within which people from the future can be encountered briefly. Apart from the recollections of the witnesses to such events nothing from this other reality affects the normal world.

Despite his environment Graham is faced with the fatal flaw in life itself, that attempts to widen the possibilities frequently narrow them and experiences, good and bad, are irreversible as is all life. The team encounters a harrowing series of events, later called the Frismersk incident, which appears to both cause and explain the creation of the Pumpkin as a virtual *machina ex deo*. The *deus* is possibly a benign extradimensional entity given the name Hermes which links with the machine through the Hermes Culture, something embedded in the analogue components of its supercomputer technology.

Aside from this Graham's affair with his girlfriend C-C has ended through her engagement to another colleague John and his life seems to be getting even narrower when he encounters Lucine, a girl from the near future, and falls genuinely in love for the first time. Their very unusual marriage increases the potential of the Pumpkin to influence future events across the world even more, but his life narrows again when the link between Hermes and the Pumpkin breaks and their fantasy existence almost ends. In his efforts to restore what he and Lucine had he falls fatally ill and dies along with the Pumpkin, but at the last moment discovers that he has the vital link with Hermes, the Culture, still within himself. In a dream-like encounter with C-C he finds himself returned to a life working in the Pumpkin very similar to the one that he has just left, as though his previous life was barely a reality. The story ends with him facing the realisation that his new life has another fatal flaw, that with what he recollects from his previous experiences there are now too many possibilities in it. For the sake of all concerned he wants to stop the Frismersk incident happening but this will destroy the life that he had with Lucine and possibly the Pumpkin as well. He has discovered that all the experience gained in a lifetime doesn't prepare one to live it any better again even given the chance.

The story is just the start of a much longer one about the people affected by the Hermes Culture and their efforts to reconcile their past experiences with a normal life while learning more about the phenomenon. It could be seen as science fiction but it is written as a sententious melodrama which repetitively invites mockery by falling over itself and maybe therein lies its appeal, but that is up to the reader. Certainly it has the nature of a synopsis, for having read it once the reader is, like Graham, merely ready to start again to discover the full story, which only experience gained can reveal. There is more in it than first appears and close examination may show that it is actually about something else, but for most mortals life is too short and the ultimate reality may be restricted just to those who have The Culture.