

I think that most people tend to meditate more on What Comes Next as they get older, and since I'm now in my late sixties, I qualify in that regard. Several of my short stories and at least one novel (*Revival*) have approached this question. I can't say 'have dealt with it,' because that implies some conclusion, and none of us can really draw one, can we? Nobody has sent back any cell phone video from the land of death. There's faith, of course (and a veritable deluge of 'heaven is real' books), but faith is, by its very definition, belief without proof.

When you boil it down, there are only two choices. Either there's Something, or there's Nothing. If it's the latter, case closed. If it's the former, there are myriad possibilities, with heaven, hell, purgatory, and reincarnation being the most popular on the Afterlife Hit Parade. Or maybe you get what you always believed you would get. Maybe the brain is equipped with a deeply embedded exit program that starts running just as everything else is running down, and we're getting ready to catch that final train. To me, the reports of near-death experiences tend to support this idea.

What I'd like – I think – is a chance to go through it all again, as a kind of immersive movie, so I could relish the good times and good calls, like marrying my wife and our decision to have that third child. Of course I'd also have to rue the bad calls (I've made my share), but who wouldn't like to reexperience that first good kiss, or have a chance to relax and really enjoy the wedding ceremony that went by in such a nervous blur?

This story isn't about such a rerun – not exactly – but musing about the possibility led me to write about one man's afterlife. The reason fantasy fiction remains such a vital and necessary genre is that it lets us talk about such things in a way realistic fiction cannot.