

"The Haunted Boardinghouse" (spoilers)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 06 Oct 1999

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 06 Oct 1999, 14:18

As Nick reminded me, the Wolfe story regarding a house with four fronts is "The Haunted Boardinghouse" (in WALLS OF FEAR anthology).

I recently re-read it, and it is pretty neat, all right.

The surface gist of it: in a future neo-Victorian Illinois, Enan, a university student (classics major), runs out of money and has to return to his humble home. He gets a letter from a classmate telling about a possible job at a school in Granville, and he jumps at the chance. But Granville has a reputation of being a weird place.

On the way there, our hero dies. Or nearly dies--he wakes up in a room inside the house with four fronts. He meets a DARK LADY whom he is led to believe is the wife of the school master. A lot of weird things happen. The hero dies, or not, another time or two. Then he meets another woman who is introduced as the master's wife--she is not the DARK LADY.

Meanwhile, the house: each face kinda sorta opens onto a different time.

STYLE STREET NOTES

Neoclassical Water boy climbing out window (p. 195, pb edition) Tudor xx window of Enan's room (p. 196) Neo-Victorian Prescott "your world is neo-Victorian" says DARK LADY
Contemporary Gate

So in the end, Enan makes whoopie with a lady in the dark, and assumes her to be the DARK LADY, but she ain't, she's the master's wife. She runs off to tell the master, and all hell breaks loose. Then the DARK LADY appears to lead Enan (and others?) to Classical Times where a miraculous army of boys and slaves are all that stands between Hannibal and Rome.

(And in a tit-for-tat symmetry, it seemed that Granville was the site of a similar military miracle that turned the Mexican Invasion at the last moment, some years or decades previous to the story.)

Thus: the house serves as a recruitment station (Enan the classicist) and time portal to help the underdogs in times of invasion. The Neoclassical face is opposite the Neo-Victorian face. All very clear cut and tidy.

But wait--how come Enan was in the Tudor face? Is that because he was already dead? And hey--wouldn't the Tudor face link up to the Tudor world, and the Contemporary face link up to the 20th century? Are there more battles implied, yet not stated--or are these two faces the "resting house" faces for the other two? (And who gets onboard in Classical times--Latin sf authors?<g>)

And what is the deal with that climbing boy?

A few scattered thoughts.

=mantis=