

Puss in Boots; Three Fingers

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 14 Jun 1998

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adam louis stephanides — 14 Jun 1998, 13:48

On Fri, 12 Jun 1998 William H. Ansley wrote:

Carabas, sends you greetings." And disappeared again. The little animal had a pointed snout and round ears, but its teeth were the even, biting teeth of a human being, and it smiled in its agony.

To me, at least, the little animal is obviously Mickey Mouse (or possible one of the other, similar cartoon mice with pointed snouts, round ears and square human teeth).

Me too! Of course, V.R.T. doesn't mention the pants or the gloves, but they could have fallen off in the struggle.

Wolfe definitely has Mickey on his mind from time to time; witness the story "Three Fingers" in *_The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories_*.

I've been meaning to post about that story for a long time, and you're mention of it has finally motivated me to shake off my inertia. (Hence, this is all from memory.)

The big question, of course, is "What the heck is going on with the ending?" I've come up with three possible answers, which I list in descending order of probability.

1) "Michael Mauss" is insane. His keepers caught up with him and gave him a sedative; everything else in the final scene is delusional. The primary external evidence for this is that I once looked para-reserpine, the drug given to him. I didn't find it, but I found reserpine, which presumably works the same way. Reserpine was at one time used as a powerful tranquilizer, especially for schizophrenics, IIRC (I don't know whether it was still so used when Wolfe wrote the story).

When I first developed this theory, I wasn't satisfied with it because I felt that by this reading it wasn't much of a story. Now I don't think so. The point of the story, I now believe, is that Michael is insane but lives in a world full of magic and adventure, while his sane "adversaries" live in a world of paunchy men and women in business suits. It's another variation of the theme of the individual vs. bureaucracy so common in his writing.

2) "Michael Mauss" is sane and the "Mickey Mafia" really gets him, just like it says in the story. Supporting this is that hallucinations are one of the side effects of reserpine. I don't like this because it leaves too many questions unanswered. Why would the Disney people dress up as Disney characters to catch Michael? And why pretend they're going to kill him?

3) "Michael Mauss" is really Mickey Mouse (and is also sane, as in 2)). Supporting this is that reserpine is now used as a veterinary tranquilizer. This is a cute theory, and it's undoubtedly true in a metaphorical sense. But it's not literally true. Aside from the objections to 2), Michael is a human being, not a cartoon mouse.

Any comments? Any better ideas?

--Adam