

MOUSE

Mice know only one color and that color is grey. The word for "color" in mouse language -- "tikki" -- is also the word for grey. It's been said that there was one mouse a long time ago who saw another color (I think it was brown) but I don't believe it. The word for "cat" and the word for "death" is "i-tikki," which can be translated as "the sudden absence of grey" or "annihilation." Many mice welcome it when it comes.

In a previous incarnation, I was Richard W. Hovey of St. Joseph, Missouri. I was employed by the Wire Rope Corporation as a foreman. I had three children, two girls and a boy. My wife's name was Anita and she outlived me by seven years. It's not very interesting being a mouse, but it wasn't very interesting being Richard W. Hovey of St. Joseph, Missouri either.

Everyone eats mice -- hawks, owls, coyotes, foxes, you name it. Mice are the universal food. We were made to be eaten. When, because of some ecological imbalance, there are no creatures around to eat us, we get very restless and depressed, and after a while we commit suicide. Then our spirits (such as they are) go up to heaven and are reincarnated again, almost always as mice. As food, we are simply too good to be true. Some say we taste like roast beef; others say it's more like lamb. I have even heard us compared to New England boiled dinner. There's no accounting for taste.

While we mice are apparently gourmet food for all other creatures, we ourselves have undeveloped palates and will eat almost anything, with the possible exception of brussels sprouts. Indeed we must eat at least three times our weight in grain every day of our lives or die. So there are no real restaurants in Mouse Land, only pit-stop drive-ins, similar to your own MacDonald's. We mice spend so much time eating, we seldom do anything else. A friend of mine (now deceased) once organized a whist party, but no one came. They were too busy eating.

Sex for mice is quick, remarkably efficient, and not particularly interesting. We have no mating calls, no courtship rituals, no dances, and of course no colorful plumage (since we have no sense of color). We simply do it as quickly as possible, get it over with, and go on eating. They say that over 80 billion mice are born on the planet earth every year. It's a wise mouse that knows its own father.

We mice are eternal lookers-on. We have witnessed most of the major events in human history. We were there, for instance, when Ben Franklin discovered radium, when Buddha turned water into wine and when Attila the Hun won the

Battle of Borodino. Some say we mice are in such an infernal hurry, we can never pause long enough to get our facts straight. But I have just proved to you that particular aspersion is incorrect. People are always putting down mice and it's unfair. We're as good as anyone else. Just give us a chance.

Few mice live on into old age, but one who did, Rik-tuk-ti, a Tibetan mouse, attained wisdom. However, only one of his sayings has come down to us: "My fellow mice, it isn't worth it." Thus, Rik-tuk-ti. It is generally believed that Rik-tuk-ti died when accidentally stepped upon by a yak. But I believe that he was decapitated in a whirling prayer wheel. All we know for certain is that Rik-tuk-ti saw into the heart of things and that it made him unhappy. Most mice are unhappy, but Rik-tuk-ti was unhappier than most. If there were state institutions for depressed mice, most of us would commit ourselves.

Mice never laugh. In that respect, mice are like moles, who never laugh either. Rats have been known to laugh, but never mice. Other creatures make jokes in the presence of mice, but mice always miss the point. Mice don't get invited out to parties very much. In the last hundred years, only one invitation has ever been extended to a mouse, and that was from a bantam rooster who didn't know any better. If mice could sing, they'd sing the blues. But mice can't sing. We mice sulk a lot. It's understandable, given our situation. But you can't really expect the other animals to sympathize with us. They have problems of their own.

I hope that in my next incarnation, my spirit manifests itself in a bluebird. (I think that if they were honest with themselves, most mice would admit that they would rather be bluebirds.) Bluebirds can fly. Bluebirds can sing. And bluebirds can see another color beyond grey, namely blue -- the color (they tell me) of the precious stone used in the construction of the ramparts of Heaven. But I have no real hope of being reincarnated as a bluebird. I glanced at my records the last time I made the Great Journey around the Wheel and I saw that I had 15,972,412 more incarnations to go, and that in every single incarnation I was a mouse.

As you can see, I'm caught like a mouse in a trap, and the trap has cosmic dimensions. And the worst thing is, I don't even have time to stop, sit down and figure out who's to blame. If you find out, let me know. Now forgive me, but I've got to run. Goodbye.

-- John F. Gilgun

St. Louis MO