

Graymalkin



E. HOUSE 6-75





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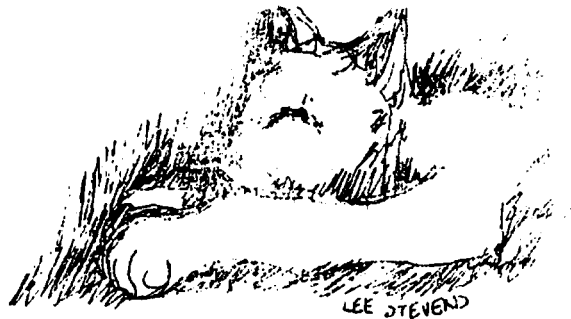
## ARTWORK:

Front Cover by Earl House	
Marla Gold	Page 11
Bill Rotsler	Page 4
Lee Stevens	Pages 2, 18
Back Cover by Steve Leigh	
Calligraphy by Jeff Kleiman	

121 Nansen St.  
Linti OH 45216

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"Malkin," quoth I, "Art thou  
the kitoun  
That I haf mourned so many  
night?  
Thou thou was wont to warm  
my couch,  
I haf laid they corse in clotty  
clay,  
Since I forsoke the fikil world,  
I loved man ne beast as thee!"



Anon. Middle English

I was physically assaulted at my first convention, Midwestcon, '77. There I was, sitting poolside, talking with Sally Sellers and friends, when a black cat, carried by some big name fan, attacked me. It's owner, who turned out to be Bill Bowers, claimed that the cat was frightened by the water splashing from the pool. Since that time, the cat, Responsibility, has continually attacked me whenever I'm visiting Bowers. Must have something to do with my karma.

Anyway, even though I probably owe 'sponse a great deal of credit for getting me introduced to Bowers, *Graymalkin* is dedicated to my own cats, Ali and Cara...without whom I would have been hard pressed to find a title for this zine.

Most of the people who will be reading (*I hope*) this zine know who I am, but for the benefit of those who don't... well, I'm obviously a neo (*okay, stop snickering*) and it's also probably fairly obvious that I don't really know what I'm doing publishing a fanzine. Well, folks, I want you to know that I had a lot of help, er, well, advice, from local fans, often unbeknownst to them. It's been a somewhat harrowing experience, but as I get down to the wire I'm finding out that I really enjoy doing this. Must be a masochist. As for how I got roped into fandom, after twenty-four blissfully ignorant years, I'll let you read Steve's article on our first con. No sense in being redundant, but I'll share a bit of my introduction to fandom.

Being a social animal, Midwestcon spoiled me. All the partying, the relaxed and very informal atmosphere made me feel right at home...even though some of the fan activity reminded me of something I'd read about in John Cleves novels. I remember feeling somewhat wary of some of the males I met at Midwestcon, thinking that Bill Cavin was trying to proposition me when he offered me a place to crash. Having gotten to know Bill better I've found that he is really quite safe. (*Sorry, Bill*) Anyway, I really had a ball, and Steve and I met a lot of good people there, most of whom are still hanging around, much to our ~~relief~~ delight.

The weekend after Midwestcon I ventured into Hap's Irish Pub to hear Al Curry perform his debachery. Upon meeting Ric Bergman, Bill Cavin, and this strange creature known as a Big Name Fan, Bill Bowers, I proceeded to get delightfully drunk and went out partying until 4:30 a.m. at Bergman's place, neglecting to tell Steve where I was going. Fortunately I had the presence of mind to call home at that time and inform Steve of my wherabouts. Unfortunately, finding out that I was at a strangers apartment with three guys and only one other girl (Al's wife, Tonya) didn't make him feel any better -- he'd already headed out to Haps, only to find out that it closed at 1:00 and was about to call the cops.

The next evening Bowers had a Fourth of July party and I finally convinced Steve that he should get to know these strange people called CFGers and find out how potentially harmless they really were. By dawn the next morning the damage was done and out social life hasn't been the same since.

Still, why a fanzine? And how to explain it? Must we get serious?

This is very difficult for me. I'm trying to pretend that a friend is sitting right across from me and that I'm just letting loose about myself. You know, relaxed atmosphere, maybe a glass of Blue Nun in hand, just rambling. It's hard, dammit! Here I am, twenty-five years old, and what have I got to show for my life? I got married at twenty-one and although I love Steve and think we have a good, working marriage, I can't help but wonder what would have happened if we'd waited and I'd gone on to college and maybe gotten involved in a career instead of merely working as a secretary for really shit pay, always afraid to change jobs because of the security of just having one.

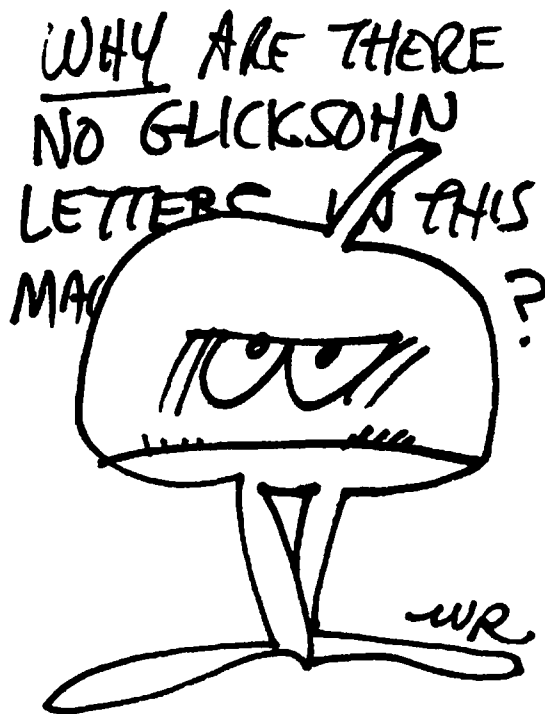
I've always felt that I lacked any intuitive creativity... you know, one of those women who appear to be built for having babies and being a housewife and doing little else...waiting on their adoring but somewhat demanding husbands and children. It's one of those images that I was brought up to take for granted and also one which I totally reject. So here I sit, definitely not a housewife, (*if you've seen our apartment, you know*) our only children being our two cats, and still no talent. I guess it's something I'll have to find time to develop or learn to live without.

There's probably an unconscious twinge of jealousy toward Steve, because he can write and I can't. That's a good part of my reason for doing this zine. It may not seem like much, but it's a big step for me in asserting myself and proving to

myself that I don't have to ride on Steve's or anyone  
elses laurels.

It's scary handing out a zine and waiting for reactions.  
I am planning on putting out another issue of *Graymalkin*  
but have no definite time in mind. The only way I'll know  
what I've done wrong or right is for you to give feedback,  
so please comment.

I want to thank everyone who helped me put this zine  
together. Jeff Kleiman did the calligraphy, Tonya Curry  
printed this on very short notice, Art Metzger helped with  
paste up and also convinced Don Carter to loan out his IBM.  
Also, thanks, Steve, for all of your moral support. I  
needed it more than you probably realize.



## Sonata

**S**he grave is empty.  
Darkness, half lit by the blurred  
moon,  
chilled by the sea, the fog waiting,  
the enthralled stars, nearly lost,  
searching for another earth,  
the dark soil waiting for a planet.

**C**haos night.  
The memory of a fireplace,  
warmth with music,  
undulating arias  
like small birds falling into  
darkness.

**C**old rain  
driving against my window.  
Muffled music and dreams of  
water,  
and another grave.

Steve Federle 1977

"GO ON, JUMP IN," THEY SAID. "THE WATER'S NOT COLD." OF  
A FIRST CON COMMENTARY

First con -- although at that time I lacked the correct mental set, the proper nuances of fannish contractions. I thought of it as a con-ven-tion, with all three syllables neatly laid out and intoned with pontifical reverence. I'd appeared in *ANALOG* a few times that year (my first stories in something other than a semi-pro magazine) and the then-current issue of *IASF*M contained one of my efforts. I'd received some kind letters from Andy Offutt commenting on the *ANALOG* stories, and I was aware that he was generally at Midwestcon -- and I'd been intending to go to Midwestcon in any event: it was nearby, I could always retreat back home if it were something exceedingly boring, and I would finally see what a con-ven-tion was like. The fact that Dale Tarr and Michael Banks, two local fans, had called to ask if I were the Stephen Leigh that had just had a story in *IASF*M only strengthened that resolution. I was known. People involved with the convention had asked if I were attending. Yes, I would go. Yes.

But I wasn't a fan. I knew nothing of fandom.

Banks had invited me to a pre-convention party on Thursday evening at the hotel. Yes, I told him, I'd be there. He gave me the room number and approximate time. Thursday evening found me, then, in the lobby of the Norwood Quality Inn -- about a ten-minute drive from my apartment. Nervous and hesitating as usual, I tried to look as if I belonged there, for the clerk at the desk had accusatory, predatory eyes that wandered about the lobby in search of unwanted carrion, and those eyes glanced at me often. I ruminated, shriving myself of stupid questions. Why had I come? I didn't know any of those people. What if neither Tarr nor Banks was at the party? What would I say to this room full of strangers? "Hi. I'm Steve Leigh." Hesitation. The blond giant holding the door stares at me in dumb question and thumbs the keen edge of his battleaxe. I stammer in confusion. "Uh, a Dale Tarr called, you see, well, he didn't invite me to the, uhh, party... I mean, Banks did, and..." More confused looks from the giant. He licks blood from his slashed thumb and glances at it meaningfully. "Banks?" he says, finally. "Never heard of him. Now git." I looked at the fellow denizens of the lobby, the impressions of their faces slowly making their way through the paranoia filter that hangs between myself and the rest of humanity. Are these sf people? I ask myself. The older gentleman in the suit coat and pants that don't match, a dusting of cigarette ashes coating the rough fabric -- is he perhaps a Famous Author? I shrugged my shoulders, attempted to be unobtrusive, and walked down the corridor toward the room, visions of unfriendly giants before me.



Outside the room, then. I leaned against the wall opposite the door and looked at the brass numbers tacked to the plywood. Yes, they match. But there were no signs, no clues giving further verification. *Steve -- here's the party. Or -- SFWA members welcome. Or -- Midwestcon Advance Party That You Were Invited To.* I would have even been content with the improper grammar of the last. Listening -- body slightly inclined toward the door, but not so far that I couldn't straighten up guiltily if someone hove into view down the hall -- I could hear murmured conversation. Laughter. Unrecognizable voices. I gathered all my resident courage

and walked back into the lobby. Cigarette Ash is talking to a wide, short woman in a red smock. She wheezes on the couch like a broken, blood-stained radiator. She laughed overmuch and hysterically. I smiled at the vulture-eyed clerk, showing my obvious sense of belonging, and walked downstairs. Busboys were putting chairs away, and I glanced at the bulletinboards outside the party rooms. A realtor's meeting. A wedding reception. No mention of Midwestcon. *AM I IN THE RIGHT PLACE?* I went back upstairs, undecided. Cigarette Ash and Red Smock have been joined by The Beard -- a younger man with an extraordinary growth of facial hair. I carefully cemented an intent and serious frown on my face as I strode down the hall toward the party room once more. People were still talking inside. I raised my closed fist, knowing that *this* time I would really knock, and closed my eyes in preparation

and found that when I knocked I only hit open air back in the lobby. Cigarette Ash was gone, though Red Smock and The Beard were holding an animated conversation. I smiled at the clerk as I walked from the lobby and out the door.

I went home. End of Day One.

Second Day: Friday Noon. I returned to the scene of last night's defeat. The lobby was full of people now, groups of them wandering about, while a knot of serious faces sat on the ring of couches bordering a coffee table burdened with full ashtrays. Again the question -- are these sf people? I saw Cigarette Ash getting on an elevator and almost smiled to him. *Old friend, remember me? Sf people?* I walked slowly about the perimeter of the room, seeing if I could detect that elusive, aberrant strain in their words that proclaimed them readers of science fiction. No, the dominant topic was politics and the hot weather, I went back to the room that had held last night's party, but the door was shut and nothing could be heard on the far side of the wood -- though as I walked back to the lobby a person bearing a tremendous armload of styrofoam cups walks past me and into that room. He looks like an overgrown panda with glasses. Sf?

I wandered downstairs, and there found the first tangible evidence that this was the convention and not a gathering of the Teamsters. A sign shone in the firmament: Midwestcon Registration. Huckster Room. I breathed an audible sigh of satisfaction cum trepidation, and entered the indicated room. Three people blocked the entrance, talking loudly of some con they'd put on years before. They looked at me as I sidled past -- and here I noticed that when one sees another person whose face is not familiar, one looks at his/her chest. I realized that I lacked the one accouterment that made this tradition viable in our society -- the name badge. I moved to rectify that error. At the registration table was a lady with one of the most interesting faces I've yet to see -- she looked, at alternate moments and sometimes at once, either twenty or fifty. She smiled, one of those rare smiles that appear to be at home in the muscles of the face. I had to smile in return -- poor payment. To her left was a bearded man with a stack of magazines bulwarking him from the common run of humanity. *Quantum*. I stepped up to the table, glanced at the name badges they wore, adorned with a too-cute cartoon of a dragon. Grimacing at the artwork, I read the names. *Cincinnati Fantasy Group: Bea Mahaffey. Cincinnati Fantasy Group: Al Curry -- Quantum. Ms. CFG* asked my name as she picked up a pen. The moment had come. I licked dry lips, and spoke.

"Stephen Leigh."

I waited for the dawning of recognition on her face, the thunder from the heavens, the light arcing and dancing in the skies. *Author! Author!* Bea glanced up from where she'd written my name, her eyes aglow, and said...

"And what's your address?"

The light dimmed, the thunder faded into the burping of last night's supper. I humbly finished registering, gave Mr. CFG my money, politely looked through a stack of *Quanta* without buying, and went back upstairs.

With the name badge, it will be different, I told myself. Everyone will talk to me now that I have that powerful talisman. I am part of the convention. Such is folly. I wandered about the lobby, doing a fair imitation of the Flying Dutchman, and watching people glance at my chest, roll their eyes back in inward contemplation, and striking nothing, shrug and walk past. Bodies with their attached names flitted by in mutual strangeness. Then, with a shock of familiarity -- like stumbling across your name in a phone book -- I saw DALE TARR printed in neat block letter, attached to a grey-haired man holding a drink. He didn't appear particularly fearsome, so I went up to him. And -- glory of glories -- he recalled talking to me. Praise what gods there be, I was saved!

The CFG will forever have Dale to ~~blame~~ thank for having rescued me from a quick gaffiation. Dale and I talked for awhile, and he entertained me with tales of fandom past. Then followed the Period of Introduction, with Dale as mentor.

I wandered about with Dale, and whenever he ran across someone he knew, that unlucky person was treated to an introduction. "This is Steve Leigh, He's had stories in *ANALOG*, and he's in this issue of *Asimov's SF*." I'd smile modestly, nod or shake hands, and immediately lose my grasp of that other person's name. At one point, we were sitting on a couch when Gordie Dickson, Robert Asprin in tow, walked by on his way to the bar. Dale blockaded Dickson and performed the famous introduction. I looked modestly at the floor -- wondering what I could say and not appear a total fool -- when Asprin exclaimed to the world "Hey, Look! He's blushing!" If I hadn't been doing so before, I did now. I could feel the heat on my cheeks. I mumbled something or other and was very grateful when Dickson and Asprin went quickly on their way. Embarrassing.

It was about that time that offutt arrived. Dale saw him first, suggested we go say hello to him. I demurred, not feeling up to a second humiliation quite so quickly. Dale went over as offutt checked in, while I remained on the couch at the far end of the lobby. I crossed my legs, leaned back.

A call shattered the air.

Dale. "Hey, Steve. Over here." I looked up to see him standing next to andy, waving. I sighed, resignedly, and walked over to them. *Oh, hell. What do I say now? Offutt's the damn SFWA president. He doesn't want to talk to every neo-pro in the world...*

I shook hands with andy and smiled. I thanked him for the encouragement his letters had given me -- yah, I had that much to say, at least -- and he shrugged my thanks away. And I abruptly could think of absolutely nothing else to say. I didn't care to sound inane or boorish -- that was the last impression I cared to leave him with. So I said something that sounded rather inane and boorish and excused myself, feeling more than vaguely stupid. This was not going well. Not at all. *Get out of here, kid. We don't allow mental defectives at science fiction conventions. I don't want to see your face around here again. Hear me?* The life of a recluse began to seem more and more attractive. I mumbled old latin prayers. A monk. That'd be good -- preferably a Trappist. Vows of silence, you know. I wouldn't have to speak at all, couldn't ever sound like a mental five-year-old.

I went downstairs, checked the setting-up of the art room, decided I didn't like most of the art, and went back upstairs. After performing my famous wallflower imitation for a time, I left. I gave the congregation a blessing from the doorway. My robes



rustled softly, and I fingered the beads of my rosary with reverence.

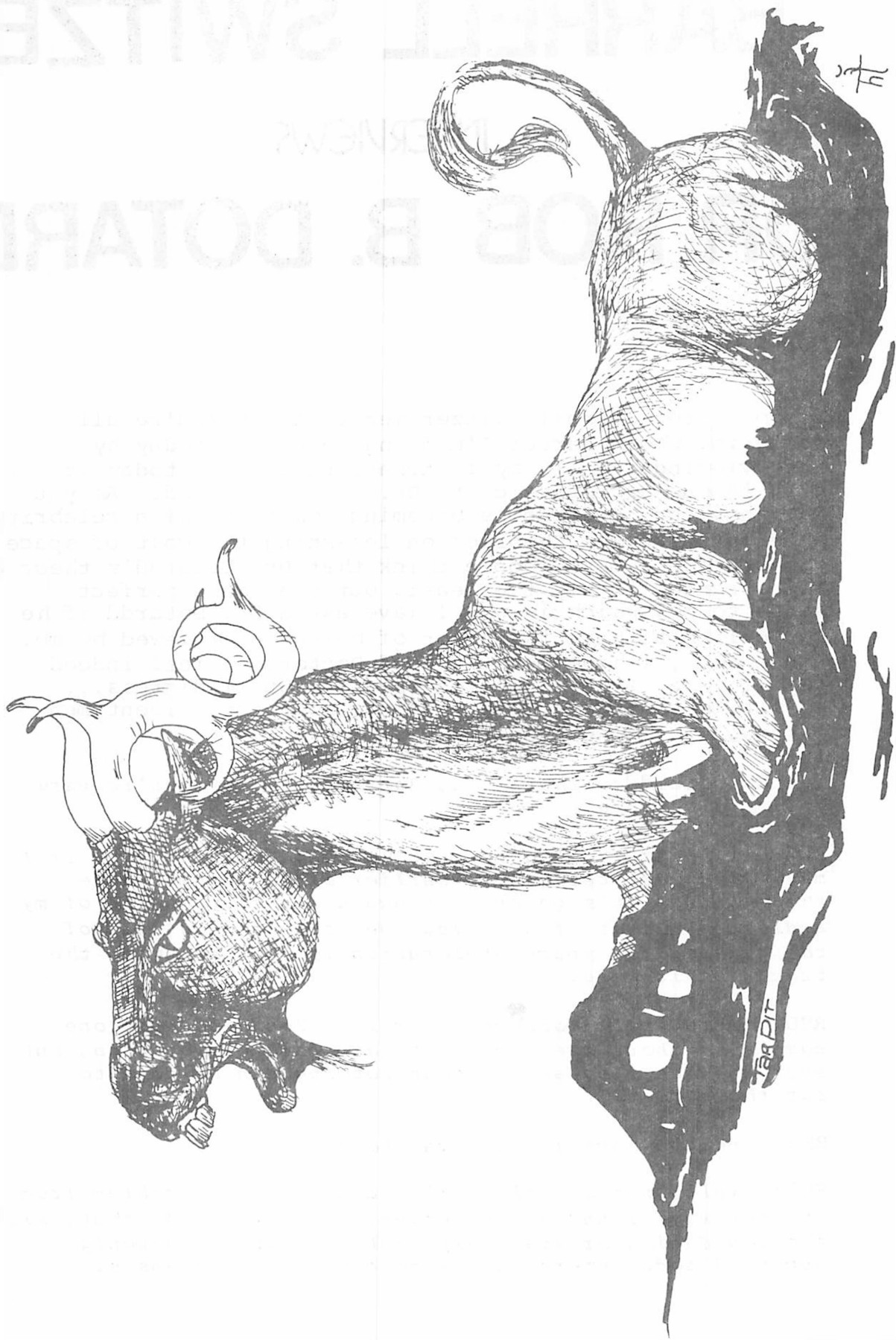
That night, I brought Denise to the con -- not an altruistic gesture on my part at all. Denise is a social creature. Strangers are, to her, just friends waiting to be met. And -- as I thought she might -- she proceeded to fit in as if she'd been a fan all her life. In five minutes, she met more people and had more conversations than I'd managed in three and a half hours that afternoon. We stood/sat in the CFG suite and talked to those revelers there -- err, in the interest of accuracy, *Denise* talked and I listened, throwing in the odd line or two. She registered with Bea and we stayed much longer than we'd anticipated after I'd given her my description of the con that afternoon. I even began enjoying myself.

The next night, I had to play at a local club. Denise went back to the con. She must have done well, by all the varied second-hand reports I heard at later dates. She managed to finagle her way into the banquet and sit at Gay and Joe Haldeman's table, met many of the CFG people we now (reluctantly) call friends, got drunk, was attacked by the familiar of a certain tall (well, not *short*...) BNF, and in general had a hell of a time. I wish I knew how she does that so easily -- and when do I get to see all those incriminating photos everyone claims they took?

All of the above meant that by Sunday afternoon, all I needed to do was stay in Denise's vicinity and meet all those people I'd seen but not talked with. Sunday was a *good* day. We sat around the pool and chatted with Sally Sellers, Andy Offutt, Al Curry, and Ric Bergman. Bill Cavin surfaced from the pool long enough to give a wet hello -- Bill, for good or ill, is one of the most amiable creatures it has been my pleasure to meet. We contacted a plethora of people that I've come to know better in later times, though they were at the time, more a quickly-moving blur of faces that I only badly managed to match with names. I enjoyed Sunday. I finally, grudgingly, enjoyed Midwestcon.

Huh, I'll be damned, I muttered to myself, leaving the hotel that evening. Yes, replied that implacable voice next to me, you probably will.

---Steve Leigh



# BARRELL SWITZER

## INTERVIEWS

# DR. ROB B. DOTARDD

Hello there, Barrell Switzer here. I bet you're all wondering whose career I'm going to change today by interviewing. Well, my fortunate target for today is that famous astrophysicist, Dr. Rob B. Dotardd. As you may know, Dr. Dotardd is becoming something of a celebrity by expounding his theories on lessening the cost of space exploration. Many people think that Dr. Dotardd's theories are strange, to say the least, but they make perfect sense to me, which is why I have asked Dr. Dotardd if he would like to have the honor of being interviewed by me. Since then, I have met the good Doctor. I feel indeed that I have found a kindred spirit. But I digress... it's time to introduce one of the most intelligent men I know, Dr. Rob B. Dotardd.

Rob B. Dotardd: *Thank you, Barrell, I know you're very happy to be here.*

Barrell Switzer: *And so must you be, Doctor...Rob, if I may. You were telling me earlier of your remarkable theory, but let's go over it again for the benefit of my audience. First of all, you feel that a good deal of the expense for space exploration is just money up the tubes, as it were.*

RBD: *Absolutely correct, Barrell. You see, everyone complains about the high costs of space exploration, but everyone seems to accept that nothing can be done to cut these costs.*

BS: *And you have found a way to do so?*

RBD: *Well, not exactly. I've attacked the problem from another way around all together. I fully agree that, with the foundation of space exploration that is commonly accepted today there can be no cutting of expenses.*



BS: But yet you say you have a way to do just that.

RBD: You don't fully understand, Barrell. With my theory in practice, the same amount of capital would be needed for each voyage of exploration, but there would ultimately need to be less voyages.

BS: You mean you mean to save money merely by cutting back on space exploration?

RBD: By no means. But if my theory were utilized we would find that we would not need to make the number of voyages we do now.

BS: How can that be? Are you suggesting that each voyage should be of longer duration?

RBD: No, no, no. I'm not saying we should explore less, I'm saying we should make less to explore.

BS: I'm not sure I understand.

RBD: It's just that everyone is trying to find a way to make space exploration less expensive, when what we should be concentrating on is fixing it so that there's less space to explore.

BS: I beg your pardon?

RBD: I said that we should fix things so that there's less space to explore.

BS: Just how would you fix it so that there was less space to explore?

RBD: Before I answer that, let me say that, as many people know, one of the biggest problems in the exploration of space has always been rubbish. People have expressed the concern that if we go on with our explorations space will eventually be one big junk yard.

BS: That's true, but I don't see what that has to do with it.

RBD: It has everything to do with it! You see my theory is that the more junk, trash...whatever, that we send into space, the less space there will be to explore.

BS: My God, Dr. Dotardd, that's brilliant! And it's so simple. It makes perfect sense to me.

RBD: Thank you, Barrell. Of course you can see the enormous commercial possibilities were my theory put into practice. Anything we want to get rid of down here; garbage, junk, empty boxes, would essentially save us money on space exploration if we could launch it into space, since we would no longer have to explore the space displaced by it. The more we send up, the less space to explore.

BS: But tell me, Doctor, wouldn't shipping junk cars out beyond the Solar System be expensive?

RBD: Of course it would, Barrell. I was merely trying to take into account the intelligence of your regular readers. Actually, cars were just a frivolous example. But imagine how many 30' weather balloons we could load into a space capsule. Once out in space they could be inflated and there would be hundreds of miles of space that we wouldn't have to explore because we'd know that all it contained was weather balloons.

BS: That's fabulous, Doctor. You've explained your theory wonderfully. Now we need only wait to see if something so amazingly simple and inexpensive can actually be put into practice in such a complicated society.

But meanwhile, Doctor, what are your plans for the future?

RBD: Right now I'm hard at work on a new theory so revolutionary that the very foundation of all our scientific knowledge will be shaken.

BS: Sounds exciting, Doctor. May I ask what it is?

RBD: Well, Barrell, there are still a few bugs to iron out, but I intend to prove that there is no such thing as gravity.

BS: Pardon me?

RBD: I said I intend to prove that there is no such thing as gravity. Right now we are kept from floating off skyward only by the enormous pressure of all the air on top of us.

BS: Doctor, that is certainly something to think about, but we're all out of time.

This is Barrell Switzer, signing off.

((The above interview was transcribed and edited by Jerry Conall.))

## "Boop boop a doo" and the Middle Class Myth

Oklahoma City, Jan. 20 (AP) - A crowd of men and women shouting that they were hungry and jobless, raided a grocery store near the City Hall today. Twenty-six of the men were arrested. Scores loitered near the city jail following the arrests, but kept well out of the range of the fire hose made ready for use in case of another disturbance... 'It is too late to bargain with us,' the leaders shouted as they stripped the shelves.

Black Thursday, the start of the Great Depression in the United States, occurred on October 24, 1929. That same year Max Fleischer Studios created a new cartoon character, Betty Boop, for the mass audience. She was fashioned after a type of Mae West image, styled in a mopsy hairdo and vampish dress, and given the falsetto voice of radio singer Helen Kane. Between Betty Boop's most popular years, 1929-1933, she embodied for many a symbol of a better life, forming the typification of the Middle Class Myth. This myth consisted of several factors: plentiful surroundings, an ideal woman, and constant happiness. The Middle Class Myth created by the Fleischer studios through this animated figure can be illustrated by examples from several of the Boop cartoons.

A viewer could look at a Betty Boop cartoon in the early 1930's and be comforted by the fact that the Depression did not touch the surroundings of this innocent temptress. Betty is able to delight in all the pleasures of a leisurely life; she enjoys a boat ride and a lavish picnic party in *May Party* (1933) or is able to spend her time watering flowers in *Penthouse* (1932). In most cases, Betty's home and surroundings is characteristically middle class. In *Baby Be Good*, Betty lives in a small house filled with plain but well kept furnishings, with little ornamental fashion that would reflect her slightly vampish nature. Nowhere on the surface of these cartoons is there a hint of social commentary on the Depression's bread lines, hunger riots, or suicides. Such misery is far from the context of Betty's pleasant world.

What appealed to many people was that the woman Betty portrayed was so unthreatening to the male oriented world. She could be chased by the little gnome-like men in *Red Hot Mama* (1934), or the male Frankenstein monster in *Penthouse*. While she cried or cooed, she was defenseless against the attackers, and relied on Koko the Clown for protection, or her Uncle Grampy to invent some crazy thing to rescue her.



Not only was Betty Boop totally dependent on and resigned to the world of men, but she possessed two qualities which would supposedly endear her to any man, or form a model for any woman. These qualities, the attributes of the *ideal woman*, were those of both the temptress and the child. The temptress aspect of Betty Boop can best be illustrated in *Penthouse*. As Bimbo looks on lustfully from a window opposite Betty's penthouse, Betty waters her plants. Even in this simple action, however, sexuality is apparent, for she cannot conceal her gartered leg or shapely curves, as her delicate *unmentionables* wave in the breeze behind her head. In contrast to this image, Betty turns baby-sitter in *Baby Be Good*. It's humorous that the baby's face and mannerisms are almost identical to Betty's, reinforcing her child-like image.

The third quality of the middle class myth is the aspiration for constant happiness. Betty was always rescued at the end, the cartoon always sounding in the final moments a happy chord. The Depression which existed in the real world couldn't touch Betty; peace and bliss were always restored before the final credits flashed on the screen.

If the portrayal of the middle class myth seems offensive in its simplicity it is of interest to note the subtle ideas which form an undercurrent to the cartoons themselves. In *May Party*, for example, Betty's boatripe and picnic is disrupted when Koko the Clown gets a *strange liquid* from a rubber tree on the island. This liquid has the amazing effect of making everything elastic, and the visualization of this effect, characterized by drooping figures and stretched objects, seems very akin to a drug induced vision of the world. In another cartoon, *Betty Boop's Museum* (1932), Betty tours a natural history museum, filled with the decayed bones of extinct dinosaurs and other ancient artifacts. If one looks carefully as she moves through the museum, in the back of the frame, partially hidden, stand the cob-webbed figures of Micky Mouse and Pluto the Dog. It is here that one notes that the creator of the Boop cartoons was a former employee of the Disney Studio, and this representation of Disney's wholesome characters seems an attack on the culture which produced them.

Through these examples it seems that the creators of this vision of the middle class myth had very different objectives in mind than those apparent on the surface of the Boop cartoons. They subtly introduce factors which seem to undercut their own process of mythmaking, and thus in effect they satirize the very myth which they have created. Apparently aware of the shallowness of the middle class values, perhaps they realized too the necessity of their own Betty Boop myth; for it was the reinforcement attained from belief in the myth which helped the American public to survive the desperate years of the Great Depression.

Nancy Soellner-Federle

# REVIEWS

LORD FOUL'S BANE: Stephen R. Donaldson; Holt, 1977

Being only a third of the way through a trilogy gives one a melding of several emotions. This is especially true if the trilogy is at all able to be viewed as three distinct entities. Relief and anticipation tumble together, and at the confluence of the warring feelings is frustration. Do I want to continue? Unlike the Tolkien trilogy -- to use the most common denominator in fantasy -- the Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever are three separate tales, not a continuous narrative. With Tolkien, you reach no satisfactory ending until that final page. You have a simple choice: read or not. There are no resting places, no interludes that you can stop and not continue on. Not so with Donaldson. So having read *LORD FOUL'S BANE*, and given that chance to ruminate by the twist of fate that has left the final two volumes undelivered, I have a totality of sorts to review -- a gestalt that is a work in and of itself.

Donaldson is being pushed by the publishers -- witness the mass mailing of paperback review copies of *LFB* -- and the publishers hold above his young head the mandella of Tolkien, so lately tarnished and stained by contact with the head of Terry Brooks. And why not? Awards sell books. If Donaldson can be bought the Gandalf Award or the Campbell Award, then their coffers will be full. And sf people, despite their touted individualities and eccentricities, are simply people, and people can be badgered, influenced, and fooled. It's a shame.

It a shame because *LFB* is not at all a bad book. It reads fairly well, the background is interesting, the characters are generally full-fleshed. It is at least competent, probably better than 80% of the fantasy in print, and is *not* without flaws. Large ones.

The structure of the book is cumbersome. Thomas Covenant, a leper, is walking down your everyday, typical street when he is struck by a speeding police car and transported *elsewhere*. This is a capital-letters-and-all, bona-fide CLICHE. Sf and fantasy readers, at least, don't *need* this rationalization, this hedging about the reality of the Land. It smacks of something a non-fantasy writer would do if he were trying to write fantasy -- an excuse he could use -- pointing to it and saying "but this isn't *fantasy*, just a literary device." It simply demonstrates his own lack of belief in his creation. Admittedly, in *LFB* this serves a larger purpose: it gets a leper into the Land replete with his neuroses -- and this leads to a second and graver problem, albeit subjective.

Covenant isn't real. And armed with that subjectivity, why not? Covenant's leprosy is a superficial patina over the book. He rages about his leprosy, and it provides the largest portion of his ego, but it never sounds convincing. Think of it: if the Land is reality and not a dream, then his leprosy is a thing of the past, cured by the hurtloam, and he is restored. If the Land isn't real, but simply a coma-dream resulting from his accident, then why not simply relax and enjoy the artificial and temporary surcease? Either way, Covenant is in a good position. His ranting, his anger, his frustrations and confusions rapidly become boring and tiring. And the leprosy is an unnecessary device. There are other ways to lose two fingers, there are other reasons for skepticism. Thomas Covenant simply never convinced this reader of his three-dimensionality. He appeared to be cardboard in search of an ego. This is not good in a protagonist.

The characters around Thomas Covenant seemed far more interesting.

There is much good in this book. As was mentioned earlier, the writing is more than competent, the background well-detailed and self-consistent, the characters seem interesting and with defined personalities (though there are perhaps too many of them, too sketchily drawn -- this might be rectified in later books), and the story line, with a few exceptions, is well-enough plotted to sustain interest. It is a *good* read, a worthwhile read.

It's simply not award quality.

-- Lee Stevens





*Star of the Unborn*, Franz Werfel, Bantam, 1976, \$1.95

Few authors have considered the human prospect one hundred centuries hence. Franz Werfel, however, did write at some length and provided us with a truly original glimpse into the future of mankind, while etching an acid portrait of human foibles. The author of this double edged sword of inquiry was perhaps best known as the man who married Gustav Mahler's widow, and writer of the sentimental best seller, *The Song of Bernadette*. Yet in this work, published originally in 1946, he abandoned any maudlin trappings to evoke the bold shapes of a new culture.

Franz Werfel did not bother explaining technological aspects of this new world; this may disappoint those readers whose chief criterion for speculative fiction include a grounding in theoretical physics. Werfel has a number of tantalizing devices throughout the book, but shrugs his shoulders at any mechanical analysis in favor of a discussion of their social impact. Instead, he bases his premise on human nature and its reaction in a given cultural situation.

Werfel's assumptions about human nature were probably colored by his life in wartime Germany. This work fits among others of the negative utopian genre through this century. Yet the sweep of his vision and ability to avoid cliché remains matched only by Eugene Zamiatin's *We*. *Star of the Unborn* suggests man's piggish nature, but does not weep and rend its clothing like so many other novels. Werfel asserts that man is not beyond losing his humanity, but the struggle will be a close one.

This novel should be taken in small doses, preferably before bedtime or on a lazy summers afternoon: not because of the pace, but because of the prose style. The work is constructed as a tongue-in-cheek traveler's account, although it lacks the concise and vitriolic qualities that characterize Swift's famous travelogue. Werfel employs florid but effective descriptions of characters and surroundings in a manner reminiscent of Dickens; this use of nineteenth century locquacity enhances a sense of chronological dislocation throughout the story. But persistence will pay off. The final view will be worth any occasional strain.

Essentially, Werfel as narrator awakens in the quite distant future. He has been summoned by psychic forces and he materializes in the bridal chambers as a wedding gift to a young couple. An unusual present to be sure, even at that advanced date. To his dismay, he finds himself

dressed in the same clothes he was burried in: a frayed, tattered and somewhat oversized tuxedo. Nonetheless, he is introduced to the best society this new world has to offer and shown the fruits of 100,000 years progress.

Werfel takes a detailed look at all aspects of life from religion to sex. It has become the best of all possible worlds, both materially and spiritually, uniting politics and religion in the state. Any brief summary cannot do justice to Werfel's imagination, but his vision remains unmatched by most major works about the future. I found his discussion of death and its treatment in this new society the most absorbing, original, relevant and best written section of the book. Here he debates whether one ought to face death complacently or struggle through the end in the face of the inevitable; among the questions he faces are those about institutional responses to death, sanctioned by a fictional society, but alarmingly close to our own. To appreciate the full impact of his arguments and presentation, wait for the topic to arise in the book rather than jumping ahead and reading in fragments as some readers are wont to do.

The closest approach to cliché throughout the book is Werfel's discussion of politics; underlying the social structure is a tension between rebels, who want to revert to "natural living", and the comfortable establishment majority. Such a theme was developed in Huxley's *Brave New World* and in Werfel's book the rebels are accorded the same romantic status. The conflict is not quite the barbarians versus the decadent civilization, but almost. Final confrontation brings down the glittering magnificence of the future in a crash of Wagnerian overstatement; the work of a hundred centuries is exposed as a fragile compromise of human dignity and technology that must give way to certain "basic" values.

Nonetheless, the resolution of the conflict and the tone of the book remains far less self-righteous than either Orwell's *1984* or Huxley's *Brave New World*. *Star of the Unborn* deserves the popularity usually accorded other less original works of speculative fiction and fantasy. For enjoyable summertime reading, and a welcome addition to the library of any thoughtful individual, I heartily endorse *Star of the Unborn*.

-- Tristan



