

God Bless America, Except for Parts of Cincinnati  
by Robert Devereaux

Brian Keene, bless his cotton-pickin' soul on up to the Empyrean and back again, has granted me the chance to set the record straight, or at least to uncrookedize it in a direction more congruent with truth, about Santa Steps Out: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups and certain events that transpired oh about a year ago in middle America.

For those of you out there sayin', "Wazzat, Santa who?", I should p'raps explain that I'm referring to my recounting of what really truly happened betwixt and amongst Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny, and various mortals, imps, elves, and flying reindeer when their originally pagan natures, long pressed under, came bubblin' up through their out-o'-kilter whore-moans and moved this used-to-be-Pan Coke drinker to get it on with other than his wifey-poo woman, a sweet milk-n-cookies ol' lady knitter who got her own juices abubblin' over her husband's repeated infidelities. Good clean fun, that took ten years to see print, but finally did thanks to David Hartwell, Pat LoBrutto, Jason Bovberg, and Don D'Auria.

Well sir, there chanced to be this benighted bastard (to be fair to the good gent, because believe you me I could say much worse and still not come close to characterizing him accurately) who strolled his grocery cart full of beer, chips, pork rinds, freeze-dried cat-vomit, and other empty calories down the book aisle, spotted the cover of Santa Steps Out, and said to himself, "Oh boy, a nasty Christmas slice-'em-up, a bit o' the old knifeblade in-and-out, a bunch o' the bleedin' and sufferin', heh, heh, I'll buy it," and did so.

What was the man's name? Fokken McLyre, yep, that was it. So ol' McLyre, he takes my book home and reads it and gets all bunched up in his pea-brain, projecting the depths of his rotten soul onto it, or God knows what-all, and just generally freakin' out.

But he ain't content to do what most of us would do, which is to say ah shit oh well I blew five bucks, I guess I'll thumb more careful-like through the next damned horror novel I buy, and not worry so much about droolin' over the good ol' ultra-vi winkin' up at me from its pages, nor about maybe even poppin' my goddamn load in the grocery aisles at all that pain and sufferin' unrollin' past my eyes.

Nope, living in that hot-bed right-wing Christ-humpin' Bible-thumpin' burg of Sin-sin-nati-ratamatati, the city that loves to censor outré art (they tried it with a Mapplethorpe exhibit a few years back), he hightails it off to a trash tabloid show on WLWT. They ask McLyre what's in the book. Now Fokken

McLyre, he ain't content with being honest about the book's intentional transgressions, which is the least I expect from offended readers. Nope. This joker makes up shit. You can witness the frigmeister lying on the Internet, if you care to hunt it down. He answers, in so many words, oh my glory jesus, there's bestiality and child porn in it, just the worst sort of filth, and it's in the grocery store right near the children's book section where sweet young impressionables might pick it up and have their snot-nosed souls snatched clean out of Christ's arms over by the bagels and rutabagas.

Now my transgressive little tale, she ain't no angel, okay? But lemme tell you, the only bestiality in it is the Titania-Bottom sort between the Tooth Fairy, who used to be a savage ash nymph in the old Zeus-Hera days, and the Easter Bunny in one scene, and offstage with Rudolph the Red-Nosed . . . no wait, I had to rename him Lucifer and reshape him a little because Rudolph's still under copyright. These are fantastical fairy-like creatures, folks, not some farmer gettin' friendly with his sheep.

But what danders me up somethin' fierce (up-riled and goat-gotten's what I become at this) is even the notion that kids are portrayed as sex objects in Santa Steps Out, 'cause they ain't, no way, no how. Not even the most lustful of my characters, not even the used-to-be fawns and satyrs of Greek mythology, ever has such a thought, because the whole idea turns my stomach, as I'm sure it turns yours.

Does our big-city media outlet, entrusted by their community to speak truth in all things, verify this joker's delusional claims by, oh, I don't know, perhaps READING THE GODDAMN BOOK? That's not what WLWT does. Instead, they hook-line-and-sinker Fokken McLyre's every word and perform some ridiculous, McCarthyite "sting" operation, worthy of HUAC in its heyday, with a hidden camera, buy a copy of the book, then return and confront the manager of the store. The upshot is that Fokken McLyre and WLWT succeed in having Santa Steps Out pulled from the largest grocery chain in the nation (I'd call it censorship by intimidation, which practice you can read about in the third chapter of Sex, Sin, and Blasphemy by Marjorie Heins).

Well, I hopped and I fumed. I researched libel laws. I even wrote to Gerry Spence and Louis Sirkin, hero attorney and champion of our civil liberties at the Mapplethorpe farce, and spoke by phone to Sirkin and his team. They were ready to hop to it, "product disparagement" their approach. But I chose to walk away. Here's why: (1) Too much goddamned money for legal fees, which money I don't have; (2) too many other writing projects from which my energies would have been diverted for months or years; (3) the way the law works, if you're a novelist, you're a "public figure" and it's highly unlikely for such to win a libel suit; (4) media outlets, even irresponsible ones, have

special protection, as indeed they should, from libel lawsuits; (5) heh heh, Santa had already had a 70% sell-through at the grocery chain; and (6) the fallout was contained in silly SinSin and surrounding communities and did not, as I feared it might, end my professional connection with Leisure Books, which in fact has never been stronger than today.

As for Fokken McLyre? Well, those of you who are personally acquainted with me know how deeply religious this deeply religious fabulist is. My numerous aithe-agno buddies, and they know who they are, they be hellbound for sure. Despite my personal smugness when I contemplate the harps and clouds and the seventy times seven non-virgins awaitin' me in heaven, I have deep compassion in my heart for them friends o' mine, and I do hope they forgimmee for comin' at them, and comin' at them at horror conventions (they ain't called cons for nothin', those Satanist, hump-in-the-hallways, gossip-'bout-eds-and-authors, pump-up-the-ol'-ego gatherings), and for tryin' to save their sin-sick souls with out-loud-in-the-lobby readings direct from my interlinear gospel in the Koine Greek. My Jesuslord, he tell me, Robert, don't you be a-rantin' and a-rippin' new holes in po' boy Fokken McLyre in that tarnished burg in Ohio. Mr. McLyre, he just a blunt-brained piece o' work what knows no better. And since September what-was-that-date, oh yeah, Robert, your 54th birthday, it behooves you all, you human beans, to be kinder to each other, to forgive all the grief you visit upon one another, and jes' move the fuck on, mooin', lowin', bleatin', and baain' in my Father's name. That's what my Jesuslord he say to me.

So, Fokken, dear lad (if you don't mind the first name basis), your act, it needs cleanin' up, but I forgive you. WLWT, you too I forgive. We all got our grief quotients filled quite full at the moment, and they say that bein' positive boomerangs all that good shit back at you.

Now Christmas, she's fast approachin'. Maybe you be considering, on your gift list for your 'preciatively perverted friends--and perversion 'mongst consentin' adults be good and beyond good, tha's what Santa himself told me while he an' I worked on his confessions--maybe you be considering the Kama Sutra pillowcases from blowfish.com (either the lesbo etchings or the more traditional hetero couplings), or the Make Your Own Dildo kit just in at goodvibes.com (which I must confess to be myself thinking long and hard about, but the \$109 price tag keeps me a-thinkin' and not a-actin'). But I hope you'll also throw a fierce consumerist glance toward Santa Steps Out, which comes in the mass-market size for \$5.50 and has a spookin' good cover, a Hartwell intro, and my afterword 'bout how much of a hassle it was getting this transgressive mo-fo into print, and tryin' to 'magine what a ruckus it might cause among my more benighted brothers and sisters in Christ. If you got really special friends and forty bucks to blow on them (ah, but Jason

Bovberg tells me for a limited time only it's \$20 plus p&h), Dark Highway Press can still provide copies of the limited hardcover with Alan Clark's subliminally erotic illos all through this acid-free, stunningly-laid-out, signed and numbered edition at [now defunct website].

Well that about covers it. The justification and the pitch. It's been nice chattin' with y'all. Bless you, brothers and sisters. Go in peace. And have yourselves a very merry Christmas!