Minnesota Science Fiction Society, Inc.
Welcomes you to Minicon 35 April 21–23, 2000
Hilton Minneapolis & Towers, Minneapolis, MN

Writer Guest of Honor: Maureen F. McHugh Fan Guest of Honor: Lenny Bailes
Artist Guest of Honor: John Berkey Mark Time Presenters: Orson & David Ossman

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Credits

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Winnowing My Folly
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The Mark Time Awards
The Maureen McHugh Bibliography
Hucksters
Minicon Ground & Flight Crew

John Berkey
John Berkey
Charles Urbach
Glenn Tenhoff
Rachael Lininger
David Dyer-Bennet
Jeff Schalles

Minnesota Science Fiction Society
PO Box 8283
Lake Street Station
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Minicon events hotline: 612.824.5559

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Before Sputnik was launched, ushering in an era of space exploration resulting in some of the most incredible views imaginable, John Berkey began his career creating equally incredible views at Brown & Bigelow, producing over 500 calendar illustrations, mostly landscapes and historical scenes. In the decades following, he has become, arguably, the greatest delineator of spaceships and interstellar travel the science fiction field has ever seen. His paintings have graced hundreds of book and magazine covers.

John’s style is very recognizable; a loose painterly style, very impressionistic. His palette tends toward blues, with earth tones for good measure. His spaceships are not gleaming monsters but somewhat organic and sprawling; huge, imposing structures of many levels. They are in motion, not frozen in time, but still moving along the page. Blurred features, smoke and fire; tiny details when viewed from afar, small paint blobs when closely scrutinized.

John Berkey has been a tremendous inspiration to many of today’s top SF artists. Many, such as Vincent Di Fate, will acknowledge John as one of the true masters of Science Fiction illustration. In fact, he was awarded the Grand Master Award from the prestigious Spectrum series for 1999.

Many of you will recognize John Berkey for his work on Star Wars. He did posters, book covers, record album covers, as well as some of the pre-production designs for George Lucas. He has also done movie posters for The Towering Inferno, Orca and dozens of others. Most will quickly recognize his King Kong, the only good thing to come out of the 76’s remake. He is a member of the Society of Illustrators and has done their Call for Entries poster art. He did a painting for a children’s book on Santa Claus and the publishers were so excited by the work, they asked for one more. And one more. And still one more, until he had illustrated the whole book. And then there was Elvis.

John did the artwork for the stamp that some people call the last Elvis. Actually, his version was a younger, thinner, but definitely a Las Vegas style Elvis, in white jumpsuit. Ultimately, another artist’s version was chosen to be the US Postal Services Elvis tribute.

John has done some Santa Claus stamps as well as movie star stamps. He had one book collecting his work, Painted Space (Friedlander, 1991), now sadly out-of-print. His book covers include works by Isaac Asimov, Ben Bova, Philip K. Dick, Glen Cook and many more. He has done work for Omni, Science Fiction Age, Discover, National Geographic, TV Guide and The Plain Truth. In fact, he has done so many paintings for publication over the years, he has trouble remembering who he has worked for.

John is very quiet and unassuming; he is very easy to work with and a pleasure to know. If you see him around the convention, take a moment to tell him how much you’ve appreciated his work. This is his first convention as a Guest of Honor, so I hope you’ll make him and his wife Demi feel welcome.
Chicago will host the last Worldcon of the millennium, and we plan to make it very special indeed. Hundreds of panels, seminars, readings and discussion groups featuring outstanding authors, artists, editors, scientists and more. The galaxy’s largest exhibition of science fiction and fantasy art. Rare and exotic SF films and theatrical works. Exhibits featuring science, technology, literature and fandom. Unparalleled opportunities to meet your favorite science fiction and fantasy personalities. Whether your interests lie with Lovecraft or LeGuin, with videotapes or palimpsests, with horrors from the dawn of time or the latest Windows upgrade (or are those the same thing?), Chicon 2000 will be informative, intriguing and fun!

E-mail: chi2000@chicon.org
Web site: http://www.chicon.org/
Snail Mail: Chicon 2000 P.O. Box 642857 Chicago, Illinois 60664
European Contact: Martin Hoare, 4H Titlehurst Road, Reading RG1 7TT

GUESTS OF HONOR
Ben Bova, Author
Bob Eggleton, Artist
Jim Baen, Editor
Bob and Anne Passovoy, Fans
Harry Turtledove, Toastmaster

Join all of your fannish friends for the science fiction community’s annual reunion, the Worldcon!

by Lenny Bailes

Old Arnold Rammer’s Dead. No, no, no, he’s outside, looking in.

Not Timothy Leary, these days, but a hologram with attitude from the British Red Dwarf TV series. Sunday night in San Francisco is junk-“sci-fi” night on our public access TV station. If parades of marooned Space Rastas and aging Timelords flickered across my TV screen on any other night, I would probably still be blissfully unaware of them. But Sundays are a bit edgy. My Sunday afternoons are usually spent in composing cutting-edge technod computer product reviews. I spend hours searching for those profound revelations that will induce the Matrix (yet one more time) to dispatch cutout-scrip certificates to my mailbox.

What I really do on Sunday afternoons is pass a lot of water. The reviews are written by psychoactive coffee beans dissolved in my Cafe Americanos, Lattes, and Cappuccinos. And I find it difficult to wind down after the coffee beans have possessed my fingers to channel the requisite spirit messages from cyber-Loa.

When the subject of “Chicken Vindaloo” dinner came up at this year’s Corflu in Chicago, I made an interesting discovery: if you put four fans together in a hotel room, you will never all have watched the same cyber-Loa.

Chicago will host the last Worldcon of the millennium, and we plan to make it very special indeed. Hundreds of panels, seminars, readings and discussion groups featuring outstanding authors, artists, editors, scientists and more. The galaxy’s largest exhibition of science fiction and fantasy art. Rare and exotic SF films and theatrical works. Exhibits featuring science, technology, literature and fandom. Unparalleled opportunities to meet your favorite science fiction and fantasy personalities. Whether your interests lie with Lovecraft or LeGuin, with videotapes or palimpsests, with horrors from the dawn of time or the latest Windows upgrade (or are those the same thing?), Chicon 2000 will be informative, intriguing and fun!

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“Worldcon” and “World Science Fiction Convention” are registered service marks of the World Science Fiction Society, an unincorporated literary society.
didn’t have its own clubhouse. Instead, meet-
ings were held inside a city-owned concrete bunker at the Silverlake Playground in East Los Angeles. Collators of apa-l (the weekly Lasfs amateur press association) would con-
duct a mad caucus round a table in the back room. Mailings had to be stapled and distributed before custodians chased every-
one out of the building promptly at 10 p.m. In the front room, whacked-out parlia-
mentary debates would transpire—about things like the legality of suppressing the status
report of the Committee to Put Rubber Tips on Clubroom Chairs.
I discovered the following record of my
first in-person encounter with the Lasfs
recently, while burrowing through my fanzine
collection.
Recollective: You want to know what
really happens at lasfs meetings?
Your puzzlement is quite amusing, I con-
sess.
Lasfs are a zanier crew than you
could ever guess!
Front room chorus: We lasfs are a
zanier crew than you could ever
guess...

The “Halfworld” alias for L.A. fandom was
acquired in the 1940s as a reference to
Robert Heinlein’s story, “The Devil Makes
the Law,” published in Campbell’s Unknown
World. If you want to know why, just read
the story (renamed and reprinted as “Magic,
Inc.” in Del Rey’s Wattn and Magic, Inc.
paperback) and then go to a Lasfs meeting.
If Bruce Pelz were attending this year’s
Minicon (alas, Gert tells me he’ll be sailing
on the Suez Canal, instead), he might tell you
that my song seems to scan a bit better to Sir
Roderick’s Ruddigore declaration than it did
back in 1965. I’ve changed a couple of syllas-
bles in response to his original complaint.
Bruce was a W.S. Gilbert-like co-conspirator
for me during my first couple of years at
UCLA. “There is only composition and de-
composition in this world—and this is it!”
Bruce and I would typically eat lunch togeth-
er and scribble some kind of frivolous fan-
nish nonsense every day.

The Devil makes the law, the Devil makes
the law. Turn on the stereo, the Devil
makes the law!

So. I was talking about constantly being
haunted by doggerel like this—waiting for
buses, riding trains, and (especially when I
was young and newly employed) while per-
forming dull, repetitive clerk-type tasks. But
my universe of Jungian musical
cetyarched experiences when I discovered folk
music and rock-and-roll. It took the “folk-
rock” movement of the ‘60s to open a few
blocked neural sinuses. “Folk-rock” was a
media/marketing term for the
merging of intricate lyrics with
catchy danceable tunes. Its exem-
ples were the songs of the
Byrds, Fairport Convention,
and ur-source Bob Dylan.
The ‘60s were a Big Deal
to me, as the decade of
one’s late teens and early twenties is to everyone.
But I believe there was
also something definite-
ly new in the external
world—a compact that
created a safe place for
high-strung, cerebral geeks (like me) to explore our
animal natures as well as
our capacities for
quick wit.

Premiering at Minicon
The Wrong World by Margaret Howes
Fleeting from his home world, young Tadko
Darusko arrives on the planet Monna
searching for his only living relative, his father.
But his father is away on a
journey, and Tadko is stranded on Monna with
no friends, no means of support, and
no identity papers. Evading the authorities, Tadko
must find a way to survive
until his father’s return, hoping that his father
can intervene in his case.

Margaret Howes’s novel reminds me of
the science fiction I read as a high
school student in the 1950s. It has old-fashioned
sense of wonder: a vision of
a future that is bigger and better than the present. If you think something’s been
missing from science fiction in recent decades, try The Wrong World. And if you
think recent science fiction has been just fine, try it anyway. —Eleanor Aronson

Margaret Howes is a storyteller of subtle grace. The plot chugs along in a
lessingly way that belies its effortless power—and the wonderfully bottomless ability of Margaret Howes to invent
detail. No “fate of the universe
at stake!” hence, only one young man trying to stay free long enough to ask his
father one question. This is good science fiction, and good story telling, and
a memorable ride. —Mary Monica Pulver (a.k.a. Monica Ferris)

For sale at the FTL Publications table.
Also available through amazon.com
Read the first chapter at:
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/hompages/FTL_Publications

By the time some of you got a chance
to meet this experience, it was probably
well into its gold-plated dotage and a good
deal less attractive and mysterious. As
for what it felt like, I can offer you an ana-
log. (In fact, I did offer this analogy to
Lydia Nickerson, two years ago, on
the rec.arts.sf.fandom(newsgroup):)

Imagine what it would be like if every
day in your life was a permanent Minicon.
Your apartment and town are like your room
and the Radisson. You get up in the morning
to get stuff for breakfast and pass a bunch of
people in day-glo tee-shirts on the “street.”
As you hunt for an open shop to pick up
eggs and coffee for the people crashed in
your “room,” you notice all the new posters
that have materialized overnight. Most of the
“stores” are run by hotel staff, but an
increasing pocket of shops is manned by
“convention attendees.” On your way
“home,” someone you don’t know names
and hands you a rose (or a potted plant, if
you’re a more ecological type).
It might be helpful to imagine this as a
Minicon year in which you aren’t on the
committee. Or the committee is an
anarchy that somehow hasn’t gotten on the
hotel’s nerves enough to be evicted.
So, after breakfast you do the sercon
stuff—go to the “program/classes.” But
there are hackey-sackers, people play-
ing guitars, handing out pamphlets,
wearing outrageous tee-shirts wherever
you go. And bemused “hotel staff” in
clothing are behind the
counters, at the desks,
giving about the daily
business of administer-
ing American civiliza-
tion and watching you
play. You feel safe and
comfortable—if someone
falls down or cries
“help!” pretty soon
an ops-like long-
haired person mate-
ning to assume the role
of “ops-like person.”
Sometimes contemporary America seems to me like the last stages of a giant game of Parker Bros. Monopoly. All the rents have been multiplied by hotels on the lots. Creative artisans throw the dice and circle the board—until eventually most people toss in their property deeds to become employees for a few Rich Uncles. (This isn’t an original metaphor. But in Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel The Game-Players of Titan, the landlords with all the Property Deeds were shapeshifting aliens from Saturn’s moon, rather than Terrestrial pan-global corporations.)

To young dot.com executives with stock options, things probably seem more like the opening phase of the Monopoly game than the final round. After years of telling Gen-Xers that their destiny in American life is to take low-paying jobs and produce/listen to grunge music on the weekends, economic mobility in our society has begun to shift. Dramatically. But I’m still worried. Maybe just by reflexive Boomer fears that I’ll soon be replaced by something smarter and more adaptive than I am.

But what I think I’m worried about is a relentless drive for independent innovators in niche markets to be acquired by Owners who don’t want to cater to those niche markets.

We had a community of creative underground radio stations weren’t profitable enough for national advertisers. From 1980 to the penultimate millennial year, thirty-five independent, single-screen theaters in the city of San Francisco have been replaced by four multi-screen movie palaces owned and operated by media conglomerates. Mr. Celluloid Film Strip is seen now, slurring his Coke and shrugging his shoulders on almost every screen in town. The Internet is still largely an open, free-form anarchy where any artist can post an animated comic book, stream a concert, or start a radio station. But this fact has been covered with a vengeance by media moguls. And we know what corporate entities like to do to artists and alternative communities.

This may simply be the Way of the World and pretty old news. But maybe we’re about to hit some logarithmic threshold (“singularity” is a term that Vernor Vinge uses). We non-millionaires may find that our quality-of-life issues as citizens have been replaced by quality-of-life issues for conglomerates. For the conglomerates, our issues as individuals may reduce to the need for our maintenance and our entertainment—as consumers and employees rather than as citizens.

What this suggests to me in less dramatic terms is that “God is in the details” (as visionary Ted Nelson wrote in his prophetic Information Age screed, Computer Lib/ Dream Machines). As a writer and teacher I sometimes find myself engaged in a battle to preserve the details and the spirit of my work. “That’s too geeky! No one will want to do this anymore.” But you remember the time when life was like a bazaar—organized by the amorphous, interchangeable “Committee.” Who were they? Were you a member? Oh, to find them again and banish them put on another “convention.”

Next topic: You never turned around to see the frowns on the jugglers and the clowns when they all did tricks for you.
The Ubiquitous Unreliable Narrator

By Maureen F. McHugh

I've been thinking a lot about point of view (POV) and the unreliable narrator. It's a pretty complex thing to be thinking about, which means it has about all the conversational buzz of an engineer discussing chrome plating techniques or the difference between ABS and glass-filled ABS plastic. But imagine this were a trade journal, which it is. And I were a trade journalist, which I'm not.

In some sense all narrators are unreliable.

The classic unreliable narrator is someone like Nick in The Great Gatsby, whose hero worship blinds him to things about Gatsby that the reader can see. An unreliable narrator has to report things that tell the reader information that the narrator doesn't deduce. A bad unreliable narrator is stupid. A bad unreliable narrator figures things out a long time after the reader does for no other reason than if the narrator figures out that the weird guy who lives upstairs, never talks to anybody, keeps a large gun and knife collection, and always pays his rent in small unmarked bills is the one who is killing all the coeds, there will be no story. The only time a narrator should be stupid is if the narrator is someone like Benjy from Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, who really is stupid—Benjy is retarded and is institutionalized in the course of the book—his narrative is without understanding. It's also difficult on the reader, who must sort out what is important to the story from what is important to Benjy. (It took me forever to figure out that he was watching two men play golf.) A bad unreliable narrator is unbelievable because the reader can't understand why the narrator hasn't figured out what the reader has.

A good unreliable narrator is a fine piece of work. The narrator must be presented to the reader as someone who is working out of the context of their own personality, and who misses things that the reader can pick up because of the narrator's naivete, or prejudice, or judgment. Like Huck Finn, who doesn't realize that the two guys that he and Jim are traveling with are con men because he is a child and has never seen a con, but his description of them is sufficient for the reader to realize. There's a tension created with an unreliable narrator—they are unaware of something important that the reader is aware of. Will it get them in trouble?

Every book has a narrator. In first person books, the narrator is the I of the book. "Call me Ishmael," and Ishmael goes on to narrate Moby Dick. David Copperfield narrates David Copperfield. But there's a narrator in third person books too. The more limited the pov the harder it is to pick out the narrator. But even in a third person limited pov where the story reports only what the characters see and think and feel and experience, someone is selecting those experiences, and the cumulative selections suggest a personality at work, a narrator. This gives the book a certain tone, a certain voice.

All narrators are in some sense unreliable because as writers we are all fallible. A book is going to reveal the unconscious assumptions about culture and ethics of the writer. When I write, the things I assume and the way I see the world are going to stand revealed in ways that I don't anticipate or intend and in the end, I think this is one of the values of fiction. All these voices of authors, talking back and forth across the pages and now, the bits and bytes, and trying to say, this is what the world is. We are all blind. We are all trying to describe the elephant.

More of Maureen F. McHugh's essays, and other information about her and her work, are available at http://www.en.com/users/mcq
My nine-year-old stepson Adam and I were coming home from Kung Fu. “Maureen,” Adam said—he calls me ‘Maureen’ because he was seven when Bob and I got married and that was what he had called me before. “Maureen,” Adam said, “are we going to have a Christmas tree?”

“Yes,” I said, “of course.” After thinking a moment. “Adam, why didn’t you think we were going to have a Christmas tree?”

“Because of the new house,” he said, rather matter-of-fact. “I thought you might not let us.”

It is strange to find that you have become the kind of person who might ban Christmas Trees.

We joke about me being the evil stepmother. In fact, the joke is that I am the Nazi Evil Stepmother From Hell. It dispels tension to say it out loud. Actually, Adam and I do pretty good together. But the truth is that all stepmothers are evil. It is the nature of the relationship. It is, as far as I can tell, an unavoidable facet of step relationships.

We enter into all major relationships with no real clue of where we are going; marriage, birth, friendship. We carry maps we believe are true; our parent’s relationship, what it says in the baby book, the landscape of our own childhood. These maps are approximate at best, dangerously misleading at worst.

Dysfunctional families breed dysfunctional families. Abuse is handed down from generation to generation. That it’s all the stuff of Twelve Step programs and talk shows doesn’t make it any less true or any less profound.

The map of stepparenting is one of the worst, because it is based on a lie. The lie is that you will be Mom or you will be Dad. If you’ve got custody of the child, you’re going to raise it. You’ll be there, or you won’t. Either I mother Adam and pack his lunches, go over his homework with him, drive him to and from Boy Scouts, and tell him to eat his carrots, or I’m neglecting him. After all, Adam needs to eat his carrots. He needs to be told to get his shoes on, it’s time for the bus. He needs to be told not to say “shit” in front of his grandmother and his teachers.

But he already has a mother, and I’m not his mother, and no matter how deserving or undeserving she is or I am, I never will be. He knows it, I know it. Stepmothers don’t represent good things for children. When I married Adam’s father it meant that Adam could not have his father and mother back together without somehow getting me out of the picture. It meant that he would have to accept a stranger who he didn’t know and maybe wouldn’t really like into his home. It meant he was nearly powerless. It doesn’t really matter that Adam’s father and mother weren’t going to get back together, because Adam wanted to see his mom, and he wanted to be with his dad, and the way that it was easiest for him to get both those things was for his parents to be together.

It’s something most stepparents aren’t prepared for because children often court the future stepparent. You’re dating, and it’s exciting. Adam was excited that his father was going to marry me. He wanted us to do things together. But a week before the wedding, he also wanted to know if his mother and father could get back together. It wasn’t that he didn’t understand that the two things were mutually exclusive, it was more that they were unrelated for him. When I came over I was company, it was fun. But real life was Mom and Dad.

More Evil on the Next Page
The Mark Time Awards

By Jerry Stearns

The winners of the fourth annual Mark Time Awards this year at Minicon come from very near and very far. We are pleased to be able to present these awards for the best science fiction and fantasy audio productions of the year.

The Gold Mark Time goes to “407 Arachne,” a hard science story in classic style. Three astronauts returning from a six-month expedition to Mars make amazing discoveries and must struggle to survive in space. The judges especially liked the rich and believable soundscape design. Written by Canadian Brian d’Eon, the program was produced in Minneapolis for the SoundStories: Audio Theater Company by Jerry Stearns, and directed by Jennifer Arave. For more information see <http://www.mtn.org/~jstearns/ss/arachne.html>.

The Silver Mark Time goes to “Time Out For Bill Lizard,” which was first broadcast last year on Irish National Radio. The work was written and produced by Roger Gregg, an American living in Dublin, Ireland. He also performed all the voices. In this first adventure of a proposed series, Bill Lizard encounters a strange mobile phone that randomly plunges Lizard into parallel worlds each time it rings. The judges were impressed with the high energy of the performances and the production.

Minicon is also pleased to present the second annual Ogle Award for the best fantasy/horror audio production of the year. The award is named after Charles Ogle, who produced “Beyond the Minicon Bridge.” The Ogle award is named after Charles Ogle, who produced “Beyond the Minicon Bridge.”

The Gold Ogle is given this year to “To Back To Frankenstein”, produced for the student radio station at the University of California at Davis. Les Light is the writer and producer of this lighthearted story of a college student who borrows a time machine to go back and talk to Mary Shelley about her book “Frankenstein” in order to do a book report for her classes. She meets not only the author, but also Dr. Frankenstein and the monster. It is a fast-moving and ambitious production.

And finally, Minicon is very proud to present the third Grand Master Award for lifetime contribution to SF&F audio to Yuri Rasovsky. Yuri has done dozens of science fiction and fantasy works in his 30 years producing audio drama. The first one I heard was an adaptation of Heinlein’s “By His Bootstraps” done in 1984 with Richard Dryfus as nearly everybody. In 1999 he released a very scary production of “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.” Currently Mr. Rasovsky is producing “Beyond 2000,” an anthology series of 26 hour-long classic SF stories for NPR. You can see more about the series at <http://www.npr.org/future.html>. Congratulations to these winners and thanks to all those who entered their work. We encourage all Minicon attendees to listen to science fiction and fantasy audio theater—a medium where almost everything is left to the imagination.

Evil is Here

Marriage stopped that. That is the first evil thing I did.

The second evil thing that stepparents do is take part of a parent away. Imagine this, you’re married, and your spouse suddenly decides to bring someone else into the household, without asking you. You’re forced to accommodate. Your spouse pays attention to the Other, and while they are paying attention to you, imagine the Other was able to make rules. In marriages it’s called bigamy, and it’s illegal.

What’s worse for the child is that they have already lost most of one parent. Now someone else is laying claim on the remaining parent. The weapons of the stepchild are the weapons of the apparently powerless, the weapons of the guerilla. Subterfuge, Sado- tage. The artless report of the hurtful things his real mother said about you. Disliking the way you set the table, not wanting you to move the furniture. And stepchildren—even
A NEW ODYSSEY BEGINS

From ARTHUR C. CLARKE, the brilliant mind that brought you 2001: A Space Odyssey, and STEPHEN BAXTER, the top British science fiction writer of the decade, comes a novel of a time, not so far in the future, when the walls of time and distance have suddenly turned to glass.

PRAISE FOR ARTHUR C. CLARKE

“One of the most astounding imaginations ever encountered in print.”
—The New York Times

“Arthur C. Clarke is one of the truly prophetic figures of the space age . . . THE COLOSSUS OF SCIENCE FICTION.”
—The New Yorker

“Clarke’s agile imagination stretches our notions of how things can be, should be, and might be.”
—Roger Elbert

PRAISE FOR STEPHEN BAXTER

“ARTHUR C. CLARKE, ISAAC ASIMOV, ROBERT HEINLEIN . . . now STEPHEN BAXTER joins their exclusive ranks.”
—New Scientist

“Baxter will be one of the major science-fiction writers of the turn of the century.”
—The New York Review of Science Fiction

Even More Evil

more than children in non-step relationships—are hyperalert to division between parent and stepparent.

I was thirty-three when I married. I had no children of my own and never wanted any. I’m a book person, so before I got mar-
ried I went out and bought books about being a stepmother. I asked that we all do some family counseling before and during the time we were getting married. The books painted a dismal picture. Women got de-
pressed. Women felt like maids. Women got sick. There were lots of rules—the child needs to spend some time alone with their natural parent and some time alone with their stepparent in a sort of round robin of quality time; a stepmother should have some-
thing of her own that gives her a feeling of her own identity; don’t move into their house, start a new house together if you pos-
sibly can.

I liked that there were rules so I followed them and they helped a lot (even though I suspect that, like theories of child raising, our theories of step relationships are a fad and the advice in the books will all be different fifty years from now). But I was still evil, and that was the most disheartening thing of all. I felt trapped in role not of my own choosing. Becoming a stepmother redefined who I am, and nothing I did could resist that inexorable redefine-
tion. I suppose motherhood redefines who you are, too. Part of the redefinition of me has just been that—sitting on the bench with the row of anxious mothers at the little league game or at martial arts. Going to school and being Adam’s mother. Being Adam’s Mom. It has made me suddenly feel middle-aged in funny ways. I used to go through the grocery line and buy funky things like endive, a dozen doughnuts, a bot-
tle of champagne and two tuna steaks. Now I buy carts full of cereal and hamburger and juice box-
es. I used to buy over-
priced jackets and expensive suits. Now I go to Sears and buy four sweat-
shirts and two packages of socks in the boys department. When I bought endive

and champagne, the checkout clerk used to ask me what I was making. But no one asks you what you are making when you buy cereal and hamburger.

Beyond all this loomed the specter of Adam at sixteen. The rebellious teenage boy from the broken home, talking about the house, always in trouble, always resentful. Like many stepchildren, Adam came with an enormous amount of behavioral baggage. He acted out the tensions of his extended family. He was sullen, tearful, resentful of me and equally resentful of his mother. I knew that Adam was the victim in all this, but when you’re up to your ass in alligators, it is hard to remember that your original intention is to drain the swamp. I had read that I would be resentful, but nothing prepared me for a mar-
riage that was about this alien child. I didn’t marry Adam, he didn’t marry me, and yet that is what my marriage came down to. By the time Adam was dealt with, my husband and I were too exhausted to be married.

My relationship with Adam was good, better than the relationships described in all those books. He was a happier, healthier, more behaved child than he was when I mar-
rried Bob—after all, it is easier to parent when there are two of you. People compli-
mented me on what a fine job I had done. I was the only one who suspected that there was a coldness in the center of our relation-
ship that Adam and I felt. I could console myself that he was better off than he was before I married Bob, and he was. But I knew that something was a lie.

One day Adam said angrily that I treated the dog better than I treated him. Of course, I liked the dog, the dog adored me, and Adam, well Adam and I had something of a truce. The kind of relationship a child would have with an adult who might hang Christmas trees from the house. So the accusation struck home.

I started to deal with my stepson the way I deal with my dog. Quite literally. A boy and a stepmother have a strange tension in a physical relationship. I hug Adam and I kiss him on the forehead, on the nose, anywhere but on the mouth. I am careful about how I touch him. I suspect that the call from Child Protective Services is the nightmare of every stepparent. But after that comment I began to ruffle his hair the way I ruffle the dog’s ears. I rubbed Adam’s back. I petted him. I occasionally gave Adam a treat, the way I occasionally give the dog one. At first it was

Still More Evil on Page 18
all calculated, but within a very short time, it
was natural to reassure Adam.
It has made all the difference.
Adam is almost twelve, and the specter of
delinquent teenager in the dysfunctional fam-
dily still haunts me, but it doesn’t seem so like-
ly at the moment. As Adam grows older, my
husband and I have more time to be married.

Speaking from the land of the stepparent,
I tell you, this business of being evil is hard.
It is very hard. Being a stepparent is the
hardest thing I have ever done. And what
rewards there are, are small. No one pats me
on the head for having given up the pleasures
of endive and champagne and tuna steaks
for spaghetti sauce and hamburger. That’s
what mothers do. Except, of course, they get
to be the mom.

The End of Evil

The Maureen F. McHugh Bibliography

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Maureen F. McHugh’s Web Page
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