

■ Book review

Poor plot makes this zany book fit for the litterbox

Even randomly placed absurdities won't save the reader from the boredom supplied by author Willits

BY RYAN MURPHEY
PULSE REPORTER

Cat people and fans of Shakespeare now have something to bring them together: a common hatred of

Malcolm Willits and his literary abomination "Shakespeare's Cat." Once in a while, a book comes along that is so incredibly bad that reading it can cause both intense

physical pain and uncontrollable vomiting. I wished that I was reading one of those by the end of this book. It is written in the form of a play, but after looking at the completely impractical (and absurdly lengthy) stage directions, it is safe to assume that it's more of a satire, without the wit.

The story begins in Eureka, Calif., where a fictional woman named Amelia Carson was said to have built what is known as the Gingerbread Mansion. (The building actually exists but was built by a Norwegian immigrant, Doctor Hogan Ring, and in Ferndale, Calif., not Eureka.) Carson, a wealthy widow, dies and leaves all her earthly possessions to her many cats, some of who are apparently enlisted in a military force that pressed northward to vanquish Oregonians. Captain Lacroix, the leader of the feline army, recounts his victories against the "Grant's Pass cavemen," "Medford malcontents," "predatory Coos Bay pirates," and other Oregonians, in an attempt to woo Carson's pampered feline, Colette. The University even gets a mention when the Captain brags of crossing the Rouge River "to rid the land of heresies emanating from Eugene's seditious University."

Shortly afterward, a mob of humans, apparently angered by the fact that Carson's wealth was left to the



COURTESY

Malcom Willits' new book is a pitiful attempt at satire.

cats, ransacks the mansion. The military cats meet the advance and Captain Lacroix dies, not to be mentioned again until a very random ghost-wedding occurs with no relevance to anything else in the book. Colette then meets up with a cavorting tomcat, imaginatively named "Tomcat," who informs her that Shakespeare's plays were written by his cat, who lived on in obscurity after his master died.

The kidnapped cats are rescued from an underground lighthouse

guarded by Japanese military cats who think that World War II is still happening, only to be kidnapped again almost immediately. Colette and her companions decide that in order to save their companions, they must have Carson's last will and testament annulled by the governor of California, who is going to leave for the moon at any minute. For some unexplained reason, the cats have to travel through time to England and receive an unknown play from Shakespeare's cat in order to fool the governor into signing the annulment. While traveling through the dimensional portal, they stop to have a picnic and Colette is confronted by "The Dark One," who, like most of the other characters in this pile of literary dung, has no context or relevance whatsoever. After his brief appearance, he is never mentioned again.

If you think this plot summary doesn't make sense, you should read the book. Obnoxiously random and extremely boring, "Shakespeare's Cat" reminded me of a high-school-aged hippie trying to fake an acid trip. The only people who are unquestionably on drugs are the publishers who decided to sink money into this garbage.

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IN BRIEF

**Spirit of Guthrie Tour
in correlation with
voter turnout**

The Spirit of Guthrie Tour is coming to Eugene on Friday, Oct. 15 at the WOW Hall, featuring Leftover Salmon lead singer Vince Herman, award-winning bassist and member of RatDog Rob Wasserman and singer/songwriter Jim Page. The three musicians will all perform solo, as duets and as a trio, with newly composed songs inspired by and featuring the unpublished

works of the late folk singer Woody Guthrie, famous for penning folk songs such as "This Land Is Your Land." Recently discovered poems and notebooks of Guthrie's inspired the musicians to go on tour together for the first time. New music by Herman, Wasserman and Page will be featured as well.

This collaboration has been touring across the West Coast, and will make stops in Bend, Portland and Eugene, before heading north to Seattle and finishing in Colorado.

The Spirit of Guthrie Tour is presented in correlation with HeadCount, a nonprofit organization

dedicated to encouraging voter registration and turnout. HeadCount is aligned with many top-name performers including Phish and Dave Matthews Band.

Wasserman is also working on an album of unreleased Guthrie lyrics and writing with musicians such as Ani DiFranco, DJ Logic, Lou Reed, Studs Terkel and others to be released in spring 2005.

Tickets for The Spirit of Guthrie Tour are \$12 in advance and can be purchased at the University ticket office in the EMU.

— Amy Lichty

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