

AN INTERVIEW WITH
HORACE BALLANTINE

by Doug Skinner



A BLACK SCAT PEEK-A-BOOK

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Q: It's good to talk with you, Mr. Ballantine.
A: My pleasure.
Q: Can you hear me okay?
A: Sounds like a good connection.
Q: Well, let's begin with the basics.
A: All right.
Q: When did you get started?
A: I did some freelance work in the '50s, but my big break came in '63, with "Chuckles Fahrenheit."
Q: What was that, a band?
A: A band? No, my comic strip, "Chuckles Fahrenheit." Didn't you read up on me?
Q: Of course not. If I knew all about you, there'd be no point in an interview.
A: You never saw "Chuckles Fahrenheit"?
Q: Nope. And you said it was what?
A: A comic strip.
Q: What's that?
A: Don't tell me you never saw a comic strip!
Q: Sorry.
A: Well, it's a series of drawings that tells a story.
Q: What did you do, put them on a wall or something?
A: No, it ran in newspapers.
Q: So it covered news stories in picture form? Was that it?
A: No, it was fictional.
Q: Didn't that get the paper into trouble? You're not supposed to just make stuff up.
A: It was a comic strip! I can't believe you've never seen a comic strip.
Q: Sorry.
A: It's a series of drawings, with characters that act out a story.
Q: Like mime?
A: No, there's dialogue.
Q: So you alternate pictures and words?
A: No, there are word balloons, coming out of the characters' mouths.
Q: But you can't talk if there's a balloon coming out of your mouth. You have to keep your mouth closed to hold the string.
A: They're not really balloons, they're circles or

ovals next to the character.

Q: Why do they call them balloons, then?
A: They look like balloons.
Q: To you, maybe.
A: That's what they're called.
Q: But you couldn't support yourself with something like that. What did you do to pay the rent?
A: I made a lot of money with the strip. And there was merchandise, too: books, games, dolls.
Q: Who'd want a doll with a balloon coming out of its mouth?
A: The dolls didn't have balloons.
Q: Did they have recordings in them or something?
A: No, they were just dolls of the characters.
Q: But you said there was dialogue.
A: Not for the dolls.
Q: Why did you have it in the drawings, then?
A: The strips told a story. The dolls were toys, for children to play with, and make up their own stories, their own dialogue.
Q: Less work for you, I guess.
A: It was just children playing.
Q: Did you pay them if you used their material?
A: I didn't use their material.
Q: Where did you get your stories, then?
A: I wrote them myself.
Q: By playing with dolls?
A: Of course not! I just wrote them with a pencil.
Q: Couldn't the kids do that?
A: Maybe they did, when they weren't playing with dolls.
Q: A pencil is a lot cheaper than a doll.
A: I wasn't in the pencil business.
Q: I guess not. Didn't parents complain?
A: No! The dolls were just merchandise using the characters. We also had games, books, Halloween costumes.
Q: What are Halloween costumes?
A: Don't tell me you never heard of Halloween!
Q: Sorry.
A: Children dress up, and go door to door, and people give them candy.
Q: Was this the paper's idea?
A: No! It's an old tradition!
Q: I still don't see how you could support yourself with that. You must have had a day job.
A: I got money from licensing my characters for the costumes.
Q: So the idea was that kids would dress up like your characters, and bring you candy?

A: Oh, for Christ's sake.

Q: Why did they have to dress up like your characters?

A:

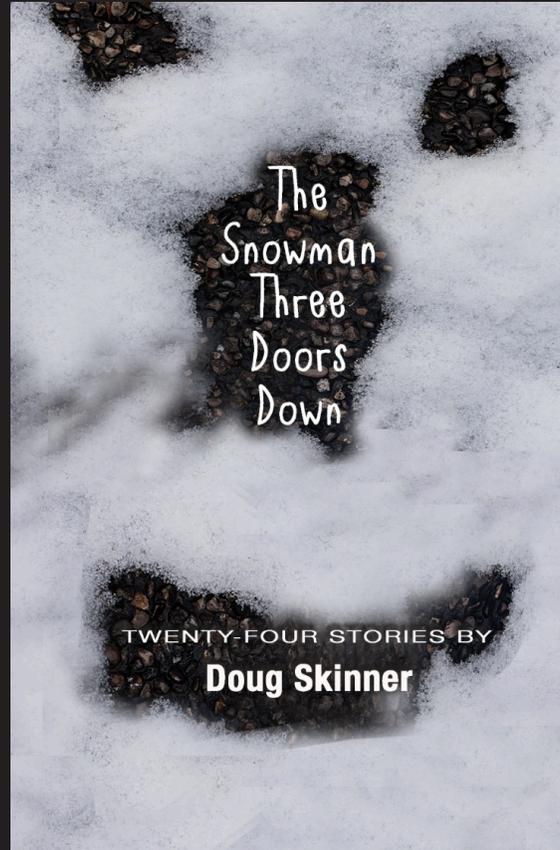
Q: Hello?

A:

Q: Hello?

A:

Q: I guess I hit a little too close to home.



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