

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Publications and Research

Borough of Manhattan Community College

---

2013

### The Birther Committee Inception: An Unreal Manhattan Real Estate Story

Marleen S. Barr

*CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/bm\\_pubs/36](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/bm_pubs/36)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

# **The Birther Committee Inception: An Unreal Manhattan Real Estate Story / Marleen S. Barr**

Even though I am Super Yenta, strange visitor from another planet with powers and abilities far greater than those of normal human yentas, the secret identity version of me still needs to live in an apartment. Super Yenta enjoys her vacation homes on the most pleasant Milky Way planets. Not so for Professor Claire Kentowitz, mild mannered feminist science fiction scholar who teaches English at a great Manhattan university. She resides in the most perilous apartment environment on Earth: the Fifth Avenue co-op building.

Coop Board President Gomorrah Horecock is more onerous than all the super villains imprisoned in the Phantom Zone. Even though I am able, for example, to bend steel in my bare hands, Gomorrah's real estate-centered adverse impact surpasses the totality of my superness. The building's Revolution Committee spent a year responding to her tyrannical regime. Its members proclaimed that all shareholders desiring to experience dictatorial repression could buy apartments in the considerably cheaper real estate market North Korea affords. Gomorrah, despite the Committee's efforts--and the term limits clause buried in one of the multiple versions of the Coop Bylaws-- reinstated herself as President for the thirteenth consecutive year. Rumor has it that she will crown herself President for life. Gomorrah is analogous to the kudzu vines growing in the women's starships James Tiptree describes in "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" That is to say, I wish that Gomorrah was a unique villain, but her kind is everywhere there is real estate or other edifices of power, no matter how large or small.

Despite extensive eradication attempts, by entangling herself around all that transpires in the building, Gomorrah and her ilk always manage relentlessly to cling to power. When the Revolution Committee called for more democracy and transparency, she replied in a way so unctuous yet dismissive my Super Yenta bullshit translator rendered it in the form of a quote from 1971 Ursula K. Le Guin story: "my vegetable love for totalitarianism should grow vaster than empires and more slow," she said.

Gomorrah, a tall voluptuous middle-aged winner of the 1973 Miss Garden City Pageant, is never far from her clone, a.k.a. her twin sister Sodom Horecock. Garden City materialism aside, Gomorrah and Sodom were never taught how to dress. President Horecock and her sister are incessantly clad in spike heels, crotch-length skirts, and cleavage skirting tank tops. Gomorrah focuses the totality of this sartorial scantiness at arousing Android Dracula, the Transylvanian Super whose work "uniform" consists of Polo Ralph Lauren golf shirts, khaki pants, and an ossifying cologne trail. Gomorrah, Sodom, and Android comprise an invincible building power block coterie.

Battling English Department politics by day and the most nefarious villains in the galaxy by night is no sweat. Not so for attempting to

thwart the Gomorrah/Sodom/Android Axis of Evil. Can achieving this objective be a job beyond the ability of Super Yenta? Can Super Moi do in the Super? Venturing to the basement provided an opportunity to use one of my myriad super powers to generate an answer. While walking five inches due north of the closed supply closet door, I turned on my x-ray vision and saw *them*: Gomorrah and Android, their gravity impacted upon pants and underpants straddling their ankles, were entwined in coital embrace while leaning against the vacuum cleaner, toilet paper rolls, and cleaning fluids. I finally had evidence. I grabbed my cell phone and snapped a picture of them engaged in their hot (I mean we're talkin' boiler room hot) compromising position. Unlike a cell phone, although I can do heat and x-ray vision, I lack an internal picture taking super power capacity. Like a non-super person, I had to open the door to snap their picture. Luckily, they were oblivious to the brief flash of my camera.

I emailed a note to the Board Communications Committee: Dear Ms. Leona Helmsley (Apartment 22S) and Mr. Donald Trump (Apartment 24F): Please know that I have garnered unimpeachable evidence to prove that President Horecock and Super Dracula were fornicating in the basement supply closet. This activity is certainly grounds for impeaching President Horecock. Even if Super Dracula is an incompetent, he is not an intern. Sincerely, Dr. Claire (Apartment 2T)

I received the following emailed response: Dear Shareholder. Thank you for contacting the Board Communications Committee . A Board member will get back to you shortly. Sincerely, Ms. Leona Helmsley (Apartment 22S) and Mr. Donald Trump (Apartment 24F)

President Horecock herself answered me: Dear Sweetie (or should I call you Dr. Claire?): Although I cannot understand how you discerned that I was fornicating with the Super in a closed supply closet, the fact that I did so is definitely not grounds for impeachment. The sex act was not publicly visible—with the unexplained exception of you, of course. I have the right to have private sex anywhere in the building. Cordially, Gomorrah Horecock, President

Curses. Foiled again. Gomorrah was right. I had to change my tactics. Enough already with my mild mannered Claire Kentowitz identity. I had to get tough. I had to unleash my full power—aided by a canine-like extraterrestrial friend. I entered my apartment, removed my ratty sweat pants and sweatshirt, donned my Super Yenta costume, perched myself on my terrace with its super to die for Empire State Building view and, with blurring warp factor speed, flew up to the S.S. E. G. B. H. P. (that is to say the Super Secret Extraterrestrial Good Buddy Hailer Phone) I had installed within the top of the Empire State Building antenna.

"Hello. Chewbacca.It's me. Super Yenta. I'm having Earthling problems—big time. Please, at your earliest convenience, hop in the Millenium Falcon and stop off at the Fifth Avenue coop apartment the secret identity version of me owns. P.S. Please anticipate having super difficulty finding a parking space for the Falcon on Fifth Avenue."

When the always loyal Chewbacca arrived at the lobby door, he had a close encounter with me, the doorman—and Gomorrah.

"Dr. Claire, as you are aware, the House Rules, which were written solely by me without any input from shareholders, explicitly prohibit you from bringing pets into the building," decreed Gomorrah.

"Chewbacca is absolutely not a pet. He is my friend."

"This this this *thing* is big. It is hairy. It is an animal. Animals are not allowed."

"I am a super English professor. I can wield illocutionary force—a power and ability which is beyond the range of most Americans. I can trap you within a word-made force field. I can use your own words against you. As far as I can tell, 'human' does not seem to apply to you—and I should know because it takes one to know one. I will give you the benefit of the doubt. I will assume that 'human' does denote you. Hence, as a human, you are an animal by definition. According to the House Rules you yourself authored, you are prohibited from residing in the building."

"I am certainly not a pet," Chewbacca growled while clenching his photon torpedo launcher.

"Gomorrah, you are engaging with a Wookiee, a sentient humanoid. Okay, I am well aware that Wookiees don't live in Garden City. I am also aware that Wookiees do not usually show up outside Fifth Avenue apartment buildings. Be open to expanding your horizons. If you continue to categorize my friend Chewbacca as a pet, and if you continue to use this specious designation as a means to bar him from the building, I will sue you."

Chewbacca jumped into his Millennium Falcon and, via the vehicle's exhaust pipe emissions, began to sky write. "SURRENDER GOMORRAH" appeared directly above the Empire State Building. He then landed, spent an hour finding another parking space, walked past Gomorrah (who was standing guard in the lobby), entered the elevator, rang my door bell, and ensconced himself on my sofa. Anticipating the impending need to cope with Wookiee fur globs, I removed my hand vacuum cleaner from the closet. At least there was no sign of Gomorrah and Android fornicating within.

"Chewie, I need your advice. Sure I can fly off to other planets. But not so for my Claire Kentowitz self. I bought this apartment during the top of the real estate market. The market has not yet rebounded to the point where I can recoup my investment. Oy, Chewie, I'm stuck in here in North Korea. I once used the following salutation in a letter to Gomorrah: "Dear Kim Jong Horecock-Il." Okay, so I am not subtle. But Gomorrah is more onerous than any intergalactic villain we have ever joined forces to quash. Would you believe that she emulates Darth Vader? She ran the last annual shareholders' yearly meeting dressed in a black helmet, black boots, and a long black robe. I almost blew my secret identity at that meeting when, hands clenched tightly around my concealed weapons permit 44 Magnum, a.k.a. my light saber, I insisted that twenty-first century

cleaning personnel should not be required to enter the building through the basement door. I am living in *The Help*. Help!"

"Your super powers are useless against Gomorrah," said Chewbacca. "Do you intend to use your heat vision to burn a hole in her apartment door, fly her out, and tie her to the Empire State Building antenna? You would be guilty of property damage, kidnapping, and harassment. Think like a human; act inhumanely. You are dealing with Manhattan real estate culture. Act like Donald Trump. Trump would state that President Horecock could not possibly have been born on Earth. Garden City origin story be damned. Ask Gomorrah to produce her birth certificate."

Chewbacca flew off into the wild blue yonder. I called a special shareholders' meeting in order to give birth to the building's Birther Committee.

"Gomorrah, I demand to see your birth certificate," I said in front of the assembled shareholders.

"Why? What do you want with my birth certificate?" hissed Gomorrah.

"You are malevolent and socially obtuse to the extent that you have to be from another planet. I answered. "If you fail to produce your birth certificate, you cannot continue to be the coop board president. A Manhattan apartment coop board cannot legally be headed by an extraterrestrial."

Gomorrah's head exploded. Her brain splattered all over the lobby. At least now the \$650,000 lobby refurbishment fiasco Gomorrah inflicted upon her neighbors would have to be rectified. A makeover replaced Gomorrah's recently exploded head: an insectoid visage replete with wiggling antennae suddenly appeared above Gomorrah's neck. Her "sexually enticing" body disintegrated and transmogrified into a big putrid puddle. A multi-footed torso complete with the aforementioned insectoid visage sprang from the puddle. The lobby began to reek of stink bug smell. Sodom Horecock stepped up to the vacated podium and began to preside over the meeting. The tall commanding woman who lived in apartment 18C indicated that she wanted to speak. Sodom acknowledged shareholder Sigourney Weaver.

"This situation is not good," said Sigourney. I have seen this before. I know how the scenario plays out. Evacuate!"

"Stop" oozed Gomorrah who now appeared as a floor to ceiling sized bed bug. I'll get you Claire. I'll get you and your big dog-thing houseguest too."

Now this definitely was a job for Super Yenta!

I inconspicuously left the lobby, changed clothes in the now infamous basement supply closet, and triumphantly re-emerged in all of my Super Yenta regalia and glory.

"Oy, Abner, it's Super Yenta," Mrs. Kravitz, the human yenta who resided in 19Y, exclaimed to her husband. "Super Yenta is quite competent. No need to call the men in black."

"Surrender Gomorrah you extraterrestrial menace. I have come to save Fifth Avenue from the likes of you. What planet are you from?" I inquired.

"Bedbugton, located second from the right and two red suns over from Krypton."

"Oy, its Super Bedbug," I screamed. Mrs. Kravitz fainted.

"My mission is to help bedbugs proliferate in America. I have recently been very successful—especially in New York City," Gomorrah/Bedbug continued.

With no time to loose, I combined my Super Yenta powers and abilities with my Claire Kentowitz Fifth Avenue street smarts. I set my heat vision to the exact clothing dryer temperature that kills bedbugs. I proceeded loudly to scream "Raid." I, in short, killed Gomorrah/Bedbug dead. Ditto for Sodom who was beginning to undergo the bedbug metamorphosis that ran in the Horecock family. Just before expiring, Sodom pushed one of the buttons on Android's Polo Ralph Lauren golf shirt "uniform" marked, I now noticed, "off." Literary theory, science fiction text sodden, interplanetary *moi* should never have missed the signifiers indicating that Android really was an android.

According to the *New York Times* article called "For Comedian, Leading Her Condo Board Is a Serious Matter," Joan Rivers has successfully presided over a Manhattan apartment building for many years (Elizabeth Harris, *The New York Times*, June 12, 2012, A22).

"I know those fash-holes all too well. If they had any standing they would have definitely been a regular on my E! show," Joan commented. "Good job Claire. Us Super Yentas with a modicum of fashion sense have to stick together."

Ms. Rivers purchased Gomorrah's apartment. She fumigated it. Sponsored by the Revolution Committee, she was elected Board President.

On her first day in office, President Rivers shot down the no pet policy. She ruled democratically, wisely, and well. Chewie was now able to visit me anytime. Everyone in the building lived happily ever after.