

Cat-astrophe

By Reg P. Wydeven
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When I was a kid, our family collected books of the ‘Garfield’ comic strips. I loved the hijinks of the crabby tabby, including the mistreatment of his owner, Jon, and Odie the dog. His hatred of Mondays was only exceeded by his love of lasagna.

Back in the heyday, ‘Garfield’ books flew off the shelves. Garfield merchandise followed – pins, t-shirts and coffee mugs. Then came the stuffed Garfields with the suction cups on their paws that millions of people adhered to the rear windows of their cars. The comic spawned a motion picture and a cartoon.

Since he came onto the scene in 1978, Garfield has generated billions of dollars in merchandise. After 40 years, I thought Garfield was the king of finicky felines, but apparently there’s a new cat in town.

Grumpy Cat is now the pick of the litter. Actually named Tardar Sauce, Grumpy Cat’s face has a perpetual frown. She became an internet celebrity in 2012, when she became the subject of a meme, or picture with a funny caption. The meme showed a picture of the sourpuss with the saying, “I had fun once. It was awful.”

Grumpy Cat is owned by Tabatha Bundesen from Morristown, Arizona. Because people were willing to pay her for the use of her cat’s likeness, Bundesen was actually able to quit her job as a waitress at Red Lobster. She even formed a corporation, Grumpy Cat Limited, to handle the cat’s licensing, which some experts estimate has exceeded \$100 million in revenue.

Like her predecessor from the funny pages, Grumpy Cat appears on clothing, pillows, mugs, pens and bags. And like Garfield, she starred in a movie and even “wrote” books, including a New York Times bestseller. To promote her brand, Grumpy Cat has made the rounds on the talk show circuit, appearing on “Today,” “Good Morning America,” “Fox and Friends,” and even “American Idol.”

Grumpy Cat has endorsement deals as well. According to CNN Money, in 2013 she became the official “spokescat” for Nestle’s Friskies cat food. She also appeared in a Honey Nut Cheerios commercial.

So naturally, when money’s at stake, catfights ensue.

In 2013, Nick and Paul Sandford, the owners of the Grenade beverage company, were issued a license by Grumpy Cat Limited to sell a line of iced coffees dubbed “Grumpy Cat Grumppuccino.” However, the company also started selling Grumppuccino t-shirts. Then, in 2015, Grenade launched a line of “Grumpy Cat Roasted Coffee.” The only problem was, the licensing agreement was strictly for Grumppuccino, not the t-shirts or coffee, so Grumpy Cat Limited didn’t paws and filed a copyright lawsuit in federal court.

According to the complaint, the purrpetrator’s unauthorized sale of t-shirts and coffee “blatantly infringe on the Grumpy Cat copyrights and Grumpy Cat trademarks,” and Grenade didn’t share the profits from these sales, in addition to failing to pay the negotiated profits from the iced coffee. The lawsuit states that as a result, “Defendants’ despicable misconduct here has actually given Grumpy Cat and her owners something to be grumpy about.”

Grenade was grumpy, too, and filed a counter-suit, alleging Grumpy Cat didn’t properly promote their iced coffee. After a week-long trial last month in Santa Ana, California, an eight-person jury awarded Grumpy Cat Limited \$710,001 in damages.

Grumpy Cat was purportedly going to spend the whole Kit & Kaboodle on Fancy Feast, but I’m sure she was just kitten.

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