

## *Nice Distinctions 30*

Arthur D. Hlavaty, 206 Valentine Street,  
Yonkers, NY 10704-1814. 914-965-4861.

hlavaty@panix.com

<<http://www.livejournal.com/users/supergee/>>

<<http://www.maroney.org/hlavaty/>>

The print version is available for \$1 (\$2 outside the USA), arranged trade, or letter of comment (e-mail counts). If there is an X after your name on the envelope, send at least one of the above if you wish to receive the next issue. The e-mail version is available on request, in text and .pdf formats. © 2017 by Arthur D. Hlavaty. Staff: Bernadette Bosky, Kevin J. Maroney, Shekinah Dax, Puff, and the Valentine's Castle Rat Pack. Permission to reprint in any nonprofit publication is hereby granted, on condition that I am credited and sent a copy. This is Discordian Regimentation #130.

---

Hello again. Unlike many good people, Bernadette Bosky, Kevin Maroney, and I survived 2016. Time to pub another ish.

### *On Praise of Expanded Universes*

“Expanded Universes” appears to be the official term for professional fanfic: authorized books set in the reality of a franchise series. It is seen as a low-rent field, condescended to for its lack of originality. As if that were something unique in a world where there is a whole genre (OK, a Sturgeonesque 90% thereof) in which jocks slog through a Land of Flies in pursuit of plot coupons. A new article notes that *Star Trek* has a particularly strong history in this field, one that I'm happy to be a part of.

I read my first *Star Trek* book back in the 80s, when I hadn't seen the show and didn't know all that much about it. Diane Duane's *The Wounded Sky* struck me as excellent speculative fiction with a few somewhat familiar names in it. Years later (about 1996–2006) I copy-edited a dozen or so *Trek* novels for Pocket Books (along with nonfiction books about the franchise). They were enjoyable, much more so than technothrillers and other works set in the alternate universe where

torture works, which I read because I was paid to.

I am glad that the series has continued to thrive without me.

### *The old retired copy-editor recalls*

I remember a copy-editing assignment a while back: a Mafia novel by a writer who claimed to have been an actual mob guy. He later turned out not to be, and the publisher sued him because the book really was a work of fiction, rather than the thinly disguised memoir it read like. I didn't catch him, and I don't know if that's a copy-editor's job, but I claim some credit for querying a point where his terminology differed from Mario Puzo's. Curiously enough, my next assignment was attributed to the other big Italian multinational: *The Personal Prayers of Pope John Paul II*. That one appears to have been legit.

I once copy-edited an article about a woman who'd had an affair with her supervisor and then sued him for sexual harassment. The article as written went on to say that she had asked to be placed under another supervisor. I managed to suggest the phrase “assigned to,” rather than saying, “Now **that's** laziness.”

On another job I was proofreading social science books, an assignment that offered the spiritual benefits of exposure to political views I don't share and paid me for it as well. There was a Marxist history of economics, a communalist tract that made me think of my other gig (resistance is futile; prepare to be assimilated), and a book on the wonders of primitivism. It wasn't all from the Left, though. One manuscript was so enthusiastic about “entrepreneurs” that I expected the About the Author to include, “has been granted the privilege of felling several business leaders.”

### *The other side*

A while back Scott Alexander linked to and agreed with one Frederik deBoer,

who defined himself as an atheist because he does not believe in “a supernatural entity that created the universe, has absolute dominion over the universe, dictates the meaning of good and evil, and sorts people into one pile or the other.” By that definition, I am an atheist too, but so are many people who define themselves as theists, including some who are ordained as such. Theism is more complicated than that.

I wonder if I am making the same sort of mistake in the opposite direction. To me, materialists are people who believe that the human spirit is nothing more than a natural process or product of the body, which I cannot distinguish from saying that it is produced in essentially the same way as methane at the other end. Am I missing something?

### *Coleslaw as religion*

It has been suggested that one should judge a restaurant burger not by the burger itself but by the little glob of slimed cabbage in a tiny cup next to the burger, the theory being that food and its preparation should be judged holistically, that the care given to the coleslaw, that smallest of supplements to the meal, indicates the restaurant’s feeling about the task as a whole. Maybe. My own approach would be to want the place to concentrate its efforts on the essential part of the meal, rather than on a side dish which, for most of us, is purely decorative.

I wonder if there is something about coleslaw that makes it a focus for bizarre food beliefs, as it is closely related to one of the culinary areas about which I am differently sane. A Sturgeonesque 90% of the coleslaw in the world is adulterated with mayonnaise, a repugnant white slime that I am convinced is no true food but a bodily secretion of hideous-looking space aliens. The nasty stuff is becoming more prevalent; we are now told that no cheesesteak is complete without it. If I

were really paranoid, I would conclude that the aliens who generate the stuff are doing so for purposes of mind control, and that people considering it the most important part of the meal are falling under its spell.

### *Null-A*

Elizabeth Edman, a lesbian priest, has written *Queer Virtue*, suggesting that “queer” means more than the obvious point that loving and having sex with someone who has the same sort of bits that you do can be a wonderful thing. She sees queerness as a challenge to all the binaries by which we believe we can divide humanity into jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories and suggests that Christianity has the same message, as Jesus ruptured the binaries between God and human, living and dead, Jew and Gentile. (I encountered this same approach in a nontheological context years ago as non-Aristotelian thinking and have tried to live by it ever since.)

### *Golden Parachute*

Since 2001, Bobby Bonilla has gotten a million dollars a year for not playing for the Mets. Curiously enough, he does not appear to have brought a major computer company to near-collapse, forced hundreds of employees to blow him, or done anything comparable.

### *Revenant*

Ray Russell has returned from the dead, which is not inappropriate. Penguin Classics (!) has published *Haunted Castles*, a collection of seven of his Gothic novellas, with an intro by Guillermo del Toro. I’m in favor, but I’ve got to say that for me, treating Ray Russell as a Gothic writer is like saying Babe Ruth was a great dude to party with and didn’t he play some sort of sport?

Russell was an editor and writer at *Playboy*, where he wrote and published

lots of science fiction. In 1961 he published *Sardonicus and Other Stories*. I thoroughly enjoyed the other stories: 50s social sf, skillfully done with lots of wit. He followed it with *The Case against Satan* (also now revived as a Penguin Classic), a brilliant novel about possession and exorcism, with much more theological pondering than one would expect from a *Playboy* editor, excellent characterization, and bits like the idea that age is a caricaturist (a concept I fear I am exemplifying) and my introduction to the dirty joke in which a dying priest tells a young lad, "I lied to you, son. I'm not your father. I'm your mother; the archbishop is your father."\* Alas, it sold like science fiction. Ten years later William Peter Blatty added showbiz and bestseller details and made millions. (Cf. Harry Harrison's *Plague from Space* and *The Andromeda Strain*.)

Then there was *The Colony*, a funny showbiz novel with bits like "*Tamburlaine*, in two parts, like my ass" and "practicing the manly art of self-abuse." I fear that the Suck Fairy may have gotten at it. I know that the Suck Fairy found another story Russell set in the same milieu and violently sodomized it. "Xanadu" was a jolly little romp about a good guy who hypnotizes women into having sex with him and does no harm thereby.

He also did an enjoyable horror novel called *Incubus*. I don't know if that's coming back.

\* That story turns out to be a classical theme. It can be traced back to the Norse Eddas, and Ezra Pound put a version of it in *The Cantos*. I still say it would be perfect as the last words of Anakin Skywalker.

### *Son of Book*

Teresa Nielsen Hayden's *Making Conversation*, like its predecessor, *Making Book*, is two intertwined essay collections, one on publishing and the other on everything else, including the dubiousness of

saints, IBM's balls, pygmy mammoths, chaos is not your friend, trolls, and much else. Like its predecessor, it is delightful.

### *Human Resources*

Every few years, there is a new breakthrough theory in Management Science to the effect that treating employees as if they were intelligent people who wanted to do their jobs well tends to produce good work. As near as I can tell, the main reason this theory has to keep being reinvented is that it takes away one of the major psychic rewards of being a boss. The new heresy is that requiring neat, uniform cubicles does not lead to increased productivity.

### *There goes the neighborhood*

Bud Selig joins Bowie Kuhn and the other immortals in the Baseball Hall of Fame. (But not, of course, Marvin Miller.) As King Kaufman said, "Can you remember the last time you went nine months without hearing the words 'firestorm of controversy' in relation to something Bud Selig did?" He was a godawful commissioner, but it turns out he did something even worse. As the news story says,

He repeatedly said he never would become commissioner, but he blocked Texas Rangers owner George W. Bush from taking the job, leading Bush to run for governor of Texas and later president.

### *At the end of a group reread*

At this point, I couldn't tell you how much *Cosmic Trigger* specifically expanded my mind, as opposed to the rest of the Robert Anton Wilson oeuvre. Even before *Illuminatus!* I was predisposed to think that we all live in our own reality tunnels (with strong restrictions from that which does not go away when we stop believing in it). RAW gave me a structure for it.

My reality tunnel is one in which physical science works: The Earth goes around the Sun; vaccines prevent disease and don't cause autism; toads don't fall out of the sky. On the other hand, "scientific" studies of people are at best limited and conflicting. That was a disappointment because I had to give up on the hope for something like Asimov's psychohistory, where the animalistic second-circuit activity of politics could be overcome by third-circuit people figuring things out.

I leave what will probably be my final reading of *Cosmic Trigger* with a similar sadness: We didn't get the SMI<sup>2</sup>LE stuff; the Quantum metaphor is outdated; I wouldn't have had the courage and discipline to follow Aleister Crowley even if I'd trusted him.

But then there's the Final Secret. When Wilson's beloved daughter is brutally murdered by a violent loser to whom we owe the courtesy and respect that is every human being's due but not much more, he refuses to seek vengeance, and I will always love and honor him for that.

### *Ode to Facebook*

The moving screen, it moves  
and, when you click, Moves on  
but not to where you chose.  
Nor all thy Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to  
Where it was before that shit.

### *Designs on you*

In 2009 the British Royal Post issued a set of ten stamps to honor classics of British design. One of those was the original Penguin paperback: two broad orange stripes surrounding a white stripe, with the title and author in clear, readable text: elegant simplicity.

But *design* is an autoantonym, like *oversight* and *sanction*. It means clear thinking made visible, as Edward Tufte would say, but it also means what other

designers like, with mere users not getting a vote.

Penguin is now looking back at the good old days and came up with two new kinds of Penguin Classics. One takes the original design and adds little orange things crawling around on it, which I guess is appropriate for the Lovecraft reprint but not the others. The other, called Galaxy Classics, includes one fantasy and five sf books and is worse. The fantasy, *The Once and Future King*, merely violates the rule that Olde Englishe and all-caps don't go together. The sf books look futuristic, if not readable, their titles uniformly presented with the sort of approach that assumes letters would be much better design elements if only they didn't have to mean anything. Perhaps the best part is that the title of Frank Herbert's interminable adventure classic looks like DUNG.

[By the way, lastish I referred to the megacorp that produces these books as Random Penguin. They had a chance to have a clever name like that but decided it was too undignified or something. Officially, they are Penguin Random.]

Three people we need books of collected writings by:

- \* **Louis Menand**
- \* **Scott Alexander**
- \* **Jim Wright**

### *Supplies!*

I have a number of the usual internal personalities, such as the 5-year-old, prosecuting and defense attorneys, and Mr. T (for Tourette). But I don't know how many other people have an internal Quartermaster.

I have a powerful desire to buy Supplies: school supplies though I no longer go to school, office supplies though I don't have an office, art supplies though I'm not an artist. I like to think I haven't bought all that much more than I've needed, and I seem to be gaining that sort

of Wisdom of Age that Heinlein told us mostly resembles weariness. Now there are all those nifty-colored things that have something to do with phones...I will be strong.

I'm a minor **Wikipedia** editor. (For instance, I remove hyphens after "-ly" adverbs.) I know that the "real" reference books in libraries are like poems, rather than trees, because I've been one of the fools who helped make them, and I know they have their limitations. Wikipedia tends to be extremely good on uncontroversial topics, and an objective source on the controversial ones is practically a contradiction in terms. This is the first time in history that people are complaining about how an encyclopedia handles current news.

### *Nasty, Brutish, & Short*

Common sense is what one learned before developing critical faculties (which means that some people can go on acquiring it all their lives). Common sense is what tells you the Sun goes around the Earth.

One thing that depresses me is how far above average I am.

Answer: Discipline and Punish

Question: Name two reasons you would make someone read Foucault.

Sometimes he goes to Episcopalian services and sometimes to Methodist ones. He's bisectual.

A pissing match between Tom Wolfe and Noam Chomsky has a certain charm if one is far enough away not to get splattered.

Today's Passive-Aggressive Tip: If a Facebook headline says, "You won't believe..." assume that they're right and don't bother to click on it.

The 24-second rule keeps basketball from being soccer.

The Bible is the work of many hands at many times, and thus has at least as good an excuse as Walt Whitman for contradicting itself.

The best toys that aren't attached to the body are words and numbers.

### *Not forgotten*

One of the best people I ever knew was my Swarthmore classmate **Pete Grubmeyer**, a quiet, gentle man who loved to teach and spent a lot of his off-hours helping the poor and the homeless. He did all that because of an intense Christian faith that I hope was a comfort to him as he battled a series of cancers, which finally took him out last year.

I assume that Pete believed there's a better life after this one. I don't know if he was right (and you don't either), but I am, like Raymond Smullyan, a sperotheist (one who hopes there is a God), and I hope Pete is enjoying the bliss he deserves.

### *He was what we thought he was*

The late **Dennis Green**, the second Black head coach in the NFL, scored low on Works Well With Others, particularly press and owners, but the players and fans loved him and he won a lot of games. He got grief for using first-round draft picks on a notorious troublemaker and the son of an old crony. That was Randy Moss and Larry Fitzgerald, and it's a shame he won't be around to sponsor them at their Hall of Fame inductions.

It wouldn't have been the Sixties without *Ramparts*, the magazine whose editors burned their draft cards on the cover. **Warren Hinckle** was mostly responsible for it, and he told the story in a fascinating memoir, *If You Have a Lemon, Make Lemonade*.

**G. Spencer Brown** has been distinguished from the world. I wish I understood *Laws of Form* better.

**Carrie Fisher**, author of the excellent *Postcards from the Edge* and *Wishful Drinking* and spokesperson for those with bipolar and addiction issues, also appeared in movies.

**Bhumibol Adulayadej** was real good at the King Biz.

**Merle Haggard's** 15 minutes of fame came when he impersonated a redneck asshole on "Okie from Muscogee." It did not represent that great talent.

Two tellers of cautionary tales: **Sheri S. Tepper** and **Jack Chick**.

**Leonard Cohen** was a first-rate poet who also wrote two enjoyable novels.

**Pat Conroy** wrote *The Lords of Discipline* and other excellent novels. I particularly enjoyed *My Writing Life* and *A Lowcountry Heart*.

**Keith Emerson** and **Greg Lake** were 2/3 of the great trio that did *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Death is life.

**Garry Shandling** is now portraying a dead person.

**Gregory Rabassa** was a great translator from Spanish and Portuguese.

### *Afterlife Fantasies*

**Michael Cimino** goes to Heaven's gate. One wonders if he finds it overpriced and disappointing.

**Jim Lowe** finds out what's behind the Green Door.

**Vera Rubin** illuminates the Dark Matter.

---

### *We lost a lot of good people from fandom*

**Lon Atkins, Stephanie Clarkson, GiGi Dane, Doug Fratz, Joyce Katz, Dave Kyle, Baerana Sabaco, Bill Warren, Kate Yule**

### *Benched Forever*

**Ralph Branca, Dennis Byrd, Gordie Howe, Monte Irvin, Clyde Lovellette, Arnold Palmer, Milt Pappas, Buddy Ryan, Pat Summitt, Walt (No Neck) Williams**

### *You Know They Got a Helluva Band*

**Mose Allison. David Bowie, Oscar Brand, Al Caiola, Sonny James, John D. Loudermilk, Sir George Martin, Marni Nixon, Prince, Leon Russell, Kay Starr, Bobby Vee, Glenn Yarbrough**

### *And*

**Daniel Aaron, Richard Adams, Edward Albee, Patty Duke, Fyvush Finkel, John Glenn, Zaha Hadid, Judge Judith S. Kaye, David Lake, Justin Leiber, Marvin Minsky, Edgar Mitchell, Janet Reno, Alan Rickman, Thomas Schelling, Carolyn See, Robert Vaughn, Gene Wilder, John Zacherle**

---

There is of course a politically symbolic elephant in the room. Trump & Pence came out of its ass, and the stench is ghastly. Nevertheless, I chose to write about more pleasant things.

---

Excelsior,

# *Arthur*