

Derogatory Reference 9)

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

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Staff: Bernadette Bosky, Kevin J. Maroney, Peter Celeron, Ida. Copyright © 2001 by Arthur D. Hlavaty.

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This is a Church of the SuperGenius publication. In Wile E. we trust.

I encourage everyone to attend next year's Minicon – Easter weekend, March 29-31, 2002, in the Hilton Minneapolis & Towers in downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota, at which I will be Fan Guest of Honor.

When Thomas Jefferson took over as U.S. Ambassador to France, he was asked if he was there to replace Benjamin Franklin. He replied, "I am here to succeed him. No one can replace him." I am succeeding Jo Walton as Fan GoH. She is an utterly delightful writer, both fan and pro, and I urge you to vote for her for the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer, as I shall. (If the electorate is foolish enough to turn her down, I have the sour grapes all ready for her. As I have reminded previous losers, this is the award that began with George Alec Effinger losing to Jerry Pournelle.)

Interestingly enough, the most recent Minicon GoH, Ken MacLeod, also has a worthy Hugo contender, best novel *The Sky Road*.

While I'm at it, let me mention the Retro Hugos. I think the previous effort conclusively demonstrated that they don't work, that memory gives the awards to people for later efforts, regardless of what's being voted on. Nevertheless, I have a chance to vote for one of my all-time favorite stories, C.M. Kornbluth's "The Little Black Bag," and I will do so. The only problem is that I cannot also vote first place to Cordwainer Smith's "Scanners Live in Vain."

Both of those stories appear in a magnificent book that has just been reprinted, in trade pb by ebooks. It used to be called *Robert Silverberg's Worlds of Wonder*, and it's now *Science Fiction 101*. It combines a guide to the writing of sf, Silverberg's memoir of doing

so, and a dozen or so exemplary stories, including the two I mentioned and some comparable ones. Buy it if you don't have it. (I'm also going to vote for a Retro Hugo for the book's author/editor, thus doing what I'm complaining about.)

Think of *baby shower* as something Charles Fort would write about.

I realize it sounds like some sort of satirical anarchist fantasy, but the Los Angeles Police Department has been declared a criminal conspiracy. That's right: The Rampart Station scandals, with police involved in faked evidence, drug dealing, and perhaps even murder, are so bad that a federal court declared that the LAPD could be sued under RICO.

I can't help wishing that the police had gotten some sort of wake-up call that would have prevented this. I know it would have been terribly embarrassing, but imagine what would have happened if a famous black man had killed a couple of white people, but got away with it because the LAPD's corruption, incompetence, and racism were so notorious that a jury refused to take the case seriously. Then something would have been done.

Have you always dreamed about going back to adolescence and meeting a permissive-seductive adult figure who'll teach you about sex and spare you the trouble and messiness of trying to learn it from your peer group? If so, you may have a career in the fast-growing field of Internet law enforcement. Just pretend to be what you've always imagined being, and you can entrap the kind of universally despised criminals who have the complementary desire.

Same-sex or cross-sex, **Famous Perverts School** can help you turn your masturbatory fantasies into money and social approval. Sign up now!

I do not have a consistent position on gun laws (and am not interested in hearing yours, thank you), but I am fascinated by the idea of gun shows, where the normal constraints against selling to felons are suspended. Perhaps there is an opening for drug shows. The manufacturers could show off their wares, and one could say, "I'm a doctor, and I need a few gallons of injectable Demerol for my poor suffering patients," without tedious requirements like showing ID.

Is anyone surprised that the Xcremental Football League tanked? Robert A. Heinlein once said that some of the "predictions" he was credited with were no more remarkable than seeing two trains speeding towards each other on the same track and foreseeing a collision. I take no more credit for prophesying the XFL train wreck. The XFL was a minor-league operation in a situation where the talent in the major league is seriously diluted. The league could not change the rules enough to make that worth watching, at least not without a lot of people going to jail.

There's been a certain amount of malicious joy over the tabloid revelation of Jesse Jackson's "love child." I remember his comment that the leading cause of illegitimacy is lewd rock & roll, and I wonder if he's going to tell us what he was listening to.

Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of sXXXch, or the right of the people peaceably to XXXemble, and to peXXXion the government for a redress of grievances
—possibly contrived example of the wonders of filtering software

Actual News

MTV apologized Thursday to two 14-year-old girls who said they were splattered with feces when an act defecated on stage during a taping of the music channel's "Dude, This Sucks" show.

OK, so I've been sulking. I kept wanting to write about the Theft of Florida at the time, but the crime was so ugly, and the details so tedious, that I couldn't bring myself to. I feel sorry for the voters who were so nauseated by the two main parties that they Ralphed, especially those in Florida. Most of them didn't want to make it easier for the White House to be stolen on W's behalf, but that's what they wound up doing, and I'm sure they feel miserably guilty about it. (Well, actually I hope they do.) They've had a chance to find out about their belief that there'd be no REAL difference between Bush and Gore presidencies. I think my favorite horrible counterexample is the decision to take the American Bar Association out of the judge-selecting process because they care about all that legable stuff, rather than just making sure that the judges are pro-life and pro-death.

There's something going on over in Serious Lit that they're not talking about. I don't know if they're embarrassed or they just haven't noticed...

I gotta give you some background. Back in the Fifties and Sixties there were two Major Jewish Writers: Saul Bellow and Philip Roth. Bellow was of course the serious one—human heart in conflict with itself and all that good stuff. *Herzog*, for instance, wrote his imaginary letters to the great philosophers. *Henderson the Rain King* had archetypal adventures. Tommy Wilhelm, in *Seize the Day*, confronted mortality. Bellow got the Nobel Prize.

Roth on the other hand was, to use a term of art, a *shonda fur de goyem*—an embarrassment for the great world of Jewish lit. Alexander Portnoy's lengthy discussion of self-gratification was the obvious horrible example. Perhaps worse, though, was the literary analog of Portnoy's vice: Roth was always writing about himself, writing about a writer much like himself (Tarnopol or Zuckerman), even writing about writing about himself. If there was anyone else in the books, it was "my ex-wife, that <anatomical epithet>."

There they were: Solemn Saul and Filthy Phil, walking through the Halls of Literature together like the good-hearted woman and the good-timing man in the Willie Nelson song.

They've traded places. Roth finally got as self-referential as he could (*The Counterlife*) and as personal and spiteful as he could (*Deception*), and he had nowhere to go but up. The new stuff is good, and it's not about Philip Roth and Philip Roth's *schlang* and Philip Roth writing about Philip Roth's *schlang*. *The Human Stain* is about the stain on Monica Lewinsky's dress, but it's also about being human and about "America's greatest communal passion, the ecstasy of sanctimony" (love that line) and what it's doing to us.

And Saul Bellow discovered something when he wrote *Herzog*. *Herzog* has deep philosophical thoughts, but he also undergoes a cuckolding, and both of those come from the life of Saul Bellow, who realized how good it was to write about Saul Bellow. Mr. Sammler, of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, and the dean, of *The Dean's December*, are also Saul Bellow, and in each book he is more willing to tell us about "the kids got no respect today" and "look what the colored get away with," and of course, "my ex-wife, that <anatomical epithet>." When I hear that a writer is "self-indulgent," I ask the next question: Is the writer's self worth indulging? Harlan Ellison, yes. Saul Bellow, well... The only Bellow books since *Herzog* that are worth reading are the ones where Bellow met someone interesting enough to distract him from himself—Delmore Schwartz in *Humboldt's Gift*, Allan Bloom in *Ravelstein*—and in the latter, he isn't distracted enough.

So the dot-coms fell, and thus, as was said joyfully by some, business had to go back to supplying actual things. The Web is likewise in trouble, partly because the sites can no longer survive on advertising. It could be worse than that. The Web may be revealing one of the Great Dirty Secrets of American culture: Advertising doesn't work.

You knew that all along. It has been said that everyone believes that advertising works, but not on them. A surprising number of them are right about the second part.

On Mad Ave. a genius is a person who's had two successful ad campaigns in a row; a god has had three. I remember *The Hidden Persuaders*, the book about how the evil geniuses of advertising were using Freudian tricks to manipulate us into buying. A few days after I read the book, I saw a gasoline

commercial that featured a close-up of the gas nozzle going into the tank. Aha.

Didn't work, though. Products with powerfully suggestive brand names died like dogs, and the most successful brand name in the world today is Microsoft. (This may also mean that Freudian psychology has been operationally tested, and it failed. As Paul Goodman said, we should be grateful that the social sciences don't work, or those in power would use them on us.)

Now there is an objective measure of how well an ad works: Every time someone clicks on your ad, it has worked. I believe that less than a tenth of a percent of those who look at a given page click on one of its ads.

This too, has brought rejoicing, and I can see why. Advertising is a form of pollution. Much of it is as ugly as what you'd get if you bred Yogi Berra with Linda Tripp, and the ad biz keeps finding more ways to make it intrude upon us. I fear that we are approaching the Philip K. Dick future where ads buzz around our heads and sting us if they catch us not paying attention. But there's another issue.

Advertising has always been looked down upon as a fraud perpetrated by clever symbol manipulators to get paid for intellectual performances that do no real good for anyone. As the old joke has it, "Don't tell my mother I work on Madison Avenue. She thinks I play piano in a whorehouse."

OK, time for a confession: When I was too young and innocent to know better, I was told that religion was *nothing but* a shuck created by clever symbol manipulators to evade their fair share of the Real Work. That's a gross oversimplification even if the materialists are right, but I didn't know that.

I disapproved of course, but I'm afraid that deep down inside, I felt that this was not an entirely bad thing. I am still tempted to believe that one ideal role for the intellectual is as shaman to a tribe sufficiently benighted to believe that the crops will not grow unless the shaman is properly fed, fucked, and cleaned up after. The closest I know of to that ideal in recent years is the role of certain computer professionals in the business world.

And so, I find myself tempted to be sympathetic, or at least amused. Those sly ad tricksters actually managed to convince the alpha males who run the business world that *everything* needs to be advertised, that nothing

would be purchased without advertising. I am not making this up: There are ads for Viagra.

(Who are these ads supposed to appeal to? Let's imagine: "Well, gee, I'd like to be able to get it up, but I don't know if it's worth doing anything about...Oh! Look! Getting cured of erectile dysfunction is cool and with it and socially acceptable. Bob Dole does it. OK, *now* I'm going to go see my doctor.")

And yet I'm sure that advertising does sometimes communicate, though not what it intends to. I imagine that the collapse of the dot-coms began with last year's Super Bowl, and all those dumb commercials. (OK, I'm overgeneralizing. The cat-herding commercial and all those dumb ones.)

I know that a lot of ads, particularly on things like the Super Bowl, are not meant to sell products directly. They are meant to say, "We are here" — to leave the sponsor's mark on the media as a dog leaves his mark on a tree. The Super Bowl commercials went beyond that. The dot-commies seemed to be screaming, "We are here. We have a lot of money. And we are far too stupid to have any idea what to do with it." How many of the ads tried that clever switcheroo of promising to be the dullest commercial you'd see all day? I have no idea which won, but they all gave it the old college try, including several that didn't mention that as their approach. Perhaps the bad commercials were even more obvious by contrast, because this was one of the rare good Super Bowls, with the Rams stopping the Titans at the very last second.

I imagine it took a while for the realization to penetrate. Nobody wanted to say anything. People rationalized: *The skin tones on the emperor's new clothes are fairly lifelike...The depiction of the tiny, malformed genitalia is chillingly realistic...* But finally, the message got through.

I recently read about the British royal crisis in the 1930s, when King Edward VIII was about to be crowned, but he loved Wallis Simpson, a divorced commoner, whom the rules said he couldn't marry. There was a news blackout on the whole business, which in those pre-Internet days meant that no one in Great Britain published a word about it, newspapers from outside had the offending stories cut out before they could be brought into the country, and of course everyone knew anyway. The pressure to discuss the whole mess in public

grew to a near-explosive level, but someone had to go first.

Finally, a minor bishop of the Church of England said in a sermon that Edward VIII "should look to the condition of his own soul." With that, the cultural sphincter opened...It then transpired that the bishop had been one of the 17 persons in the United Kingdom who had not heard about Mrs. Simpson; he was concerned with an ugly rumor that Edward VIII planned to open his coronation to Methodists and other lesser breeds without the law.

Perhaps there was a similar start to the dot-com collapse. Some financial personage mentioned "the Super Bowl disaster," setting off a panic when he was merely complaining of his own injudicious investment in the fortunes of the Titans. The rest is history.

From Silent Tristero's Empire

John Fast writes:

It's interesting, in a Jungian Shadow sort of way, to read comments bashing voting Green/Socialist Workers/Silly Party because it helps the Stupid Party, while we Libertarians occasionally get bashed for giving aid and comfort to the Democrats. The *National Review*, for example, is talking about "The GOP's 'Libertarian Problem.'"

FWIW, I promise to do my best to help the LP do its part to balance out the Greens and other minor parties. I hope you feel better now.

Actually, I wish the Libertarian Party luck, and not just to harm the Republicans. I'm a recovering libertarian, and I still think they're right on a lot of things, including sexndrugs and the First Amendment. They also make some valid points that get omitted from the usual consensus, such as the fact that all government action is in essence performed at gunpoint, since it will be defended by lethal force, if necessary. This doesn't mean that there should be no government, but let's remember that element of force when we're casually considering things the government should do. But I'm no longer a libertarian because I don't believe they have an answer to the six-billion-player Prisoner's Dilemma that the environment has locked us all into. Besides, libertarians do not hate and fear insurance companies. They're even willing

to have a voucher system that would turn education over to similar organizations.

But maybe the election is a payback for those of us who were hoping that Pat Buchanan would take a big chunk of the Dumb White Guy vote away from Bush. Whatever happened to Buchanan? (I'm open to conspiracy theories.)

As far as I'm concerned, Roth and Bellow are both far too mainstream to take seriously—I reserve that for sf, and read them purely for enjoyment, without worrying about status wars that only interest a tiny clique of socially inept weirdos who dress funny, don't understand the real world, and don't have high-paying jobs, aka "academics."

After lastish, Jeff Copeland asked why I take an interest in things like the *New Yorker* psychodrama. For me they have the intellectual fascination of fan feuds, without the drawback of caring about the participants. I remember a lengthy Norman Mailer rehash of old disagreements with other Major Literary Figures that read like Ted White without the wit.

Jo Walton writes:

It's funny, in retrospect [Jesse Jackson's remark] makes sense as a comment in a way it never did before—if he got carried away by lewd music and forgot to use a condom, then railing against rock as a cause of illegitimacy is no longer absolutely barking but just generalizing from too small a sample set.

In my usual socially challenged fashion, I have failed to report on what's going on in real life around here. Let's see: My old computer seized up and died, and we bought an inexpensive but highly functional new one. It has a Celeron processor, so we're calling it Peter Celeron. Kevin's employer has, in true dot-com fashion, reinvented itself, as Unplugged Games, providing games for cell phones and other wireless computing devices. The move appears to be working, and Kevin remains essential to the company. Bernadette is doing private tutoring, particularly for the SATs, excellently of course, and teaching at Gotham Writers Workshop. I'm still proofreading and copy-editing legal newsletters and still enjoying it.

I reviewed Edgar L. Chapman's excellent (but expensive) Greenwood Press study of Robert Silverberg's fiction, *The Road to Castle Mount*, for the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, I've also reviewed NESFA's collection of Eric Frank Russell's stories for *NYRSF*, and I'm going to do likewise with their forthcoming collection of Fredric Brown. Those are two authors who should not be forgotten. Brown was one of the great formative influences on me, and I discovered Russell somewhat later, enjoying both for the combination of wit and sensawonder.

I didn't sign up to write for the latest *Scribner Encyclopedia of American Lives* because I disagree with their taste: William Gaddis, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and Lawrence Sanders are not deemed worthy of inclusion, but Allen Drury is. They are, however, also doing a sports encyclopedia, and I'll be writing about Charles Barkley, Frank Deford, and Johnny Unitas.

It's time once again to ransack my fading memory and worse notes for an ICFA report. I shall attempt to divert the reader from its deficiencies by doing the report in the form of a Ballardian condensed novel.

The expository lump. This year my spouse, Bernadette Bosky; my co-husband, Kevin Maroney; and I all made it to the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, March 21-24, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, though it was a near thing. Bernadette was having a particularly busy tutoring season, but she had committed to presenting a paper, and she was able to set aside a couple of days. Kevin and I were able to be there for the whole thing.

The epigraphs. "An adventure, wrongly considered, is an inconvenience. An inconvenience, rightly considered, is an adventure" —G.K. Chesterton
"Oh shit, not *another* adventure." — me

The travel. All the trips were adventures. The day before the conference, Kevin and I got to the airport and found that our flight had been canceled, but the airline was willing to put us on a flight on another airline to West Palm Beach, with a free cab ride from there to Fort Lauderdale. When we reached West Palm Beach, we feared that the signs there might be made by the same people who design the ballots, and a sign directing us to Baggage

Claim could lead to the Egress, if not into the path of an oncoming aircraft. Fortunately not; the rest of the trip was mercifully uneventful. Bernadette got to fly direct to Fort Lauderdale, but a flight that would not have given her much sleeping time was delayed so as to give her even less. She survived, and delivered an excellent paper on "Slime and the Sublime: Transcendence and Degeneration in the Fiction of Arthur Machen and Peter Straub."

The GoH. John Crowley is of course the author of the massive, brilliant, and complex Aegypt quartet, and I devoutly hope that by the time he has finished the project (one book to go), I will have concluded the task of getting up the courage to read it. He spoke on, among other things, his encounter with Ioan Couliano, a twentieth-century sorcerer who had the misfortune to call up that which he could not put down, from the preternaturally horrific realm of Romanian politics.

The fantastic. Greer Watson, who's been at these things for a long time and keeps getting better, presented "A Multivariate Approach to Analyzing the Fantastic," including a look at that famous Todorov term, which probably should not have been translated that way.

Another first-rate paper. Michael Arnzen on Stephen King's *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*. This was in the session I chaired. The man speaks fluent PoMo, but most of the paper was an excellent analysis of the traditional sort. It's going to appear in NYRSF before too long.

And another. Sondra Swift on golden ass imagery from Apuleius and Giordano Bruno in the Aegypt books. Crowley was present, and I believe even he learned from the paper.

The games. Stefan Hall does papers outlining the narratives of computer games, thus opening to me an area in which otherwise I would be completely ignorant. This year he told us about *Thief: the Dark Project*.

The reading. A privilege Bernadette's shortened visit gave me was the chance to take her place introducing Chelsea Quinn Yarbro for a reading (actually performed by a friend, Stephanie Moss) from a forthcoming tale of the vampire Saint-Germain. I spoke briefly with the author beforehand and discovered that she did not know that recently there was a Congressman Saint-Germain, a far less bene-

volent bloodsucker who did much to facilitate the Savings & Loan crimes of the 80s.

The books. R. Michael Barrett presented a paper on science in Connie Willis, particularly the use of chaos theory in *Bellwether*. He made it sound so interesting that I read the book, and I'm glad I did. I like about half of Willis's writing, with most of the rest of it in her favorite area of Screwball Comedy, an approach that annoys me for no good reason, rather as if I were being uncomfortably tickled in a body area we haven't evolved yet. *Bellwether* has some of this, but it's also the kind of Connie Willis story I like best: science as metaphor, like "In the Late Cretaceous" and "At the Rialto."

- Andy Duncan was there, which gives me an excuse to plug his collection, *Beluthahatchie* (Golden Gryphon hc), which is full of strange and wondrous tales. Andy helped me get over one of my vulgar prejudices. I was shocked when I first learned that he is a product of a Creative Writing program, because he can write creatively. Well, actually he studied with another excellent fictionist, John Kessel. I guess Creative Writing has been infiltrated.

- There were a couple of papers on Neal Stephenson, reminding me that I have not yet gushed in these pages about *Cryptonomicon* (Harper tpb). Marvelous stuff, his best yet, worthy of comparison with *Illuminatus!*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Ciphers*, and that lot. (Which reminds me that I've also been remiss in not plugging Amitrav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*, for a whole different take on that area.) Anyway, I suppose I should warn you that Joseph Major says it suffers from severe historical errors, and he knows stuff like that. But I enjoy the conspiracies, and the set pieces (the one about the man with the fetish is my favorite), and the weird detail, and the grand *hieros gamos* at its heart. It even has a satisfying conclusion. (Perhaps Stephenson has a Delany-esque scruple about that sort of thing, but indulged himself just this once because it's the first book of a trilogy.)

The news story. The local papers reported the death of a woman, from bungled unlicensed cosmetic surgery. It was a sad story, and I tried not to giggle, but I kept thinking: the Fatal Buttock Enhancement.