

Review of Revelation X

Bob Black

Revelation X: The “Bob” Apochryphon: Hidden Teachings and Deuterocanonical Texts of J.R. “Bob” Dobbs.

Translated by The SubGenius Foundation, Inc. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

According to the last sentence of *The Book of the SubGenius* (hereafter: *BS*): “You’ll never have to read another book.”

Not *this* one, anyway.

The Church of the One Joke just keeps going and going and going ... nowhere. If you loved *BS*, you’ll like *Revelation X*, so you might as well reread *BS*. If you liked *BS*, *RX* is a prescription for (as the greatest of ex-SubGenii put it) *less of more of the same*. And more expensive, too.

The cost of Church membership, as of funeral arrangements, has risen much faster than inflation, tripling in fifteen years. Back then you had the feeling that SubGenius was on to something. Now you have the feeling that SubGenius is up to something. Back then you had the feeling that SubGenius had *potential*. Now you have the feeling that SubGenius *had* potential.

RX is the fourth coffee-table book by Douglass St. Clair Smith, a.k.a. “Rev. Ivan Stang,” all published by the notorious underground publisher Simon & Schuster. For eight years now, time and time again, Stang has hoodwinked this multi-national subsidiary of the Conspiracy, not only to go out on a limb, but to try very hard to *saw it off*. For some strange reason, luckily for the both of them, it never falls. SubGenius is like the guy who, as John Crawford put it, couldn’t get himself arrested. Ivan Stang: the Teflon revolutionary.

RX is full of — besides *that* which, to be full of, is that — what the Church of the SubGenius thinks of the Conspiracy. But what does the *Conspiracy* think of the Church of the SubGenius? If Simon & Schuster isn’t part of the Conspiracy — *any* Conspiracy worth an upper-case “C” — then there was no arms-for-hostages deal and furthermore, Lee Harvey Oswald as a lone nut, acting alone, killed Kennedy, all by himself, just as George Thorogood drinks alone, preferably by himself. (He probably killed *both* Kennedys and slept with Mary Jo Kopechne.)

According to the press release (“Contact: Jennifer Swihart, 212-698-7643”) — *or kill me* — “*Revelation X* broadens the satire of cults, religious extremism, and conspiracy theories promulgated by the now notorious SubGenius Foundation.” You mean ... it was all just a *joke*? A satire on villains it is so *safe* to despise that even “60 Minutes” rounds on them? And SubGenius is just an adult fantasy role-playing game like Magic or Dungeons & Dragons, only not as interactive?

How curious that the co-authors of the *Conspiracy Lowdown* cartoon booklets of the mid-1970's, Jay Kinney and Paul Mavrides, signed on early with SubGenius (and at the same time distanced their other project, *Anarchy Comics*, of which they never speak any more). Kinney, who used to ridicule mystical cults, now hosts them in his slick rag *Gnosis*. I *gnow* a scam when I psee one. Mavrides, who has never repudiated the violent, crypto-Marxist *Processed World* cult he used to contribute to, is the illustrator of *RX* and was co-illustrator of *BS*.

A working knowledge of conspiracy theory and radical ideology gives the upwardly mobile hipster an important leg up in the business world. Stang has a thorough grounding in the former but only a hit-and-miss, increasingly dated acquaintance with the latter, as the radicals he used to string along recoil from his ever more blatant, careerist shuckin' 'n' jivin'. In this he is (as so often – and so happily! – happens) the victim of his own success. To the extent he's reduced *soi-disant* anarchists (Kinney, Mavrides, Trevor Blake, etc.) to mere Pipeheads he has, in the argot of the intelligence community, "burned" them – blown their cover – nullified their utility as informants. These performers have more customers and fans than they ever did, to be sure, but nobody is *telling* them *anything*, so Stang can't "run" these agents anymore.

The guy who is doing the running – on a hamster-wheel – and running down, is the poor little rich kid Douglass St. Clair Smith himself. ("Never trust a guy who has a *last* name for a *first* name, J.R. "Bob" Dobbs once warned me.) He told his customers that all it took to be creative was to send him \$30, and they took him at his word (but usually didn't send the \$30, a complaint reiterated well past the point of tedium in *RX*). The scores of credits to collaborators at the beginning of *RX* are meant to disguise the loneliness of the long-distance "runner," Smith. (Several are also fraudulent: tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE and Blaster Al Ackerman regard SubGenius with contempt.) He complains in *RX* that for too many – for most – SubGenii, the Church is just a jackoff. *They aren't even that self-starting*. They expect *him* to jerk them off, so he does, but his hand is getting tired. (Is my metaphor sexist? Not nearly as much as the Church itself. Female SubGenii are almost as rare as black SubGenii.) Smith made his bed and now he has to sleep in it – alone. No wonder he sounds so cranky, so peevish, so defensive. This Antabuse dry-drunk needs a drink, among other things, in the worst way.

After 15 years, "Stang" can churn the stuff out according to the formula, in any quantity. But as a husband, a father and a homeowner – what's with this shit in *RX* about extirpating *normality*? – what he's churning out is infant formula for retrograde young adults looking for an easy escape from their all too accurate awareness that, for all the resentments or theatrics of their so-fleeting youth, they're just like their parents. Doug Smith has the customers he deserves, and who could wish a worse – or more fitting – retribution upon him than that?

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Commissioned by *Steamshovel Press*. The continued, albeit threadbare, persistence of the Church of the SubGenius I attribute to two factors. The first is the perennial renewal of the population of white male college students uncomfortable with girls. The second is that Doug Smith/“Ivan Stang” is no longer creative enough to come up with anything else, so it’s either keep milking SubGenius or get a day job.

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