



High Weirdness By Mail

Ivan Stang

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This hysterical hobbyist's guide belongs in every hip library. Coot cat Reverend Ivan Stang, high holy of the Church of the SubGenius, has compiled a bestiary of American creeps and crazies so that you can write to them and receive mail that is weird, horrible, wonderfully absurd, or a combination of all three. Each entry has a paragraph or two and the last known mailing address of some fringe loonies. The book is only current through 1988, though; the only thing wrong with it is that it's high time for an update--with URLs, of course. Let's see ... there are catalogs of perpetual motion machines; brochures from South American flying saucer cults; something called "The Battle Cry of Aggressive Christianity" (Christian, not likely--aggressive, you bet); and bizarre roundups such as "News of the Weird," the Church of Beaver Cleaver, and so on. What makes this book so funny is the author's willingness to list (and ridicule) any group, no matter how repulsive. This means, too, that *High Weirdness* contains a group to offend everyone; consider yourself warned. In fact, if you aren't offended by some of these groups, you must be pretty offensive yourself. So there.

High Weirdness By Mail Details

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Author : Ivan Stang

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From Reader Review High Weirdness By Mail for online ebook

Chris says

Classic universal WEIRDNESS!

Joseph says

Not as relevant now that there's the internets and all, but still a great cross-section of american weirdos...

Willy Boy says

excellent

Shawn says

How you did it before the internet...

Ed Selkow says

This was one of the most fun books to read and reread back then. Wish I knew what happened to my copy. I made notes in the book when I wrote away for numerous highly weird things. Ivan Stang is on YouTube now.

Ronald says

This book is sort of an artifact from a time before the internet became a mass phenomenon.

In those days, individuals or organizations disseminated their fringe ideas by old fashioned post. This book gives the name, mailing address, and synopsis of fringe publications. Some of the publications are vile, some are silly; they are all whacked out. The editor of this volume, the Rev. Ivan Stang of the Church of the SubGenius, makes witty comments about each publication. Actually I had fun, skipping around the book at random, reading the entries.

Here's one I just picked at random: Inner Light, publishing cheap books on everything ultraterrestrial, such as magic, space gods, occult UFO books, etc. The Rev. Ivan Stang remarks: "Yeah, but can they hex the IRS for me?"

Meril says

obviously of historical interest only, but glad my local library has kept 2(!) copies of this around, as it's a good way of showing folks who don't remember a time before the WWW how we used to have to find our cranks and weirdos. it's also good proof that some stuff didn't get invented by those crazy kids on Tumblr.

Michael says

Essential artifact of pre-internet weirdness.

Glenn Davis says

I always thought the actual Subgenius materials produced by Stang & Co. somewhat failed to live up to the promise of their fantastic concept. But this compilation of ACTUAL cultic weirdness is absolutely delicious and laugh-out-loud hilarious. I still can't recommend it highly enough, if you can find it, although as another reviewer points out, sadly the snail-mail world of which HWBM is an artefact has largely faded away.

Andy says

To start with, the late-'80s-Kinko's-employee snark gets old really fast. But that's just fine. Stang says right in the beginning, when justifying the tone and scope of the project: "Copies of this 'funny book' will be floating around for years, whereas more serious studies will be so rare and/or inconvenient to locate as to be practically nonexistent." And that's absolutely true. This book is still floating around, and it's a treasure trove.

Even in the internet era, this age of boundless and accessible information, it's amazing how few of the organizations highlighted in here have any presence on Google. The few references you can find connect right back to this book. Most of these visionaries and cranks and zealots really did disappear, and this "funny book" is maybe one of the only records around of what they accomplished in their time. Mission accomplished, Rev. Stang.

Stephen Yoder says

Such an amazing, odd book. And to think we can find these people on YouTube in seconds now.

Xenomantid says

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: I wrote this review long before I knew the horrible truth about Ivan Stang and what he did to Bob Black. Since then, I have decided to remove this book from my favorites and "positive influence" shelves. The review itself will remain as it was when I wrote it. Just bear in mind that this book should be taken as pure disposable entertainment and *nothing else*.

Today, the World Wide Web provides a veritable all-you-can-eat buffet of groups dedicated to virtually anything and everything within the bounds of the human imagination. Should you so desire, you can join a message board for people who have cannibalism fetishes. You can go to a Web site and order a dildo shaped like someone's idea of a dragon's penis. If your tastes are more innocuous, then you're still in luck: you can join a LiveJournal community for people who collect bootleg toys, share kinky fan fiction about television characters, or trade unorthodox interpretations of the development of life on Earth on a forum. All of this assumes that you have regular Internet access, but if you're reading this review from your own computer, then you can probably afford it.

Back in the day, however, finding communities based on extremely specific quirks required much more perseverance--if the deity of your choice saw it fit to bless you with their existence in the first place. Because of the human race's endless variety, strange ideas sprang up in defiance of the absence of instantaneous mass communication, and many of them were similar enough to form the basis for groups or clubs. Even if you didn't belong to any such organization, you still might be so unusual as to muster some curiosity about them. That was where Ivan Stang came in with *High Weirdness by Mail*.

This book is a lengthy annotated listing of addresses that, upon mail order, distributed bizarre, kooky, cracked-out, hateful, or otherwise strange literature (or, occasionally, cassettes or videotapes). Some of them, such as Jack Chick Publications, known for its insane "Christian" comic tracts, had more widespread success/infamy than others. Most of them aren't around anymore, but all are worth looking at, despite your likely unfamiliarity with them. The listings are organized by category, so the weird science organizations, weird politics conspiracies, hate groups, outsider-art publishers, and so on are all distinguished from one another. The book is a proto-F Plus, if you will. (N.B.: For some reason, Stang doesn't spare several Crowleyite groups from his occult section, but the Church of Satan is left unlisted, even though it deserves a thorough skewering.)

The author belongs to a fringe group himself: the Church of the Subgenius, which I would summarize if the official site didn't insist on obfuscating their actual mission. As far as I can tell, it's similar to Discordianism (*High Weirdness by Mail* claims that the Church of the Subgenius is the original branch of Discordianism and that the Discordians themselves perpetuated the lie that they antedated the followers of "Bob" Dobbs, whom you will learn much more about within the book's pages). So, if Stang insults your religion--and he will--just accept the offense and carry on reading. It's worth it. The Church of the Subgenius collaborated with Devo on some of their music videos, to inform you of the disposition in which this book was written.

In other words, *High Weirdness by Mail* is not a book by a normal person for normal people about abnormal people. This book is by an abnormal person for abnormal people about even more abnormal people. Stang affects a lunatic-raver persona (at one point, he claims to beat his children), and yet displays flashes of common human decency, such as giving the address of a civil liberties organization before listing the racist groups. (His understanding of transsexualism leaves something to be desired, but the publication date was 1988.) Many of the images therein, often from the fringe groups' publications, make the book even more unsuitable for youngsters than it already is, and since there's at least one honest-to-God pornographic publisher listed inside, that's saying a lot.

After churning through the sea of madness, the reader sees a beacon of clarity. The last part of the book consists of an excerpt from Waves Forest's *Further Connections*. To avoid spoiling the content of this enlightening text, imagine something similar to the book-within-a-book from George Orwell's *1984*. For this reason, I tagged *High Weirdness by Mail* with the "positive influence" label.

If you're weary of books that maintain the tiresome falsehood that the universe is orderly, then *High Weirdness by Mail* just might be recommended reading for you.

ETA: Recently, I learned that Waves Forest was instrumental in the accidental deaths of several cancer patients. Feel free to ignore his comments on unorthodox medicine, but take his political meditations seriously.

ETA #2: According to *The New Hacker's Dictionary*, the Church of the SubGenius actually is a splinter group of Discordianism, only it's a parody of Christian fundamentalism specifically. That isn't surprising.

Michael says

if i had to pick a book that had the biggest impact on my life, this would be it. at 15, i had absolutely no idea who the rev. ivan stang, the church of the subgenius, or even what the hell "mail art" was. it is absolutely responsible for me discovering the magnificent world of small self-published zines and ultimately the continually published bible of mail art, factsheet 5. i started self-publishing my own work for the next 5 years and made me realize you can have a voice (even if it is a tiny one) and someone might actually be willing to pay to read it. crazy! i met a lot of great people in the community and was in contact with people that i greatly admired. stang, you changed my life. thanks!

Pat Fitzgerald says

Changed my life, pre-Internet high-octane America

TailFeather says

This can't be appreciated in this day of instant gratification, unfortunately. But still a great collection of neat stuff.
