

Uyless Black's Remarkable *The Cepee Dialogues: A Modern Fairy Tale*
Jim Harris, *Hobbs News-Sun*, May 31, 2020

Even if Uyless Black had not grown up in Lea County, even if U.D. was not a friend whom I have known for several years, even if he was not the author of some forty books, and even if he was not the brother of several men who have had a positive impact on the Lea County Museum, I would be writing this Last Frontier column praising Black's new book for more reasons than I can count.



Published not so long ago in 2019, the book's title is *The Cepee Dialogues: A Modern Fairy Tale*, an unusual title that requires some explanation which I will give in a few sentences.

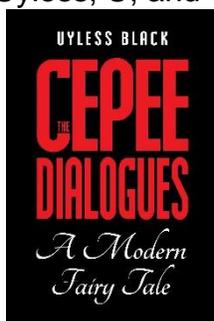
But first, since I'm already on the subject, the reader should know a few things about Black, a writer who was born in Lea and who has studied and worked all over the world.

Black did his undergraduate work at the University of New Mexico and graduate work in computer systems at American University and the Stonier Graduate School of Banking at Rutgers University.

He writes fulltime now at his home in Idaho, but earlier in his life he was an officer in the US Navy, receiving the Navy Commendation Medal for his service in Vietnam. He was an intelligence officer at the Defense Intelligence Agency, with extensive knowledge in Soviet and Chinese military systems. At about the time he was at the Agency, he published a landmark article on the use of Gestalt psychology in the design of software code.

Black served as the Assistant Director as well as ombudsman for the Federal Reserve Board, and the Senior Vice President of the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank.

If all of his books published and all of the work-related accomplishments had not put Black in the All Lea County Biographical Hall of Fame, his book of essays *The Light Side of Little Texas*, published in 2011, would guarantee his induction in the ALCBH, an organization that has yet to be created but should exist for county native sons and daughters, such as Black, who was known variously by his childhood friends as U.D., Uyless, U, and Useless.



Talk about irony in a name for such a talented man, talk about variety in life experiences and accomplishments, talk about success in a potpourri of life's genres—as he might be described in a Spike Lee genre film, "Uyless Black is da man."

And what has he created in his latest book *The Cepee Dialogues*?

In a life of reading books and studying literature, I really have never read a book quite like this one. It's a book about the present, set in the future, but with a plot that focuses upon the 20th century and early 21st century.

How is *Cepee Dialogues* about the present? How is it about what's happening this week in America even though it was published several months ago? Here are just a few of the subjects Black covers in the 372 pages of the book:

Human-engineered food, mass killings, recent US military conflicts, germs and pandemics, human aggression, bell-shaped curves, environmental pollution, climate change, weapons of mass destruction, Chinese aggression, alternative facts, the modern ego, drugs in our lives, the influence of evangelical Christianity, the longing for ownership of land, history, and President Donald Trump.

So how in the world could Black write about all those subjects in one work? What kind of book could offer such commentary and opinions on so many subjects?

To say the least, it is a very unusual book. The author describes it as centering on "humans' inability to control their pointless, violent aggression."

Set in 2084, the two main characters are an older sage-like teacher, and a younger student learning about the history of humans on Planet Earth and about the human-machines that have evolved with the technological and scientific revolutions that have taken place in the last 400 years.

Both the Sage and the Student are what is called "Cepees," the name an acronym for "changed entities, programmed for extended eons."

Cepees are not humans. They are the creatures who have evolved from humans, and they have DNA, genes, and replaced tissue body parts that allow them to live indefinitely.

And very importantly, the Cepees live very happy lives. That is what they are programmed to do.

Rather than writing a dystopian novel, popular today, Black has written a utopian fiction in the sense that the characters are happy. The Sage and the Student are content with themselves and with the Cepee world in which they live. There is even a love angle to the plot as Black brings to the ending of the story an attractive young female Cepee who is about to enter into a relationship with the young student.

However, I have still not told enough of the plot to illustrate how Black is able to cover so many topics. The answer is fairly simple in that the Sage is teaching the Student about the past, the 100,000 years of Homo sapiens becoming the dominate creatures on the Earth.

Teaching is a much simpler task in the future, according to Black. The brain of a Cepee can be uploaded with millions of files about whatever a Cepee wants or needs.

However, Black's story also contains an old fashioned way for all Cepees to learn. Everyone has a sage with which to consult about life's matters. The Sage in the novel is a Socrates-like figure who asks questions and answers questions, thus, the "dialogues" of the title of the book. Put another way, the Sage is like Siddhartha, the Buddha. In the training the Student gets from the Sage, an artificial intelligence (AI) hologram occasionally appears to add levity and other perspectives to the dialogues.

There is a chronology to the learning that the Student has—the early encountered ideas are developed in later episodes—however, after the opening chapters, a reader can move forward and backward in the text to read about whatever he or she chooses as the subjects of the conversations. Those subjects are suggested in the titles to the 65 different chapters.

Yes, "The Cepee Dialogues" has 65 chapters, which suggests some things about the book's style. Black writes in simple prose, as in what a reader might encounter in emails and on Facebook.

Here are a few sentences from Chapter 35 entitled "Bombs Awry and Bombs Away":

"The Student Cepee has been endowed with genetic manipulations designed to give him a positive outlook on life. After all, who could not feel positive about life if one's living was one of security and one of infinity? A time without end, forever lounging in a metaphorical hammock with lemonade at one's side. It was a pleasant way to think about aging, as old age death did not exist.

"Nonetheless, the immediate and all-consuming job of this young being is to learn about his ancestry. He could indeed lounge on lawn furniture and take in drinks, courtesy of his comfortable life style. But he is not focused on lounging and drinking.

"He is a special Cepee. He is consumed with learning more about his ancestors who lived long ago. In his consideration, it is his job to improve the Cepees. After all, part of this process of his special curriculum is to learn about humans in order to improve himself, but in his mind, to also improve his race."

To conclude this Last Frontier, one final note about Uyles. Back in the 1980s, I met Uyles for the first time when we had dinner together in a Fort Worth restaurant high above the city's downtown streets. We were both there attending and giving talks at the annual gathering of the Texas State Historical Association. I think I will never forget the interesting conversation we had that night about life and about writing.

Following his life of writing since then has been instructive and enjoyable.

His *The Cepee Dialogues: A Modern Fairy Tale* ought to be on American best-seller lists.

Long ago and far away: As a young boy Uyles Black stands between two towering figures in Lea County history. On the right is the late Ross Black--coach, college teacher, school superintendent, county commissioner, and UD's brother. On the left is Bill Lee, rancher from a pioneering family, businessman, and former State Senator for Lea County.

