

Dear Dave:

This was written March 3, 2004:

I strolled into the office yesterday morning and, first thing, pulled up the latest digest of the Cerebus Yahoo group e-mail list (they come to my address in digests of twenty-five messages each instead of one at a time). This is the slow time of year at my job, so reading through the mailing list is usually just about the right speed for filling in the gaps between interruptions from the phone or co-workers (you know, the job). One of the first subject lines I see is that Pam got her subscription copy of #300. Now, typically, my subscription issues have arrived a day or two after copies show up at my local shop. Since yesterday was Tuesday, I didn't really have my hopes up. Still, I dutifully went to the post office on my lunch break (just like I do every day), and after twisting my key in the lock to my mailbox, realized that a white mailer from Aardvark-Vaneheim was in fact lodged into the somewhat less-than-comic-book-sized space.

And inside was #300.

Something did fell, and it was Cerebus off of his bed!

I have been scrambling over the past month to figure out how one could possibly tie up everything you laid down in #299 in only twenty pages. Well, now we know one simply doesn't! Hell of an ending (no pun intended). The quote from II Maccabees has me reading the Apocrypha again. Your prayer has me considering the nature of verse-chorus-verse.

Over the last month or so I've undertaken a complete re-reading of your entire 6,000 page series. I was about half-way through the Latter Days phonebook as of yesterday. My reading has slowed down considerably now that I'm into the thick of the Cerebexegesis. Not slowed for lack of interest, but slowed because each page is now considerably more dense -- I recall spending the better part of an hour with the little tiny type of each issue as it was coming out monthly. This book is a long haul. I will go on record as saying that I did find this whole section worthwhile, even as it was coming out, and it has only improved with age. I will admit that about halfway through the Cerebexegesis, I started to wonder what your game was; why it was going on so long. But it continued to get more interesting as the pages went by. Then cameth #289/290. The stretch between #280 and #300 gives real weight to the last few pages of the final issue. It's the same motif that's been repeated in front of Cerebus since at least the Judge; but, like a moth to a porch light, Cerebus sends himself hurtling towards it without a second thought... that is, until it's too late. Harrowing!

This series has meant a lot to me over the last twelve or so years. With each monthly issue, Cerebus has most often been a retreat from the real world (as you say, those quotes have to be there) into the Real World that is, a world that at least offers some semblance of coherence, and at least resembles the world I see with my own eyes. There were many afternoons and evenings in my teenage years when re-reading a stretch of single issues, with their attendant Notes From the President, letters and/or essays, restored some sense of balance to a fractured and assaulted intellect. When things didn't make sense, you made sense. For that, thank you.

I am working on a letter to be submitted in support of the Cerebus Archive, as per your request in issue #300. I will send it along to you once it is completed. If I get it finished

up before I seal this package (I had intended to mail this today, but upon reflection, I'm going to have to rustle up a larger envelope than I have here at my desk) I will include it in this mailing.

And hey, while I've got your ear, I do have some questions/observations (you decide which is which) about #300:

1.) I of course recognize the flashback panels, but it appears that you redrew the images, even though they are duplicates of scenes that actually exist in previous issues. Just out of curiosity, did you reference these, or were you working from memory? What influenced your decision on this?

2.) Cerebus' spirit has both his ears and his medallions, but no sword and no helmet.

3.) Suentus Po, along with most of the rest of the major cast of Cerebus, is present in the light, but Cirin and Serna are both missing. Were they meant to be inferred, and perhaps suggested by the vague figures that fade off into the distance in the lower corners of the group shot, or is there some other message here? I suppose it could be as simple as the fact that Cerebus is unlikely to be attracted by the appearance of Cirin. Would hardly be the kind of bait one would select to get him to come towards one, would it?

4.) Suentus Po is present in the light. In your answer to my letter in #294, you seemed to be somewhat defending Po's philosophical pronouncements, as given in Reads. Am I correct in inferring that his inclusion in the light is in keeping with the point that Cerebus' relationship with God must necessarily be a personal relationship, and therefore not something which could be mediated by any of the number of other characters that Cerebus has found himself attached to over the course of the story? That Cerebus would be committing folly by seeking redemption through Rick, Jaka, Bear, or Po? Po never said anything at all about God, that we (the readers) heard.

It's been a great ride, Dave. Thanks for hanging in there.

I had printed out some back-and-forth between Allen Rubinstein and myself from The Comics Journal website, but didn't have an envelope large enough to accommodate it. Next day I cruise into the post office and there's a sixteen page letter from you in my mailbox. This has happened before, with my September 9, 2003 letter, as the day after I sealed up the package (but before I'd managed to put it in the mail) the receipt for my back issue order came, with your note that my letter would be published in Cerebus #294. I sent the September 9 letter on anyway, unedited.

Now, on to your letter, which arrived March 4.

First of all, thanks for writing back. My letters to you in 2003 probably didn't come off the way I wanted them to. Judging from your responses, it didn't seem like I was sparking much thought, or interesting you in much that you figured needed to be re-examined in any great detail. I want to apologize here if anything I wrote came across as a personal

attack. Such was certainly not my intention. It was my hope that you'd be willing to address some of the specific points I raised, as I honestly saw problems in some of what you'd put forward. I understand now that you're somewhat past the figuring out what I believe stage and well into the phase of planning your first campaigns into real world territory, if your statements that you will be writing to Canadian officials and beginning to take a hand in Kitchener-Waterloo local politics are anything to go by. It was my misconception that your period of figuring out what I believe might have been viewed as an ongoing process, as being a fundamental facet of the nature of perception itself -- but I understand now that this view of Reality seems to strike you as unsound. Fences are not for sitting, there's no use writing manuals detailing how to sit on a fence without hurting one's ass, and so on. There's nothing I can (or would) do to undermine your freedom to arrive at your own conclusions. It's your life, and obviously you make your decisions to the best of your ability. You've certainly demonstrated that you can stay on the yellow brick road. I wish you well on your journey, and with whatever you may find at its end. I want to make clear that I have little interest in winning you over to the team you still seem to think that I'm on. That said, I'd still like to present my observations on your latest (sixteen page!) letter.

1.) The Founding Fathers. I made the same intuitive mistake as you about the meanings of words like deism and theism, when I first started collecting my thoughts about the Founders in writing. Fortunately, someone called attention to my error. From the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition:

*deism:*

*n.*

*The belief, based solely on reason, in a God who created the universe and then abandoned it, assuming no control over life, exerting no influence on natural phenomena, and giving no supernatural revelation.*

*theism:*

*n.*

*Belief in the existence of a god or gods, especially belief in a personal God as creator and ruler of the world.*

As you can see, the actual meanings of the words are reversed from what we both (initially) guessed, just from looking at them. As I found out, theism is the more vague of the two terms, and does not actually imply a theology, while deism does. Now, in the context of the American Revolution, most all of the leading Founders were associated with deism, as politically it was a sort of safe area outside the mainstream of Christian thinking. (Curious that it would be rather controversial with Christians today, but such is politics.) I find in the historical writings that theism is rarely used which makes sense, since most all of them went to great pains to distance themselves from atheism, and, generally, theism was otherwise assumed as a given. Few were in a rush to contradict that assumption publicly, for obvious reasons. That said, it should be clarified that the

belief in (a) God was not always (or even often, in the case of the Founders) synonymous with a reverence for Scripture. Deism itself was largely a concern which eschewed the supernatural aspects of the monotheistic religions, and posited that (the) God did not interfere directly in human affairs. This sets it quite apart from the common tenets of practically any major Christian sect of the era. The language used to frame many of their philosophical musings could be construed by Christians of many different denominations as fitting in with their theologies, while still allowing the Founders to speak their mind with a clear conscience. The fact that so many of them took oaths as Freemasons should demonstrate that if they bothered to give it any thought at all, their loyalties were not directly compatible with the great mass of Christianity, as it was known to average citizens of the day. I think they gave it a lot of thought. The writings they left behind confirm their positions much clearer than any modern interpreter I've seen so far.

You said that you'd doubt if most of the Founders were dismissive of Scripture, or of organized religion in general, and that to suggest otherwise is revisionism. I would assert that the opposite is true. Study of the issue is complicated by the language used by all parties, as I mention above, but study it I have, and what I found is that most of the Founders were not Christians in the sense that Christians today would recognize them as such. This is not say they were all atheists, but, again, I think you'll find that their conception of (the) God is something wholly different than that which is informed by the Scriptures. This has been evident from the historical record which they themselves left behind. You can read most of it in their own handwriting at the Library of Congress. This is not revisionism.

We've already established that Thomas Paine, author of *Common Sense*, *The Rights of Man*, and *Age of Reason*, rejected both Scripture and organized religion. I won't repeat myself on him here. If you really are interested in the the origins of the United States, you really owe it to yourself to investigate this man's works (as well as the other literature surrounding the Revolution, for that matter). I'll include the syllabus I sent to the Cerebus Yahoo group in this package.

It's a running joke in American politics that everyone claims Thomas Jefferson. Republicans and Democrats. Theists and atheists. It's important to note that no one tries to ignore Jefferson's contribution, or ostracize him the way they did Paine, who was considerably more overt in his declaration of allegiance to Reason over Scripture. I believe most of the Founders were quite wary of floundering the way Paine so famously did, which is why they edged away from him in later years, especially after the publication of *Age of Reason*. By walking a narrow road of vague but assertive public statements regarding their philosophies of (the) God, they were able to maintain the trust of competing schools of thought. Atheists point out Jefferson's many quotes (often taken out of context) about the wretched nature of Christianity, as constituted by priests and the hierarchy of the church. Theists point out that Jefferson collected his own version of the Bible, and frequently remarked (though these quotes are often taken out of context as well) that Jesus Christ presented the system of morality [which was] the most sublime... ever taught.. I found out very quickly, in my studies, that the best way to figure out what these men really thought is to read their own words:

*Letter From Thomas Jefferson To William Short.*

Monticello, April 13, 1820.

DEAR SIR,

*Your favor of March the 27th is received, and as you request, a copy of the syllabus is now enclosed. It was originally written to Dr. Rush. On his death, fearing that the inquisition of the public might get hold of it, I asked the return of it from the family, which they kindly complied with. At the request of another friend, I had given him a copy. He lent it to his friend to read, who copied it, and in a few months it appeared in the Theological Magazine of London. Happily that repository is scarcely known in this country, and the syllabus, therefore, is still a secret, and in your hands I am sure it will continue so. But while this syllabus is meant to place the character of Jesus in its true and high light, as no impostor Himself, but a great Reformer of the Hebrew code of religion, it is not to be understood that I am with Him in all His doctrines. I am a Materialist; he takes the side of Spiritualism; he preaches the efficacy of repentance towards forgiveness of sin; I require counterpoise of good works to redeem it, etc., etc. It is the innocence of His character, the purity and sublimity of His moral precepts, the eloquence of His inculcations, the beauty of the apologues in which He conveys them, that I so much admire; sometimes, indeed, needing indulgence to eastern hyperbolism. My eulogies, too, may be founded on a postulate which all may not be ready to grant. Among the sayings and discourses imputed to Him by His biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the most lovely benevolence; and others, again, of so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism and imposture, as to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same Being. I separate, therefore, the gold from the dross; restore to Him the former, and leave the latter to the stupidity of some, and roguery of others of His disciples. Of this band of dupes and impostors, Paul was the great Coryphaeus, and first corruptor of the doctrines of Jesus. These palpable interpolations and falsifications of His doctrines, led me to try to sift them apart. I found the work obvious and easy, and that His past composed the most beautiful morsel of morality which has been given to us by man. The syllabus is therefore of His doctrines, not all of mine. I read them as I do those of other ancient and modern moralists, with a mixture of approbation and dissent...*

Can we agree that when Jefferson once referred to himself as a Christian, that he meant something other than the normal conception of Christian? I mean, he rejected the divinity of Christ!

It might interest you to check out a copy of Jefferson's *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, which was his distillation of what he found valuable in the New Testament.

The Beacon Press edition (sold as The Jefferson Bible) is still in print, and comes with an interesting example of the kind of skewed-context mangling of Jefferson's message that I mention above, in the form of an introduction by F. Forrester Church, son of former U.S. Senator Frank Church. He paraphrases Jefferson's April 21, 1803 letter to Benjamin Rush, without indicating the source (in fact, without indicating that he's paraphrasing Jefferson's actual words), and makes it sound as if Jefferson is affirming his standing as a Unitarian Christian (Church is a Unitarian minister). He gives the same treatment to Jefferson's Syllabus of an Estimate of the Merit of the Doctrines of Jesus, Compared with Those of Others, which he at least bothers to mention specifically in the course of his paraphrasing it (the text of both documents are enclosed in this package). On March 10, 1804, Jefferson received his copies of The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth back from the bindery. This was the prototypical version of the work that would grow into Life and Morals, and carried a blurb on the cover page indicating that it was an abridgment of the New Testament for the use of the Indians, unembarrassed with matters of fact or faith beyond the levels of their comprehensions. This quote has been extracted and used by theists to prove that Jefferson only whittled down this version of the Bible as a way to help the Indians convert to Christianity. And yet, Jefferson's own words about his work contradict this. Again, taken in the context of the time, it is generally accepted by most scholars (and is supported by Jefferson himself when he stated on numerous occasions that his work on the Jesus material was primarily intended for his own edification, and for circulation amongst his peers) that this reference to the Indians was a wry jab at his Washington colleagues, who Jefferson had referred to with similar language in speeches on several occasions. He thought they could benefit from the moral education, themselves.

Over the course of the next seventeen years -- abandoned after the death of Rush, but spurred on by a renewed correspondence with John Adams, who expressed his interest in the subject matter -- Jefferson produced a multilingual compilation of Jesus' sayings. Stripped of the supernatural and miraculous details, and limited to Jesus' direct philosophies, which Jefferson intended to hold up as exemplary, the original text appeared with four columns to a page, each depicting the Greek, Latin, French and English renderings of the verses he chose to translate into his compendium. Jefferson made it clear that he was stripping out the extraneous parts of the Scripture that he did not believe in, but for some reason the fact that this book exists is still touted by theists who insist that it is proof Jefferson was a Christian. Knowing that many of these people have read the source material, as I have, I find the claim to be intentionally misleading. Why don't they simply present the facts? And why can't the atheists accept that Jefferson did believe in a supreme being? Could it be that Jefferson's avowed theism wasn't enough to put him squarely in either of their camps?

Then there is the matter of the collected letters between Jefferson and John Adams. These reveal in startling clarity many of their thoughts on religion, God, politics, etc. Usually only extracts of these are cited, or quoted, by anyone trying to claim Jefferson for their team.

I think the record supports my supposition that Jefferson rejected both Scripture (in terms of it being remarkable for its supernatural connection with [the] God) and the very concept of organized religion (perhaps similar to your own abstention from attending public services). Contrary to what many Christians say, Jefferson was not a religious man. But also, he was not an atheist. That position is not especially useful in politics.

(An interesting side note [possible contender for the Belief category?]: Jefferson's compilation in many ways remarkably resembles the structure of the presumed Q documents. Freemasons for centuries have claimed to be privy to secrets involving the origins of Christianity and the Scriptures. Jefferson was a Freemason. Extrapolate.)

Do you want more? Want me to write up Adams, Franklin, Washington, or others? I'm covering some of this in *Oh Christ*, but the depth of the coverage is not solidified yet. Maybe I should save some of this for the comic.

Your assessment of these Factual category items is of course up to you.

I found your suggestion that perhaps the book of Job predates the current cycle of civilization fascinating. In terms of items like the Sphinx at Giza, it's fairly clear that some artifacts still extant probably predate the last deluge. Of course, the age of these items is also hotly disputed amongst those who devote study to the respective topics. Egyptologists insist that the Sphinx was erected by the Pharaoh Khafre, while geologists insist that the weathering of the stone (aside from the head, which seems to have been replaced more than once) places its origins many thousands of years prior to Khafre's reign. I've found that most fields of science and history are heavily politicized. When doing your own research, you'll often find that the popular books on various subjects are strikingly biased, even though that bias might not be evident from a cursory reading. Hence the need to examine primary sources. In the case of Egyptology (or Scriptural study, eh?), this represents a problem, since there are many ancient languages which have to be learned even order to take the first step. There's no reason to think that translations of ancient documents are any better, on average, than translations of fictional works from the modern era. This isn't to say translations are useless. Just that when I read a translation, I have to remain cognizant that there are layers between myself and the primary source. I don't consider a translation a primary source. I know, more Facts.

I hear what you're saying about relinquishing the reasoning part of your brain and submitting to the will of God. However, I'm not sure how to reconcile this notion with having a conscious mind at all. The world view you advocate seems to surrender Free Will by way of eradicating the left brain, rational, active part of the personality completely. Human society used to be structured on this notion, and I have trouble seeing what separates this from the kind of emotion-based chaos you view as harmful to our current civilization. Have you read Julian Janes' *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*? In it, he suggests that primitive man's mind was divided between very active, though opposed, lobes. As the right brain talked to the left brain, the left brain would receive and interpret the information in the form of auditory and visual hallucinations. Modern man has somehow managed to integrate these two hemispheres, such that the ongoing dialog between both is absorbed into the conscious mind and flows naturally. It's all very interesting, but I'm almost certain you'll see my referencing science as sort of prescribing you with a medication that I hope will make your hard questions go away. Rather, I'm trying to ascertain some inkling of your awareness of advances in neurology, even as it stood in the 1970s. I find your hard questions extremely worthwhile to consider. How about Daniel C. Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*? This is one of the basic texts on understanding the mechanics of perception, as those mechanics are understood today. I was surprised to find that many

of the concepts and questions I came to in my own pondering on these subjects had been examined, in depth, in the existing scientific literature. I do think there is some value in determining what prior work has already been done. It doesn't mean I have to share their conclusions.

The parallels between submitting to the will of God and Aleister Crowley's proscribed methods of realizing one's personal will, as outlined in his *Book 4*, are striking. But then, the processes themselves, and their physiological and psychological effects, are nearly identical. The realization of the will through disciplining the behavior of the self is the foundation of most every system of personal enlightenment ever devised. From Freemasonry to Tibetan Buddhism to a bare existence playing chess or drawing comic books. The will is posited as an opposing, or overriding, higher form of the self, which is aspired to by the lower, semi-conscious personality most of us experience on a day-to-day basis. The process of awakening this higher self is the ongoing process of actually becoming conscious gaining awareness of the interplay between the right and left hemispheres, and operating on sensory input at some level above the knee-jerk, reflexive reactions we stomp through when less focused. In other words, transcending mere emotional reactions to what goes on around us in the everyday world. This was the original subtext of alchemy. Transmuting the raw stuff of the human personality into figurative gold. Little wonder it was so dangerous to the religious/political axis of the medieval age.

And so, which is the natural state? A fully integrated mind, or multiple, competing clumps of semi-conscious chatter running back and forth, creating pretty patterns on our thoughts? I'm not sure we can answer that., but it does imply another question: Is this so-called natural state the one we should be pursuing? That could depend on which one you think is most natural.

But I can hear you asking now. What do you believe?

2.) Marxist/Feminism. Now let me see if I can turn some of my trees right-side-up. I am not a Collectivist and I am not a Socialist. And, well, what can I say? I'm sure you'll disagree with my self-characterization (though why outside of the fact that you seem to assume everyone who is not an overt theist can safely be regarded as such I cannot figure out). I agree with most of what you put forward in 2.), with the minor exceptions that I don't share your presumption that everyone in the world except for you is a Socialist (what you call liberalism is such a vague term as to be meaningless -- including, as it does, virtually every human being on the face of the Earth), and that you sweep right over the question of exactly what a government's authority to tax its population is that is, the question of from whence that authority is derived (which, I would assert, can only be the will of the people, as expressed in the design of the United States through the election of Congressional representatives, who regulate taxation).

I do not believe that the way that you improve things is by taking this pool of money that everyone has kicked into and applying gobs of it to social ills as a means of eradicating those social ills is a good idea. I do not believe that if we put all of our resources into the pot, and no one can actually own anything, there will be enough in the pot to take care of all of us. I agree with you that both assumptions are ludicrous. I also agree with you that there has been a (significant!) erosion of Conservatism (particularly since WWII, though for your part you don't specify a timeframe). I am not a supporter of national health care, or nationalized anything, for that matter. But you (again) indulge in sweeping me over

onto that side. I am not on that side. I agree with you (and in fact, I'm the one who suggested) that Kennedy's liberalism was not what we would call liberalism today. Certainly, you wouldn't lump Kennedy in with what you call liberals today, would you? In fact, Kennedy pumped lots of tax dollars into the arms industry over the objections of the Conservatives of his time. (He also reduced troop funding and diverted money towards the development of spy satellites and the space program, which perhaps goes some distance towards explaining the friction between himself and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but that's another discussion entirely.) I don't think Democrats today would vote for Kennedy, if he stuck to his guns, Thomas Paine style, and asserted his positions openly. This is how far we've drifted. Yes.

Your observations about the transitional nature of the tentative Socialism both our governments indulge in (and it is becoming less tentative, day by day) are astute. I agree that we're either heading in one direction or we're heading in the other, and it does appear that where we're headed is even further through Socialism into whatever lies on the other side. There is no final destination of polite, tastefully appointed half-Socialism. Socialism doesn't work that way.

But I don't call myself a Conservative. Your team doesn't call me a Conservative. Your team is corrupt, and morally bankrupt, itself. They lie, and they cheat, and they have betrayed the mission that the Founders and you have laid out for them, and when they get caught they try to blame anyone but themselves for their actions. I don't really think your team would even claim you, if all your cards were on the table. Why is that? Well, how many non-Christians do you know who identify themselves as Conservative? How many Conservatives do you know who are willing to claim non-Christians? You yourself assume I am not a Conservative solely because you've pegged me as a not-Christian. There's certainly nothing else in anything I've written to you that would indicate my politics, outside of my asking questions about the veracity of U.S. foreign policy (is questioning our actions abroad evidence of non-Conservatism?). This is a long way from the publicly vague theism of Jefferson. The fact is that the theocratic despotism you condemn in Middle Eastern countries has swallowed Conservatism whole, here in the West. True Conservatism was the first casualty of the Cold War, beginning with our covert political warfare against the Soviet Union before the end of WWII. When the CIA decided that Christianity, in all of its contradictory, bi-polar promotion of vice and virtue was the wedge they would use to fight the cultural battle throughout the world, the U.S. lost its moral high ground in terms of promoting religious freedom. And we allowed those tactics to sully the soil here at home, as well. The Soviet Union then funded Feminist and Civil Rights groups in a bid to destabilize the West. Martin Luther King, Jr. took money from the Communists. As you say, the State Department was riddled with Communist dupes. Unfortunately, Americans were all too happy to combat Soviet totalitarianism by erecting our own, competing totalitarianism, founded on the very affronts to human liberty that America was created to abolish from this continent in the first place. With characteristic American efficiency, we dominated the competition. Today, the United States is the greatest power the world has ever known, eclipsing Britain, Byzantium, Rome, the Mongul empire, or any other bureaucratic superstate you'd care to point out. This was not achieved at no cost to the founding principles. In fact, in many ways, we've been absorbed by that which we were fighting against. The abyss stared back. Henry Kissinger pointed this out in 1972.

There is a great yawning chasm between social Conservatism and fiscal Conservatism.

The two are by no means mutually exclusive, but this, for example, is one reason why Norman Mailer is able to identify himself as a Left Conservative with a straight face. I would not contradict it if someone were to identify me as a fiscal Conservative but I no longer wish to be conjoined with an inclusive group who have taken it as their mandate to enforce their notions of so-called social Conservatism upon the greater body of the population of my country, and by virtue of our place as the central global power, the world. I do believe that if you identify publicly with a group, that you have a responsibility for the actions of that group for as long as you continue to identify yourself as one of them. Social Conservatism, as a function of government, is in itself contrary to the larger theme of general Conservatism as you seem to support it. So-called social Conservatism is nothing more than a thin plastic tarp pulled over plain-vanilla totalitarianism. I don't believe that coercion is justified in the service of enforcing so-called societal norms any more than it is justified in the service of promoting minority viewpoints. Coercion is coercion.

So ask yourself again what is the basis of this taxing authority in the first place? And how do foreign adventureism and cultural warfare figure into it? My contention is simply that the first question must be answered before we can even consider the second one. We both know that discussion of these hard questions will not be forthcoming in modern politics. But meanwhile, we continue to drift away from the founding principles.

No, I am not a Socialist or a Marxist.

And they can pry my copies of *Cerebus* from my cold, dead hands.

Feminism. I don't subscribe to it. However, I'm sure my criteria for what constitutes Feminism is somewhat narrower than yours. I don't, for example, assume atheists are Feminists, just because they're atheists.

3.) I agree with your observations on the utility of the military strategy being pursued by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq, when viewed as a don't do this again kind of warning to other potentially hostile states. I see our actions having precisely the effects you outline (though I'd stipulate that there is a lot going on behind the scenes which we are not immediately privy too for example, the legwork in leaning on Khaddafi and prompting his immanent concessions was mainly handled by the British, over a number of years prior to 9/11). Still, I don't agree that 9/11 was the primary motivating factor in why those countries were invaded by the United States. Sure, I think 9/11 was the primary reason Congress approved the first and (to a lesser extent, the) second invasions so quickly, and certainly 9/11 gave the Bush administration its chance to shuck off its campaign promises of no nation building, but I believe that both of these regimes were targeted by Bush and his handlers prior to 9/11. I don't confuse popular support of a policy with the intellectual origins of a policy. And besides, there is documentation.

My observation is that the re-arming of Japan and now the slow circle we're forming around China has more to do with ensuring a strategic position against Communist East Asia in the new century than it does with any real fear about radical Muslim strikes against the United States. This has been in the works for a very long time. Once we take Iran, or Iran's regime is overthrown, or becomes friendly to us, we'll have an unbroken landmass between Iraq and Afghanistan. Similarly, North Korea will form the northern flank. The permanent military presence in Iraq, which supplies almost all of Japan's, and much of the rest of Asia's oil, is an ideal staging ground to balance the burgeoning

problems in China to the east, with the press against Palestine and Syria and Saudi Arabia on the west. Even in merely economic terms, controlling China's access to Iraq's resources is a major victory. Are you familiar with the Project For the New American Century? I'm enclosing their mission statement, which includes a list of their leading members. You might find it interesting to read up on the group's foreign policy recommendations which were made public prior to 9/11. These same men formed the core of Bush's group of advisers even while he was still campaigning against nation building.

Notice how the U.S. responded to China's announcement that they planned to put men on the moon by 2010, and on Mars by 2025?

Now, you can say that these views put me on the other team, but I can only believe what I see to be true. I think we're both trying our best here. I too am willing to move items between categories when presented with convincing evidence. But that's the key it has to be convincing evidence. In other words, I don't think it's reasonable to juggle allegiances out of boredom.

You say that you can't imagine living inside a brain that would entertain the hallucination that the Joint Chiefs of Staff would authorize shooting innocent Americans on the street. The documents referenced in Body of Secrets were obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, through the United States Government. I mean, that was the source of the documents. Is that revisionism? It's true that the existence of contingency plans does not mean those plans were ever put into action, or were even known to exist by the men in charge. However, Bamford makes the case that Eisenhower signed off on these specific plans (Operation Northwoods). Kennedy, to his credit, was outraged by the mere suggestion, when it was put to him. This may have been the genesis of his rift with the Pentagon, who began to think they'd been suckered by Why England Slept. I mean, didn't he have the resolve to do what had to be done to fight the Communists? A few random Americans was a comparatively small price to pay, when weighed against the potential casualties of a nuclear exchange. Right? That's definitely not squishy pink.

Still, I'm not quite sure I parse the following sentence correctly: If you really think the Joint Chiefs of Staff would authorize the shooting of innocent people on American streets, then I think your problem is fundamental disloyalty to your fellow citizens, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff are. Does this mean to say that even believing such a thing was possible is being disloyal? Is this not the same office of the Pentagon which lied to Kennedy about the Soviets on Cuba, and tried to press him into a first strike that would have resulted in the destruction of (at least) the Western Hemisphere? In 2002 it was revealed that Kennedy had concrete evidence the long-range warheads everyone was most afraid of (and which could have reached Seattle) were on Cuba, and that a first strike invasion by the United States would have resulted in their being launched. It was also to Kennedy's great credit that he held to what he knew to be right, and overruled the Joint Chiefs' recommendations to invade anyway. They were of course very unhappy (transcripts of Kennedy's secret [as in, he didn't tell anyone he was recording their meetings] Missile Crisis tapes reveal that Pentagon officials discussed how they were going to lie to him while they were alone in the situation room thinking no one would hear what they were saying). Forty years later, Kennedy's distrust of the Joint Chief's was vindicated publicly, as documents surrounding the Missile Crisis were finally declassified. The logic you are apparently positing here does not work. A man does not

become honest when he's appointed as a Joint Chief. He is expected to be honest before he is appointed. This smacks of the no Englishman could have committed these crimes approach to solving the Ripper murders. It was wrong-headed then and it is wrong-headed now.

So yes, I suppose I am capable of suggesting the unthinkable. I am capable of entertaining the notion that the Joint Chiefs could approve shooting innocent civilians on the street. The National Guard did open fire on civilians just a few years later, at Kent State. It is impossible for me to ignore the fact that under 4,000 lives (the current tally for the 9/11 attacks added with the sum total of American lives lost in the War on Terror to date) might be considered worth it (as Clinton's Secretary of State Madeline Albright remarked, while discussing the 500,000 Iraqi children whose deaths were attributed [speciously, in my opinion] to U.S. sanctions against Iraq) in a bid to contain China. I mean, it's China. Unfortunately we don't have a John F. Kennedy in the White House, but our President has resolve in spades. And 9/11 sure got us moving in Asia.

If I'm wrong, then I'm wrong. I hope I am. But I can't ignore what jumps out at me. On the other hand, would we be any better off if we weren't doing something about China?

Out of curiosity, did the National Post run a story on March 10 about CIA Director George Tenet's March 9 testimony in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee? I ask because after seeing several articles referenced on the front page of <http://news.google.com>, which is generated algorithmically from the bulk of news websites it spiders and is not edited by human beings, I checked the Post's website and even though there were other current stories, that particular event was not covered.

The Vidal and Mailer books were both disappointments to me. Vidal's was almost totally laughable sniping. It was also drawn from over a decade of his essays, which (I think) somewhat hurt the cohesiveness of his critique. However, given that the line from Bush Sr. to Bush Jr. is essentially unbroken, in terms of administration heavyweights, he might have been trying to call attention to that by including articles on multiple administrations under the same banner. Mailer's book leaned on trying to get the reader to identify with his personal 9/11 trauma, which I thought was a pretty cheap way to get the reader on your side, but did include his excellent interview from Pat Buchanan's American Conservative magazine, which identified the President as what he called a Value Conservative, which I think was a salient observation. I didn't think either writer offered sound alternatives, or even did a particularly good job of deconstructing the problems with the current status quo.

You wrote:

*I was intrigued that Koresh claimed to have identified the seven seals in the Bible addressed in John's Apocalypse and that he was in the process of breaking them, which, if true would mean that he was bringing about Armageddon. I've often wondered if that wasn't what was actually happening on another overlapping level of existence (since I take it as a given that our physically incarnated reality is just one of many and not the most important one) which required those entities in charge to supersede the rule book of our physically incarnated world in the name*

*of larger interests.*

That is intriguing. At the time it happened, the story in the news was that Koresh was not only stockpiling guns, but was molesting young girls. Anointing them as his wives. This, of course, was call to bring in the big guns. There were military troops participating in the assault on the Branch Davidian compound. Not that Janet Reno (or Bill Clinton) ever put forward any pretensions of being Conservatives, but certainly that is very far from being Constitutionally sound. Another of the many offenses for which the Clinton administration should have been investigated, leaving Monica Lewinsky completely by the wayside. The Conservative strategy, to unseat him by means of impugning his social character, however, failed. Meanwhile, there was China, and according to the Project For the New American Century, Clinton was getting way too close with them.

Fact versus Belief. I admit there is validity in what you say, here. I do intentionally reserve personal judgment on factual matters, when specifically discussing factual matters. I don't necessarily have any strongly held beliefs about the Second Law of Thermodynamics, for example. Someone might prove it wrong tomorrow; but for today, it holds up. This is the shape of the world, to me. I do try to avoid jumping to conclusions about new information until I'm satisfied that I understand what I'm looking at. Many times, I don't perceive any utility in injecting my beliefs at all. They're often irrelevant to the topic. I believe that absolutism is folly. This is evident in the school of thought emerging in the scientific community which promotes avoiding words like is in theoretical papers. It leads to sloppy thought. There really are no givens, in theoretical work. (Note here that theory does not indicate tentative guessing.)

But I suspect the larger question you're edging around here is whether or not I admit to myself that I perceive no intrinsic value in human life. Well, I don't. I don't perceive any intrinsic value in anything. To me, that's just the nature of perception. What makes something meaningful? That isn't to say these hallucinations of value aren't important; aren't useful but to me, there is no ultimate objective reality. How could there be? We'd never be able to recognize it, so in the end we can't figure it into our plans. We can pretend we are adhering to a plan that we have no hope of comprehending, but ultimately we have to operate according to what we can comprehend. Otherwise, we are not conscious. We're operating on that emotional, right-brain level of thought which isn't really thought at all. The question becomes, is your will conscious?

I realize this is at odds with your recommendation to submit to the will of what you perceive as God. I'm certain you believe you are submitting to the will of God. I am not certain how you know that you are correct. I'm not really certain why you believe that you are correct. My Facts can't account for it, outside of my observation that fasting and praying during Ramadan seems to have elicited positive results in your life. I see the fact that fasting and praying during Ramadan works for you as a good thing.

Do you realize, though, that what you are doing; concentrated meditation at regular intervals, in which you align thought, word and deed into a single, focused action; fasting; opening yourself to your higher will is exactly the kind of time-proven techniques for gaining control of and integrating the mind that have been practiced for thousands of years even outside of Monotheism?

It's not like I haven't thought about this stuff. Here's what I tried:

At sixteen, in 1993, I stopped watching television. Completely. Just turned it off. I also altered my diet such that I was eating about 1/3 of what I had been eating before. I was getting regular exercise, walking about four miles every day. I engaged in a regular regimen of focused study and meditation. You know what the results were? Thirty-nine issues of my old zine, *FUCK(tm)*. Eight issues of my old zine, *Loss*. Various miscellaneous one-shot comics and zines. Musical works. Writing. I discovered that I was content with the unfolding of the universe that in spite of the normal stress of everyday life, I was perfectly willing to fulfill my role in world, whatever it was, and to accept the consequences of putting forward my ideas, whatever they were. Was I still depressed? A bundle of hormones and emotions, feeling sorry for myself and blaming the world for my problems? Yes. But I knew what I was doing. I was aware. There was now an underlying sense that all things pass. That was the key. That whatever scheme I fit into ultimately transcended the morass in which I found myself. Today, I look at those thirty-nine issues and see a lot of muddy thinking, bad writing and silly preoccupations, interspersed with an earnest search for truth, comedy I still find hilarious, interesting design ideas, and the beginnings of the emergence of my consciousness. But the underlying contentment with my place in the world persists. The original value derived from the exercise persists. Some variation of the hard, gemlike flame you describe in *Reads*. I believe it was worthwhile.

For my trouble, on the strength of those thirty-nine issues, I was kicked out of two public high schools; threatened with murder by my first high school principal, threatened with a sexual harassment lawsuit, sent to live with my father (who still lived with his parents, ten years after his divorce from my mother); sent back to live with my mother; diverted to a psychiatric hospital on the way home from a visit, when my dad suddenly veered ten miles off course to a parking lot where my mother was waiting to make the trip; encouraged by psychologists to continue producing issues of *FUCK(tm)*; discouraged by my parents to continue producing issues of *FUCK(tm)*; recommended for college enrollment by the specialists at the school for delinquents they sent me to; and, finally, told by a team of psychiatrists that my intelligence could not be accurately gaged, before my mother relented and allowed me to enter college at the age of sixteen, at which point I moved away from home for good.

All of this time, I was reading *Cerebus*, and thinking to myself, Dave Sim's problem is that he's the smartest though hardly the best educated person he's ever met, and no one can keep up with his shifting contexts, in debate.

It was *FUCK(tm)* #17 that first prompted David W. Johnson to write to me, out of nowhere, way back in 1995, in an attempt to get me to visit his church. And I did. For years, we shared conversation on various topics, including religion and politics. I virtually forced *Cerebus* on him (though obviously aware of your work, he was more interested in *Bone*). Later David would go door-to-door here in Evansville, and somehow sell over three hundred copies of my self-published comic book, *The Stork*. We collaborated on, among other things, a short text-with-illustrations piece for local creator day at Evansville's Comic Quest store, which I've enclosed.

Now, it's not hard for me to see where I went wrong. For one thing, I failed to stick to the regimen I'd laid out for myself. Issue #39 of *FUCK(tm)* came out in 1997, and I did not complete another paper version of the zine until the end of 2003. When regular work on it had slowed down, in early 1996, I suddenly found large gaps in my time, and proceeded to fill them in with all manner of

ill-considered activities. During 1994 and 1995, *FUCK(tm)* took up almost all of my free time. Sure, eventually, other works started to take its place, like the thirteen issues of *The Stork* I managed to complete between 1997 and 2001. I also churned out a lot of music, prose and other work which most likely no one will ever see (and, truthfully, much of it is not of sufficient quality that this state of affairs greatly disappoints me). When I wasn't slaving at a series of shit jobs, ripping off friends or otherwise being an honor-roll jerk, I was diving into an intensive study of the Scripture. This may strike you as odd that I was engaging in a very serious investigation of my relationship with God at the same time that I was allowing my ethical accounts to run seriously into the red but that's how it happened. Adrift on a whole lot of Factualizing, I did, as you say, completely disregard the bigger picture the rights of other human beings. The situation with David Johnson finally made me realize this.

But, at the same time, I came to other conclusions as well. Concurrent with all of this, my studies were leading me to a point where I had to try to remove as much of the cruft from my personal philosophies as possible. It became obvious to me that subverting my rational mind to simply float along the currents of the scheme of totality was not improving my situation, but was accumulating into a circumstance which I did not really want to find myself in. I examined my life, and what I was doing with it, and realized, maybe for the first time, that I had to be responsible for what I did. For everything that I did, and do. This is of course a simple fact of life. If you do something anything -- you did it. I ignored this for the better part of my childhood. I don't ignore it anymore.

I'm pretty sure that in one of the letters I sent to you, I said:

*What I did was wrong. I've tried to pay for it.*

And well, I did. Try, that is. I want to make it clear that I did not try to evade responsibility for what I did. My *Cerebus* collection wasn't the only thing I turned over to him (at his request, mind you), and it wasn't the only thing that he eventually decided he didn't want, and tried to give back to me. I noted several omissions and misstatements in the letter from David that you forwarded to me. I have no way of knowing what his motivations for mentioning it to you were, since I didn't use his name in print, and I'm not aware of anyone else besides David and myself who know the full extent of what happened, but I do know (now) at least that when he's telling people what happened, he's not telling the absolute truth as he knows it.

The 2001 letter you printed in *Cerebus* #294 was written in its own context, and I think it's clear that I mentioned the David W. Johnson situation (though not by name) to illustrate a point that was not strictly about him, or his trauma in having had to deal with me and my problems. The fact that he wrote in, and seemed to be offended by the way I referred to him, is regrettable. It was not my intention to take a shot at him. In fact, I did not really think, when I sent the letter, that there was much chance he'd ever see it. He was not reading *Cerebus* monthly when I severed contact with him. The *What Stan Lee Means To Me* piece was something I wrote for a contest to win a copy of Tom Spurgeon and Jordan Raphael's book, *Stan Lee: The Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book*. As such, it was essentially factual, but told in a sensational (excelsior!) manner, and somewhat exaggerated to that end. By the way, they awarded me with the highest place possible to win without getting an actual copy of the book. Point taken, fellas.

I mentioned that the situation with David was considerably more complicated than had

been presented in public, and this is also true. I don't know what he's said to you about it that was not forwarded to me, but there are reasons quite beyond my own shame and regret that I no longer wish to associate with him. I'll just leave it at that.

But you know what? I'll take you up on your challenge to fast and pray at Ramadan, in 2004. I've got some reading to do before I figure out exactly how I want to do it, and exactly what my prayer will consist of, but I can see no reason not to play along. I've tried riding the random currents of totality; I've tried being guided by pure rationality; perhaps it's time to attain some further measure of discipline and to fulfill my aspirations of achieving consciousness over what exactly it is I'm doing with myself. In point of fact, I have been trying to devise an organized approach to a renewed meditation regimen for some time. Your plan sounds good to me. I can see no contradiction here. Something I've tried to get across to you is that I don't rule anything out.

In 2003, after putting on a considerable amount of weight over the years since I started working in the computer industry, I again regimented my diet, began (earnestly) working on a new comic series (the resulting *Apophenia*), and found myself dropping 1/3 of my body weight in a matter of just a few months. I began keeping a journal again; completed some musical works that I considered (at the time the esteem in which I hold these tends to fade, over time) significant; inaugurated an aggressive program of correspondence, in which I wrote to you (and others) several times; published a 100 page issue of *FUCK(tm)*; invested in real estate so as to begin the process of freeing myself from continual financial obligation; began practicing the Japanese art of *Aikido*, so as to draw my conscious mind a little closer to my physical body; and read probably close to two hundred books. Committing to something (Ramadan) and keeping a schedule sounds just about right to me, right now. I'll let you know how it goes.

You wrote:

*Your criticisms of 289/290 are interesting in a hair-splitting-sophist-is-it-a-house-of-cards-if-one-of-the-cards-isn't-where-I-think-it-should-be? kind of way.*

Well, I liked #289/290. It was a huge payoff after the long journey from #200 (and just to be clear, I think *Guys* is probably my favorite of the phonebooks -- you both seemed to be at the peak of your game in terms of pacing, polish, etc.). I think #289/290 was a high-water mark in the series. However, that can't change my assessment of the science you reference in the footnotes. I still don't understand how you reconcile the attempt to support your speculations along scientific lines with your complete rejection of scientific methodology in terms of forming those speculations to begin with.

You wrote:

*But, at the end of the day, Stephen Hawking ended up in the same situation as you have: standing so close to the Factual that he forgot why he wanted the facts in the first place. If you figure out What all the stars and galaxies actually are and What happened in the first five*

*seconds after the Big Bang that is still going to leave you with Why. Because why is where you started from. Why are there stars in the sky? Why does the earth go around the sun? Why was there a Big Bang? Science can never tell you Why because motive isn't visible or measurable. Every why question that you answer (why are there mountains? Why are there volcanoes?) leads you back to another why. And another why and another why. And the ultimate whys aren't contained in the factual category, they're contained in the belief category.*

You presuppose that the whys *matter*. Another way of looking at this is that since we cannot determine the whys, it is a waste of time, in terms of practical value, to speculate on them. It's certainly not the best use of our time to pit completely arbitrary speculations one against the other. I mean, what's the criteria? One of them makes us feel better than the other?

It should be evident to you, after reading this far in my letter, that I am capable of entertaining multiple models of reality, and considering pro and con of each. In your answer to my letter in #294, you suggested that stepping outside my own biggest world view to evaluate that world view was an illusory concept, because the fact of stepping outside the world view would become a part of the world view I was trying to assess. But this was part of my point about vocabularies. Not all of our internal, mental vocabularies are formed of all-encompassing words. Words are words. They describe things. Things are not the words which describe them. Picture the man pointing at the dog bowl, and the dog who, missing the point, runs up and sniffs the man's finger. I think that, internally, each person selects whatever tautological framework they want to perceive the world through, and chooses to believe that that tautology is representative of the larger, objective Reality they imagine exists. In turn, the tautology they have selected then defines new perceptions of that world back to them. It's a vicious cycle, and I don't think many people ever become aware of the process. I concede that this blind approach to perceiving the world yields results. I don't, however, think that makes it Truth. I think finite vocabularies (algorithms) can be applied to finite problems. The definition of a problem contains its own solution.

You wrote:

*But, I do take it as a given that if I'm examining my beliefs at the closest proximity I'm not going to be able to see facts very clearly and if I'm looking at facts at the closest proximity belief is going to be outside of my field of vision. It's analogous to the wave/particle conundrum. Both facts and belief exist, even if you choose only to believe demonstrable facts. Just as there are irrefutable facts, no matter what you choose to believe.*

*Right?*

Well, no. At the lowest level, I would tend to classify any phenomenal perceptive experience in the category of Belief. I don't have a lot of faith that Facts really exist.

Philip K. Dick says that “*Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away,*” but I think that just means he never really stopped believing in it hard enough. When we lose the capacity to cognit belief, in a very real sense, we are no longer conscious. At that point, I would say things cease to exist. No real way to find out though, is there? This, I think, was the great awakening of the Enlightenment, which lead directly to the establishment of the United States of America, that shining city on the hill.

I can appreciate your efforts to keep the record straight, with regards to all facets of the *Cerebus* project. It's been immensely valuable to read your essays over the years, and to see the kind of correspondence your work generates. You have set an honorable example for others through your refusal to compromise your professional ethics. Certainly anyone thinking seriously about the comic book industry in the 80s or 90s or 00s has had to take your achievement into consideration. I can understand your trepidation at having that achievement diminished by it being misconstrued as something other than what you intended. Thanks for clarifying.

*Collected Letters 2004* sounds great. I agree that substantiative correspondence is of course preferable. To me, this sounds like common sense. I realize, however, that this view is not shared as a mainstream opinion.

The sprinklings of Philip K. Dick in my last few letters were spontaneous excerpts from things I was reading at the time. If that little bit about his experience with what he called the *Valis* entity was interesting to you, you really should check out the trilogy of books he wrote specifically about it. You do seem to be laboring under a few misapprehensions though about his approach to, and his conclusions about, God. Specifically: “*I think Philip K. Dick got a more lucid and overpowering ker-whomp than I did more along the lines of what Riel got. Actual narration (in a feminine voice no less!). The 'rational' part I would chalk up to Dick's unthinking acceptance of what was being told him. And obviously I disagree.*” The one thing PKD never did was to accept anything without questioning it, so in this case you're disagreeing with a misunderstanding. It's not clear he ever accepted anything at all. He's *known* for not accepting things. He certainly never promoted himself as a candidate for being emulated. The very quality that makes the *Valis* trilogy important, both as a work of fiction and as a philosophical treatise, is that he examined the experience from many different angles, and was not content to concoct a simple explanation which ignored whole swaths of what he perceived, in the interest of simply making himself feel better about what was going on in his head.

Personally, I've always thought he was trying way too hard to find God in what happened to him, when the evidence for that supposition was slim, if it was there at all. He spent very many years pursuing his belief that part of what happened to him with *Valis* was that he had begun to spontaneously perceive a parallel lifetime, in which he lived as a 1st Century C.E. Christian named Thomas. He perceived this as occurring simultaneously as his life in Berkeley, California in the 1970s. Not a past life but some sort of lateral connection with past and future events. The landscape of northern California was overlain with the landscape of 1st Century Jerusalem. This was the source of much of the Koine Greek he heard running in his head. Thomas spoke to him. One of the last books PKD worked on was to have been a sort of what if story about Paul of Tarsus, and what might have happened if he'd never been converted to the cause of

Christianity. PKD hypothesized that Paul, on the road to Damascus, might have actually been contacted by Valis. A two page proposal for the book is archived on his estate's official website.

*The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick* is a collection of his essays and speeches, many of which explore the ideas behind his novels in a more direct manner. It's still in print.

You wrote: "*But what a valuable confirmation. Which I really very much appreciate. The odds of my running across it on my own were astronomically slim.*" I comprehend your larger point, and I too find it remarkable that the voice he was describing there fits your YHWH model. However, you probably want to get a little bit deeper into what PKD was actually saying before you start quoting him, or assigning him as a member of the other team. PKD did not worship Valis, and it sounds to me like you're jumping to conclusions, on very little evidence, about the snippets I quoted. However, Dick was married more times than I can count, so maybe you've got him pegged after all.

Thanks for the compliments on "Solution." That was the first story I worked on in 2003 (as I mentioned above). If I keep at it, it will probably eventually be included in a larger collection of similar short stories, in that similar vein. It was originally created with this in mind. As such, it is a piece of a larger whole. *Apophenia* #1 featured another short (4-pager), and I'm working up a new one that will probably appear in *Apophenia* #3.

Right now I'm continuing to hash out an extended story I'm calling *Oh Christ*, the first installment of which will debut in *Apophenia* #2 at S.P.A.C.E. 2004. It's done in a similar style, though as I mentioned in the my last letter, I have begun using photo reference for the drawing. I'm about twenty-five pages into it, as I write this. A month ago, I was about twenty-two pages into it. (I write these letters at work, in case you're wondering what I'm doing away from the drawing table.)

It's immensely gratifying that you seemed to understand *Cowboy Actor* #1. I don't think anyone else I've shown it to did. I didn't get any response from *The Comics Journal* or the readers of their website, and most folks I've shown it to directly either didn't make it all the way through the text piece ("*what's that supposed to be about?*") or just flat out didn't understand the message. My intention with the two stories (I sent you #2, right?) was to keep them relatively ambiguous, even within the confines of their seemingly inflammatory fictional elements. Upon a cursory examination, they appear to be simple slam pieces against George W. Bush. However, there's really not anything in either one of them that doesn't closely mirror the facts of the historical record (fictional Japanese setting aside), or reasonable extrapolations thereof. They are designed to be as close to a depiction of the Truth as I can muster, with the intention of conveying what it's like to witness this moment in history transpiring before my eyes. I find it important, on a personal level, to write my own history.

I will tell you here that I am one of those people who have attempted to defend you on the Internet. I had an exchange or two of my own with Allen Rubinstein at *The Comics Journal* website about the *Cerebus* storyline, and have put in comments on other threads (they always seem to be discussing something about Dave Sim over there). I've attempted to inject a reasoned view of your work on other sites, as well. I think part of the reason more people don't speak up for you on these message boards is that (as I've found) there isn't much point. There are as many half-baked opinions on the Internet as there are people using the Internet. Message board threads or Dave Sim is a Misogynist websites

aren't taken especially seriously, even by the people who contribute to them. I think many thinking *Cerebus* readers, even when confronted with the blatant stupidity that characterizes much of the criticism of you on the Internet, simply choose to avoid participating in such obvious drivel. It's not a lack of character on their part when they don't take the time to stand up for you; it's simple noise filtering. There are millions of pages on the Internet, and millions of topics, covered by millions of writers, with millions of different opinions. There's simply not time to refute (or even read!) everything one disagrees with. Imagine your distaste for dignifying leftist tripe with a response, magnified by many orders of magnitude. Similarly, I think the lurkers which read the *Cerebus* Yahoo group are not all lurking just because they lack the moral fiber to stand up and be counted as your readers. I lurked on that group for over a year before I made my fist post. I also skipped a large number of the messages that didn't interest me (and still do). What did interest me was some of the discussion of the storyline, and some of the discussion of ancillary topics which benefited from consideration in light of your storyline and your essays. Your observation that many on the list have convinced themselves you mean things that you don't mean is accurate, but that is also true of the people who read your book or your essays and don't participate in Internet mailing lists, as well. Not everyone is going to understand you. I'm sure I don't understand all of what you're saying. Some people will even willfully misunderstand you. As you know, this is going to be a factor any time an audience considers a piece of fiction, or any piece of writing. You can try, but in the end you cannot osmos your ideas directly into their heads. Communication doesn't work like that. Cognition doesn't work like that.

That what gets said about you on the Internet is allowed to stand as common knowledge about Dave Sim is a consequence of your not being there to defend yourself -- just like it would be in the print medium or in the television medium (all political concerns about why you'd be barred from doing so in those media duly noted). With that in mind, I had planned to send you printouts of several Dave Sim/*Cerebus* threads which cropped up on *The Comics Journal's* website over the last several months, highlighting my recent exchange with Allen Rubinstein. I decided against this, primarily because of the size of the stack of paper I ended up with. If you'd like, I will send them to you, and continue to send you printouts of what they say about you at TCJ.com. In this way I can help you try to rebuild your reputation, if only by filling you in on what's being done to it. However, I'd take all this Dave Sim talk with a gentle head-shaking motion and a family sized packet of salt. The fact that comic book experts have ostracized you is unlikely to have much impact on your reputation in the outside world. The outside world wouldn't care if comic book experts loved you, either. Ask the average adult who Alan Moore is. It may be that whatever the future culture is which finally recognizes the value of *Cerebus* will have no connection at all to the current embodiment of Comicdom Assembled. Having seen the explanations and defenses put forward by some of the people who ostensibly agree with your various controversial positions, this might not be such a bad thing. You once noted that John Lennon said there were something on the order of five people on the planet who really understood what the Beatles were about. But maybe that's a bad example.

It was great to get such an in-depth response. Thanks again for writing back to me.

Ray Earles