

Ray Earles
P.O. Box 535
Evansville, IN 47704-0535
United States of America

April 22, 2004

Dear Dave:

There is just too much news happening out there, all over the place, like some kind of incredible exploding elephant leaving a mess all over the living room. I suppose I must be adjusting to the improbable scope of it all though because I've given up; I can no longer even *imagine* trying to keep track of what all is happening, even just in the United States – much less across the world. I'm resigned, I guess. This state of affairs is troubling in that not knowing what is going on creates some difficulty in trying to *figure out* what I don't know is going on. Here in twenty minutes I will leave the office, having spent most of my free time today scanning news that I didn't get to read yesterday. That is, stories *from* yesterday that I only just got around to reading *today*. This cannot go on.

April 23, 2004

But of course, the quandary persists and will stretch into each and every tomorrow if I allow it room. If I choose, I can sacrifice a succession of continuous eight hour segments of my life to sorting through updates from Fallujah, Kandahar, Milosevic's war crimes tribunal, Diebold electronic voting machine scandals, Diebold's financial connections to GOP fund raising, the fact that Republican candidates have statistically swept traditionally set-in-stone-Democrat districts which have recently switched to Diebold electronic voting machines... etc., etc., until my face catches on fire and/or the federal income tax is repealed (you know, whichever comes first). It's 12:23pm now and I came into the office at 9:00am. I now know what the White House is telling the press about the events in Iraq yesterday, and what various third-party news sources have reported about what the White House has said; but I still haven't read the last of yesterday's *Cerebus* Yahoo group e-mail digests, or gotten more than two paragraphs into my latest letter to Dave Sim. I did however put in my subscription for *Following Cerebus* last night, in between collating new notes for part 2 of "Oh Christ" and trying to organize a stack of recently acquired books into "read first" order, so that at least is all taken care of. Every moment away from reading the news though means more of the world slipped through my fingers and lost forever. You see, the news has a way of *changing* after it's first been reported. Figures alter and details become malleable as time wears on. The further you get from the moment of impact, the more that is lost and replaced and lost and replaced again, until, are you even reading about the same thing -- *whatever* happened all that time ago? No one seems to notice this; remember; or care much either, for that matter. For my part, it makes my hair turn white. Call it what you will, but this "being well informed" is difficult work, and can quickly swallow up prodigious quantities of time without leaving much to show for the investment. Maybe it's a fool's errand.

April 26, 2004

Congratulations on cracking the 166 spot on the Diamond top 300 with *Cerebus* #300. Congratulations, also, on taking home the first annual SPACE Lifetime Achievement award. Maybe in this final year of the *Cerebus* monthly you'll claim the Eisner for Best Lettering as well. I paid particularly close attention to the evolution of this part of the book from the beginning of "Guys" forward on my last re-read, and for the last few years you've really managed some impressive innovations. Inspiring stuff that rewards closer scrutiny. It may seem like a slight that all they could come up with to nominate you for is the lettering (not, you know, the actual *writing*), but at least in this case the faint praise is based on something real. You deserve recognition for that part of your work whether you win or not. Let this serve as notice that I, at least, have recognized it. (For whatever that's worth to you.)

Back here at my job, I have avoided the news today (for the most part) in favor of catching up on some other correspondence and finalizing last minute changes to the script for "Oh Christ" pt. 2. The first five pages of this installment have been in the bag for a while; I turned away from them while I expanded the first chapter (which ultimately appeared in *Apophenia* #2) and spent a lot of time fleshing out the outline of

the overall story. In the meantime I've also completed three issues of *Cowboy Actor* (all three of which you should now have, counting the contents of this package).

I trust you've at least had some time to yourself since last I wrote. I've been squabbling with events away from the drawing board and/or keyboard. Also, I must confess, continuing to do an awful lot of reading.

April 30, 2004

I was pleased to receive another lengthy response from you dated March 19. It seems though that you forgot to sign it, and it is to my eternal regret that I, in turn, forgot to bring it with me to SPACE to have you autograph it along with my copy of *Cerebus* #77. Which would have been amusing. Lost opportunity. Margaret was gracious enough to let me cut in front of her in line after you suggested people wanting quick autographs could jump ahead (I didn't ask permission from anyone except Margaret though, who was on deck by the time I got up there – logistics!). I had already been away from my own table long enough that by the time I got back several more of my books had sold without my having been there to talk them up. In retrospect I wonder how many more I could have sold if I'd stayed away from my table for the whole day, and prospective customers had been left to figure out questions like “so what's your book about?” for themselves.

On to your comments:

I get the Cerebus Yahoo group in digest format because trying to watch for them in my inbox and sift them out one at a time is both inefficient and awkward. I can reply to the digest about individual messages as the whim strikes me (changing the subject line of my replies to match whatever it is I'm responding to), or simply scroll down through the entire batch of twenty-five messages and reply to none of them at all. This is the typical “Internet mailing list” format that has been somewhat subverted by the emergence of the World Wide Web and web-only message boards like COMICON.com's and TCJ.com's forums. In most cases I prefer e-mail.

Reading the list this way also makes it easy to skim Every Single Message, since I can breeze by and catch the gist of them all (number of lines; number of paragraphs; whatever stray words catch my eye) without having to necessarily commit to a forensic examination of each individual word. Given the somewhat chatty nature of the list at times, this (to me) is the best available approach. I don't always get around to reading every digest, every day; sometimes they pile up and I read them all at once, and sometimes I just delete the oldest ones unread and research on Yahoo's web archive if it seems I've missed something important. Since I don't watch much television and primarily avoid mainstream pop culture, I don't have a lot in common with most of the members. It really all depends on how busy my day is a work. *Ca va*.

May 3, 2004

I may have been more oblique than I intended with the references to and enclosures from the Project For the New American Century (PNAC). The point I was trying to make was that the strategy the U.S. is currently implementing in the middle east was laid out in detail in PNAC articles and whitepapers throughout the 1990s (and which continued to appear well into the present administration). It's familiar material to me; I read *Foreign Affairs*. PNAC is also *physically* well represented in the present administration itself, claiming as they do the Vice President, the Secretary of Defense, etc. I simply meant to underline the connection between *pre-9/11* agitating against Iraq in service of combating the Red Chinese threat and the *post-9/11* reaction to the new global threat of terrorism; the combating of which conveniently places us in a much better strategic position against China. It is by now well documented even in the mainstream press (and through interviews with the President given in Bob Woodward's *Plan of Attack*, which I'm reading now) that an invasion of Iraq was on the table prior to the attacks on New York and Washington, and had nothing at all to do with Osama bin Laden or his organization, which was summarily dismissed by the present administration as off-topic precisely because it didn't seem to have any connection to Iraq. The resulting attack on the U.S. mainland effectively bolstered support for an invasion which might have otherwise been a hard sell, particularly with the American people, and by extension, its Congress.

It may seem unconscionable to you, but I still think there are minds in the government which may see 3,000 American civilian deaths as an acceptable price to pay for an improved strategic position against China and other ideologically opposed powers around the globe. We've certainly stated that such civilian

sacrifices, orders of magnitude greater (in terms of the number of deaths) than the carnage of 9/11, were affordable so long as the deaths in question were *not* American citizens. Maybe the conceptual leap is too far to make safely. But since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, we have been increasingly hamstrung in trying to effectively manage global security and protect American corporations and citizens in the foreign countries (basically, all of them) where they conduct their affairs. Many thinkers have concluded that our position on the world stage, in terms of securing the peace and maintaining a defining influence on world markets, has eroded. The newly recognized threat of global terrorism provides a unique sort of “pass” which allows us to pursue various policy objectives virtually unfettered by treaty obligation or U.N. Interference. We are now free to operate -- in the open -- on a level unheard of since before the second World War, and at a level that certainly would have been impossible even five years ago. We no longer have to explain or justify anything in real terms. In the long run, this trade-off might represent a significant “bargain” in terms of American lives -- and American dollars -- saved. Again, I have to reiterate that this isn't *my* proposal, or anything I personally advocate; but it isn't hard to see the sort of logic at work here if you squint just a little, bringing the bigger picture into a sort of focus. It's not exactly inconsistent with Cold War strategy, in spite of the apparent gulf between Containment and Preemptive Strike. Now we're just free to bring formerly covert operations (or more precisely, *acknowledgment* of *formerly* covert methods) out into the open. The question from me now, is, of course, at long last, what will we *do* with this freedom to operate out in the open? How will we set an example of how a responsible nation handles itself under these circumstances? Given these allowances?

I glance over at the news today and see about four hundred stories about tortured civilian prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. There are graphic photos of blindfolded prisoners being urinated on by Western soldiers. I don't want to start jumping to conclusions, but I'll resist reading more than the headlines until I'm finished writing here.

Please find enclosed a copy of *Cowboy Actor #3*, which includes a facsimile of the Operation Northwoods proposal – signed by Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff General Lyman Lemnitzer – which was obtained by the National Security Archive at George Washington University via a Freedom of Information Act request. This document was provided to them by the United States government, and as such it is presumed to be legitimate. The existence of the document itself was touted by conspiracy theorists for decades, but only finally confirmed in James Bramford in *Body of Secrets*, which devotes a chapter to it. His discussion of the document was the excerpt I sent you.

It is known that the proposal was originally drawn up near the end of the Eisenhower administration, and was eventually re-packaged and presented to Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, but it is not known whether or not it ever actually crossed the desk of the President. However, shortly after McNamara rejected it, Kennedy ordered Lemnitzer's removal from (“promotion” out of, actually) the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff position. Both Kennedy brothers are now dead and McNamara has never commented publicly on Northwoods that I am aware of. But the more general Cuban initiative, after several abortive attempts to bring it to fruition, was eventually abandoned. We'll probably never know how many lives it ultimately cost.

The scenario I envision plays out similar to how I depicted it in “They.” By recommending such a course of action in writing – a proposal which would have to be archived and would eventually become available to the American people – the Northwoods document became a sort of attempt to entrap President Kennedy into a course of action which could later be used to blackmail him, if it turned out he suddenly decided to go cold on Pentagon recommendations down the road. This would conceivably bind him to Cold War designs and strategies which the Oval Office was already showing resistance to. During the Missile Crisis Kennedy would be told in an emergency meeting, “You're in quite a fix, Mr. President.” Just him, eh? Despite our mutual view of his position on defense (and I think we are both aware that he was very much in favor of assassinating Castro, as well as “taking care of” the problem in Vietnam), Kennedy *was* held to be squishy pink by many in the early-60s Pentagon (most particularly the career military men in the Joint Chiefs of Staff). A few even believed him to be a Communist agent. Careers (lives?) were sacrificed trying to rectify that perceived breach.

The standard “conspiracy theory” rebuttal for any reference to the Operation Northwoods document is that it was inserted into the National Archives by Israeli intelligence agents. Amazingly, this is how it is refuted. Certain phrases (“*students on holiday*,” etc.) are cited as not being American English. Of course, this rebuttal is not supported by any actual evidence other than wild speculation and is generally put forward by those with a clear agenda to “expose” undue Israeli influence over the U.S. government, while the Northwoods document *itself* was literally *provided* by the United States government. There are so many

levels of investigation, and we can so easily slice the delicate underbelly of the truth with Occam's Razor. Is it more likely the document was faked and released officially? Is it more likely the document was *real* and released officially as part of a psychological warfare operation? Well, these are interesting suppositions, but of course we can't and don't know. What we *do* know for sure is that Lemnitzer's signature appears on the damnable thing, and the government is sending it out to people as if it were legitimate. In this case, a "conspiracy" would need to be posited to explain the document away and claim it was a fake. Which conspiracy weighs more?

All of this may seem like pointless speculation, but I would reiterate that an awful lot hinges on the basic trustworthiness of our government and its leaders. Documentary evidence of contingency plans such as these provides context for how we can interpret the decisions and the statements they make today. When they put forward the impression or claim directly that plans such as these do not exist – have never existed -- but then release documents proving otherwise to the public through official channels, they quickly tie the party line into knots. As information continues to leak out about events which took place in the summer of 2001 and the lead-up to the present war in Iraq, knowledge that the Federal government has been capable in the past of considering an Operation Northwoods-style ruse takes on a new significance.

How far does one have to bury their head under the sand (so to speak) not to hear the obvious questions all this raises, echoing in their head?

On conspiracies: Since your religious and political awakenings, have you come to believe that the pronouncements of the Warren Commission report were, in fact, accurate? Supplementary question (as I suspect your answer may be complex): Which parts do you believe and which parts do you not believe?

May 10, 2004

Many planets many messiahs. That's a fascinating idea. Are you familiar with the *Book of Mormon*?

Social conservatism. Just "momentum" ? I suppose crowds will be crowds.

You write:

"I appreciate you posting your own syllabus at Yahoo suggesting that American Cerebus readers should read up on the process that went into the founding of the Republic rather than just relying on Civics classes giving a nutshell description of what resulted. I plan on doing the same with the Canadian constitution and the British North American Act."

I very much look forward to this.

You also wrote:

"(Sorry, this does tie in with faith. I think it's a given that God-fearing men believe themselves to be in a system which will function well if it is left alone for the most part because it was created by God-fearing men. Yes, there will be excess. But excess, it seems to me, brings about its own punishment. I don't think you need, as an example, to break up Microsoft into smaller companies. I think Bill Gates' hubris will accomplish that task at the appropriate time if he lets it get too far out of control once it has gotten way too big: the one does seem to follow the other. But all of the protectionist stuff, with governments trying to outdo each other in how much tax money they can pump into an industry and how many regulations they can pass preventing honest competition. Well, as long as that's the rule and not the exception – which I think is the case right now – the biggest messes in the economy will always be the industries that government is taking an active role in.)"

Microsoft is an interesting example since they contribute virtually nothing to the tax base. Even less than working women! In fairness, large corporations are given tax credits basically in recognition of the fact that

they create jobs, which never hurts an election campaign. But according to you, this will all sort itself out. Why then aren't Feminism and Fascism given equal room to breath? There are circumstances which dictate the "natural order" of things must be manually adjusted, right?

May 18, 2004

I have to apologize that this letter is taking so long to write. Today I came into the office and have so far not even looked at the news. I trust that later when I click over to <http://news.google.com>, I'll discover new developments in the Abu Ghraib saga, and new information about the context of the scandal. (I haven't read the Yahoo list for days, but I did dig out your response to the latest salvo of questions and I noticed that you pointed out the prison's administrator was a woman – as if this fact in itself explained the torture of the prisoners – while failing to mention that the normal staff of the military prison had been subverted by military intelligence, who were using such techniques on the inmates under direct orders from the Pentagon. You know, techniques that they have honed at Gitmo and had successfully exported to Afghanistan. Was the fact that the operatives responsible were not under the command of the prison's female administrator reported in the *National Post* this week?) I also assume there'll be more about Nick Berg and the somewhat suspicious circumstances of his death. Where the killers white? Why were they wearing Air Jordans? Shouldn't there have been more blood? What about those accents? Poor audio dubbing? Would you really wear a mask if you wanted to be identified? The orange jumpsuit? Last known whereabouts in U.S. custody? Both the U.S. and the Iraqi police say they never had him – except when they say that they did. And perhaps worst of all, he had supposedly been detained against military regulations and held without access to counsel. He wasn't even supposed to be there that day. But these things happen, right? To your way of thinking, should this investigation not be pursued?

Enclosed you should find a copy of the latest piece I've finished, 23. This is obviously not a comic strip, but does at least include illustrations. You've asked me repeatedly in this correspondence what I "believe" in, and well, this is a start. *This*, rather than some of the assumptions about me you seemed to have pulled out of thin air, is what I've been running away from. How does one sort it out? The only intelligible answer I can give you is that after more than twenty-six years (I'm only slightly older than *Cerebus*), I *just don't know*. This isn't so much a source of distress as an acceptance of the way things are. As you've pointed out, my perspective is necessarily limited, and as such can never encompass even that which I can conceive of abstractly. Therefore – essentially – I believe nothing. What choice does an honest person *have* but to believe nothing? What is there to believe but lies and misunderstandings (as we've marked out are the inescapable result of issuing forth thought into language)? There's nothing left. Belief is a soothing balm on the contact-burns left by reality. It is a tool which is sometimes intricately precise and at other times blunt as Thor's hammer. In either case it is a willful abrogation of totality which at its best functions as a temporary template on which to pattern plans for Getting Things Done. An example is putting blinders on a horse so that it keeps its mind on the road. This doesn't make me happy or sad. It merely is. I have acknowledged the flawed nature of my perceptive facilities, and realize quite clearly that *I know nothing*.

So where does that leave me? What *is* Truth?

Quite literally, we couldn't know even if someone tried to tell us. We cannot conceive the total entropy of the universe, at any knowable, distinguishable resolution. It will by necessity always be all in our heads; an abstract shadow; a high-altitude map of a place we'll only ever see in the book.

June 1, 2004

You've made a point of dismissing so-called "Gnostic" Christianity and its trappings, but interestingly, a lot that was uncovered with the Dead Sea Scrolls seems to lean in the direction of your own interpretations of Scripture – and perhaps *most* interestingly, your explorations of it in the *Cerebus* storyline. From the book of Enoch:

Ena I ii

12. ...But you have changed your works,
13. [and have not done according to his command,

*and tran]sgressed against him; (and have spoken)
haughty and harsh words, with your impure mouths,
14. [against his majesty, for your heart is hard].
You will have no peace.*

Ena I iii

13. *[They (the leaders) and all ... of them took
for themselves]*
14. *wives from all that they chose and
[they began to cohabit with them and to defile
themselves with them];*
15. *and to teach them sorcery and [spells and
the cutting of roots; and to acquaint them
with herbs.]*
16. *And they become pregnant by them and
bo[re (great) giants three thousand cubits high ...]*

Reference

Milik, Jazef. T., ed. *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford, 1976)
Printed book. General Collections, Library of Congress.

[<http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit/Library/enoch.html>]

Echos?

June 7, 2004

You wrote again on April 10, with comments on *Apophenia* #2, which I greatly appreciated.

As “high altitude mapping” goes, your observations on my mother are fairly astute, in that Christian mothers tend to cast themselves in exalted roles, etc. Where my account, informed as it is by actual contact with the woman, diverges from your own is here: For over ten years now I’ve had virtually no contact with my mother outside of infrequent, short e-mails and approximately one family dinner per year along with my sister and my mother’s husband (Red Lobster, for my sister’s birthday). She has basically no knowledge of my day-to-day life, and in fact has not set foot in either of my last two residences.

The core, and origin of “Oh Christ” was a series of e-mails we exchanged in 2003, in which my mother attempted to re-establish regular contact with me, taking on some amount of blame for my disillusionment with organized religion, and attempting to (I suspect) extract from me absolution for having contributed to that disillusionment. “Oh Christ” is intended as a record of my views on the subject as they stand now, being an account I can return to in the future as a marker on the highway to wherever it is I’m going (television vs. music – *Highway to Heaven* or *Highway to Hell*); and also as a rejection of the notion that I -- anyone -- can provide absolution for the sins people believe they’re committing. To me that’s just not how it works. As I figured out for myself way back in the 20th century and wrote in a song at the time, “*I’m not God.*”

A portion of my story certainly *is* going to touch on the faith (and/or lack thereof) of the Founders -- and it *is* going to be an extended section -- but that was never intended to be the central focus of the whole piece. It is instead one of several chapters meant to illustrate the lack of coherence in “common knowledge” about the historical and religious figures so frequently cited in America as exemplary role models. I mean, *institutions* are founded on these mistaken principles. I will also examine various small conspiracies and superstitions which share the notable quality of being supported by more empirical evidence than many of the more difficult to reconcile fables from antiquity; which for the most part slide by essentially unquestioned by those with incentive to believe in them. (The small conspiracies being almost universally regarded as hoaxes and myths.) My mother is enamored with the notion that “*This country was founded by Christians, and anyone who isn’t a Christian doesn’t belong here.*” Having studied the topic quite extensively over the past decade, I have to of course beg to differ.

I do appreciate your candor. I've not candy-coated my views for you either in past letters, and the rhetorical leeway is welcome room to maneuver. I take it on faith (!) that you're primarily interested in discussing ideas, at some length, and not preoccupied with seeding your present ideology as the driving motivation for your continued responses. Some rudimentary semblance of civilization may be rearing its head here.

I hope things are going well with your retirement. I look forward to the final *Cerebus* phonebook (not counting extras, ephemera, etc.), the first issue of *Following Cerebus*, and your further comments.

Almost completely divorced from the Yahoo group by now, I remain,

Ray Earles