

Dave,

In the back of *Cerebus* #293, you mention that you have no way of knowing who reads and re-reads your essays, or what ultimate (if any) thinking those essays stimulate in your audience. I appreciated your account of reading, forgetting, re-discovering, disagreeing, and then yet still deriving value from the work of Norman Mailer (or his earlier, funnier work anyway, natch). (I think *Harlot's Ghost* is worth reading; but I digress.) Sir, I for one read the essays. I think it's typical of your readers who grew up reading comics in general to prize their *Cerebus* collections, and to go back over the extra material in the individual issues even when they own the collections as well. It's probably safe to assume most of what you write gets read and then re-read, later on. I think you sell yourself short if you take the lack of response as an indication that no one is paying attention, or that the reason for that lack of response is that the entire world has written you off. The entire world does not play by those rules you've elucidated so eloquently against. You remarked once that no news was good news, when it came to the reception of a *Cerebus* storyline.

I would call VALIS a picaresque novel, experimental science fiction. The Divine Invasion has a very conventional structure for science fiction, almost science fantasy; no experimental devices of any kind. Timothy Archer is in no way science fiction; it starts out the day John Lennon is shot and then goes into flashbacks. And yet the three do form a trilogy constellating around a basic theme. This is something that is extremely important to me in terms of the organic development of my ideas and preoccupations in my writing. So for me to derail myself and do that cheapo novelization of Blade Runner -- a completely commercialized thing aimed at twelve-year-olds -- would have probably been disastrous to me artistically. Although financially, as my agent explained it, I would literally be set up for life. I don't think my agent figures I'm going to live much longer."

It's like Dante's Inferno. A writer sent to the Inferno is sentenced to rewrite all his novels -- his best ones, at least -- as cheapo, twelve-year-old hack stuff for all eternity. A terrible punishment! The fact that it would earn me a lot of money illuminates the grotesqueness of the situation. When it's finally offered to me, I'm more or less apathetic to the megabucks. I live a rather ascetic life. I don't have any material wants and I have no debts. My condominium is paid off, my car is paid off, my stereo is paid off.

At least, this way, I attempt the finest book I can write -- and if I fail, at least I will have taken my best shot. I think a person must always take his best shot at everything, whether he repairs shoes, drives a bus, writes novels, or sells fruit. You do the best you can. And if you fail, well, you blame it on your mother, I guess.

-- Philip K. Dick,
Fall, 1981

And you're almost there! You very well may be finished as you're reading this. You may receive this *before* you finish, but not read it until *after* you've finished. But maybe you're not finished. Someone posted to the Cerebus Yahoo group that as of November 25 you were working on page 20 of issue 299. This, the eleventh hour letter I forgot to write until ten forty-five, may well find its way to you too late. My reason for writing is simply to affirm that your decades at the drawing table have been worthwhile for more than just yourself. This may be small comfort, but understand that you've created something of value to the human race, on anyone's scale. Whether literature is ultimately worthwhile or not; *Cerebus* is worthwhile literature. You have inspired such notable derision only because you have first of all inspired. Don't you imagine a population of *Cerebus* readers (or former *Cerebus* readers) who will, at length, as you did with Mailer, rediscover the work after a period of inexplicably having set it aside? Thwacking themselves upon their heads. This letter isn't as well written as the last few pages of your essay in #293, but it is an attempt at tit for tat. In spite of any questions they raise (see previous letters), I for one find much to think about even in the issues packed with little tiny type.

Later in the same interview:

TZ: In earlier interviews you have described your encounter, in 1974, with "a transcendently rational mind." Does this "tutelary spirit" continue to guide you?

Dick: It hasn't spoken a word to me since I wrote The Divine Invasion. The voice is identified as Ruah, which is the Old Testament word for the Spirit of God. It speaks in a feminine voice and tends to express statements regarding the messianic expectation.

The thing with Dave Johnson is, as you might imagine, a slightly more involved situation than he elaborated. Our estrangement was wholly voluntary on my part, as factors beyond what's been related in public necessitated. It was, to say the least, surprising to find a copy of his letter to you included with my receipt for *Cerebus* #289/290, 291, 292 and 293.

[The rest of this letter was missing from my file for some reason]