

I wrote my first letter to Dave Sim sometime in the year 2000:

Dear Dave,

I was about to write you a letter in some kind of half-assed attempt to make sense of the reaction to *Tangent* (my knowledge of which consists entirely of what I've waded through at COMICON.com and the *Comics Journal* website), when I got to Sky Woodruff's letter in *Cerebus* #222 and your follow-up reply in the same issue. I am realizing that once again, there's really not much to recommend in dredging it all up.

So after re-reading *Mothers & Daughters* in its entirety, I'd been going over the individual phonebook introductions and what was left of my collection of single issues (long story), when I came to the Moore/Sim dialogue. The points concerning the preference for co-existing yet opposing belief systems without need of resorting to the torch, mobbing and stake-burning of one's ideological nemeses were well made. It's been an unfortunate recurrence in history that Authority often believes the problem with thinking people is that they are dangerously susceptible to being reasoned with, and thus possibly converted to the hated "other" side. Better to put the agitators to the sword before they muddy the waters, or so goes the logic.

I've been giving a great deal of thought to this story of yours as of late. I essentially read the *Mothers & Daughters* volumes (quite unintentionally) in reverse order, and so resisted the urge to continue back to the beginning of the series, where terrible analogies might have overwhelmed me with the notion that the Cirinists were actually *receding* from prominence; pious men who would heal wounds with ritual blades and fascinating strips of paper which accumulate in value and are inexplicably exchanged for (transmuted into?) worthless gold (which no one seems to be able to get rid of quickly enough) uncoiling in their wake. The vestigial associations between the slivers of story housed in individual issues and their *Aardvark Comment* counterparts winding an analogous, residual trail through the clumps of traumatized grey matter dangling loose in my cranium. I resisted the urge.

Instead, I looked over #266 again and started to mentally compose my "go figure" letter on *Tangent* reactions, which also ended up being doomed to reluctant abandonment. A less perceptive person might ignore such obviously symbolic false starts and continue on their present course despite increasingly numerous signs and warnings. Not so sure I'm that much different, in spite of my elaborately orchestrated self-regulatory measures.

I'm writing now, after almost ten years of silent monthly reflection, to relate a few salient points and ask a couple of spurious questions. They include:

- 1.) Under a considerable amount of duress (self-inflicted, I'm afraid), I begrudgingly surrendered my entire collection of *Cerebus* back issues (from #41 or so up, plus the odd earlier issue and one-shot special [including AV-3D]) to the redemption of my own sadly lacking moral character. You know, I used an entire longbox of AV publications to fulfill a karmic debt. Shades of the 'literature test' you once explained in *Aardvark Comment* ("If the book is heavy enough to stun a burglar..."). I owed money (and then some), and I paid it off with *Cerebus*. Being the only real comic book I still collect in any meaningful sense, it was somewhat difficult to whisk them out the door, knowingly ejecting a sizeable component of my comics reference library in the process. Then, a year and change later, the idiot tried to give them back to me! He diplomatically abandoned them at a shop we both frequent, leaving instructions to turn them over to me when next I came in. Not to be outwitted by the rightful legal possessor of my perfectly legitimate ethical overdraft, I in turn donated the entire collection to a mutual friend (co-owner of the shop in question, and in all honesty much more *my* friend than *his* passing acquaintance), who to this day may or may not have even attempted to *read* the damn things yet. Playing hot potato with two hundred issues of *Cerebus* did not quickly become a favorite sport. My internal jury has yet to render a verdict on whether or not I'll be allowed to restock my current meager holdings -- stretching back only to the beginning of *Going Home* -- sating the desire to cross-reference the *actual* contents of the late 1980's *Aardvark Comment* with what remains in the now time-altered vaults of my conscious memory. I only mention the incident here in the small hope that the affair's

preservation in posterity will serve as a signpost for me to remember lessons learned. Using the book in this manner is fitting since the artifact of the comic book in its many other forms (i.e., non-*Cerebus*) has become considerably less precious to me in my old age, *Eddie Campbell's Bacchus* and *Promethea* to be excluded as pre-imminent exceptions. This has torn from me the last panacea of Comic Book As Object. Firmly sacrificing these collectibles being the price of actions entered into with full knowledge. I guess what I'm saying is that *Cerebus* has contributed to at least my own decisive ethical development. Perhaps not the sort of praise you're accustomed to receiving, but it is said that Utility is the better part of Valor, and who am I to argue with my own badly mangled corruption of famous men's words?

2.) Explaining anything is useless. Wilde was onto something with his "When the critics disagree, the Artist is in accord with himself." How this squares with governing the Republic is echoed by the novel invention of the anonymous ballot. Voters in the polls aren't required to qualify their choices (at least not yet), and such is as it should be. The artistic voice selects raw materials in the same manner as a constituent half-hazardly aiming for pregnant chads. "And it harm none...", enlightened self-interest takes its rightful place subservient to internal dialogue. It's important to make good choices, or at least ones you can live with. Reconciling your choices with the distinctive sensibilities of others isn't strictly desirable or even *possible* most of the time. This isn't such a sad fact. Give and take doesn't balance when the other end won't let go, and there's no reason to push anyone off the merry-go-round because they happen to be swinging *out* while you happen to be swinging *in*. There is a balance which overshadows individual acts and contains the entirety of human endeavor. Many attribute the label "God" to this awareness and then go about their business in ignoring its wisdom.

3.) Suenteus Po. Wisdom or Folly? Much of what was said in *Reads* seemed to point directly to the speech he gives Cirin, Cerebus and Astoria in the throne room. While he espouses non-interference and placid observation, here he stands, truly altering the (arguably) most significant event to take place in his lifetime with these carefully constructed sentences. On the one hand, his intervention contradicts its own purpose, but flip the coin over and one realizes that without this intervention, someone might well have been sentenced to death in the name of Truth. Again. There is something to be said for abandoning destructive behavior, even if that means a small breach in the comfortable routine. At the very least, his actions seem to have freed Cerebus of many distracting and meddlesome influences (though this alone doesn't explain or excuse his own tampering with Cerebus's mind, which may well have been taking place even before Astoria and Cirin came on the scene. Just how long has Po been 'watching over' him, anyway?).

4.) If Suenteus Po has spent his entire life alone in a room, playing chess, how do Cirin and Astoria recognize him when he suddenly materializes in the throne room, telling them what's what? Wouldn't they be somewhat shocked to be confronted with another (sperm producing!) male aardvark? Instead, Cirin seems most impatient with this latest tete-nipping distraction elbowing in and disrupting her assured ascension. Or have they communicated telepathically 'off panel'? How aware are they of his continuous meddling in Cerebus's life?

5.) While 'poit' may not be your greatest contribution to comics literature, it has to at least rank somewhere near the top in the Great List Of Quality Innovations In Comic Book Sound Effects. The disappearance of life-giving oxygen into a cold, hard vacuum has seldom been depicted with greater flair, and certainly never so well with only two vowels and a couple of consonants. Unfortunately, it is much too soon to appropriate the effect wholesale into the mass of comic book hack work. Further study of the phenomenon is recommended and required.

6.) Thank you for *Guys*.

Inevitably (there's that word again), I'm including in this package some examples of what I've been up to since ending the free zine I used to force on the public, and deciding Egypt wasn't where I wanted to go (yet) with my storks. The 'real' comic is an example of the one thousand-some-odd copies of the issue that remain boxed in my upstairs art room. I'm about half way through a short story right now (issues #7-10; the mini-comics), which centers around an identity crisis focused through the character's

connection to a particular comics narrative. The half-legal (sized) booklet is one of those things that just... happens. I'm sure you can relate (or not, feel free to hold it with only the tips of your fingers, disposing of the wretched thing if it lashes out at you).

It would have been fun to interview you (the offer still stands, by the way) for the final issue of my other zine, *FUCK(tm)*, but my fax software seems to be chasing its own tail and I'm not sure my original transmission to you couldn't have been worded with more clarity and/or panache.

Anyway. I have some reading to do. Then some drawing before my eyes slide over to the clock and it occurs to me that I've once again exceeded the bedtime allotted by my reliable old nine to five. At least the paycheck comes this week. I'm looking forward to *How To Be An Artist* and the collected *Form and Void*.

Break a leg,

Ray Earles

**Evansville, Indiana
21 June 2003**

Dear Dave,

Re Cerebus #289/290:

Nice issue. A little late.

I was surprised to see you including the footnotes along with the pages of the actual story, though given the layout of the issue it seems like the only logical place for them to go. Will they be reproduced this way in the phone book?

Drawing was excellent. You did most of the stars and planets yourself this time, correct? The use of paste-ins (computer printouts?) was a little distracting at first, but after a couple of re-reads it all seems to coalesce smoothly.

As part of the *Cerebus* storyline, I thought this fit well (gracious of me, yes?). I'm sure you'll be hearing from a lot of people who didn't. No matter, the allusions drawn to the past creation stories in the book were clear. I think the writing here was particularly strong. Very enjoyable read, in spite of some factual mistakes I think you made in the footnotes (specifically as pertains to the relevance of the Fomalont & Kopeikin experiment to the quantum theories of physics, and some of your other mentions of complex physics problems -- I think in some of this you may have glossed over the mathematics to make your story point thematically; which can detract from a clear understanding of the phenomena in question, since these types of theories are derived from mathematics in the first place).

Research is a bitch, isn't it? You have to draw the line somewhere, and just get on with whatever you're writing. You mention in a couple of places that you hope to never return to (those specific) physics texts again -- is this literal? A major problem with modern science is keeping up with the current state of "reality" as its currently being described. It's impossible now for a single person to even have a clear overview of all the various fields which compose the truly rational world view. It's often necessary to accept a learned expert's testimony on the state of certain collections of knowledge. On closer inspection, it becomes evident that the experts don't always agree. How does the uneducated select the proper expert? I've attached a recent article on the "speed of gravity" debate as an illustration of this dilemma.

I'm looking forward to the remaining ten issues. Any chance of a color segment in #300? ...Yeah, I know you're not going to tell me.

Ray Earles

[http://www.space.com/scienceastronomy/gravity_speed_030116.html]

Speed of Gravity Results 'Incorrect,' Physicist Says

By Robert Roy Britt
Senior Science Writer
posted: 01:30 pm ET
16 January 2003

Physicists leveled heavy criticism Thursday on a report from last week that claimed the speed of gravity had been determined by observation and was equal to the speed of light.

One physicist called the interpretation of the finding "nonsense". Others were more diplomatic, suggesting that the experiment, involving observations of the bending of light from a distant galaxy as the light sped by the planet Jupiter, had instead measured other phenomena.

The brewing controversy, which illustrates the fits and spurts with which science sometimes grudgingly moves forward, appears to have ground to a stalemate for now as the two scientists who conducted the experiment categorically defended their work.

"The claim that they've measured the speed of gravity is simply incorrect," said Clifford Will, a physicist at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri, and an expert in the field.

Interestingly, Will is friends with one of the researchers whose work he knocks.

In a telephone interview this morning, Will hailed the intricate observations as possibly "a great achievement" but said the interpretation of the data "clouded what would otherwise have been a really cool result."

Defending the claim

Ed Fomalont of the National Radio Astronomy Observatory and Sergei Kopeikin from the University of Missouri in Columbia, performed the experiment. They watched light from a faraway galaxy bend as the planet Jupiter passed almost directly between the galaxy and Earth. Their theory stated that the bending would occur due to the gravitational influence of Jupiter.

By noting the extent of the bending, the researchers claimed to have measured whether gravity acted instantly or somewhat more slowly, at light-speed.

Proving that gravity works at the speed of light would add support to Einstein's General Theory of Relativity and place limits on fringe theories in cosmology. Most physicists are confident that this is the case, but no

one has ever confirmed it by direct measurement.

Isaac Newton long ago argued that gravity instead propagates instantaneously. The suggestion has not died. If it were true, a big door would open to wild theories of how the universe might work on the grandest scales, including its possible interaction with other universes or other dimensions. Even a slight difference in the speeds of light and gravity would give theorists nifty wiggle room to craft bizarre ideas about the mechanics of the unseen universe.

Fomalont, an observational astronomer, calmly refuted the criticisms one-by-one this morning.

"We're really confident that we've measured the speed of gravity and that our interpretation of the results of our experiment are as stated," Fomalont told SPACE.com.

Behind the scenes

The finding, announced Jan. 7 at a meeting of the American Astronomical Society (AAS), was controversial well before it was reported to the general public. Two papers on the work had in prior weeks been submitted for peer review and possible publication in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*. One describes the technique, another details the results. Both are still being reviewed.

Will, the Washington University physicist and a self-proclaimed longtime colleague and friend of Kopeikin, was asked to review the theoretical paper for the journal. Will recommended it not be published. The paper has since been sent to another referee.

Will explained his reasoning: A moving body, like Jupiter, produces additional gravitational effects that Kopeikin did not take into account in his theoretical calculations. Will was surprised that the findings were announced last week, before the papers had been accepted for publication.

It is not uncommon for discoveries to be presented to reporters at AAS meetings prior to having been through peer review. Numerous other findings, by NASA scientists and others, are announced in press releases every year prior to any formal peer review. Scientists are sometimes critical of this so-called "science by press release" process. Others see it as a natural and inevitable flow of information into scientific and public hands.

Ultimately, Will said, the scientific community will sort out the truth in this case.

"Will is one of the giants in this field," Fomalont said. He added that Kopeikin and Will have gone politely back and forth on their differing interpretations of subtleties in what might be observed in the experiment, and are simply at loggerheads over which approach is correct.

Kopeikin said he has found a mistake hidden deep in Will's calculations, and that other mathematicians concur. "He does not agree," Kopeikin said of Will today. "But mathematics is against him."

Kopeikin, too, said the review process would ultimately reveal the truth.

Long-running debate

Kopeikin began circulating his theoretical idea for the experiment more than two years ago, and criticisms began well before the observational work was carried out last September.

Japanese physicist Hideki Asada published a paper, also in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*, about a year ago arguing that Fomalont and Kopeikin would actually be measuring the speed of light, not gravity. That paper has been a thorn in Kopeikin's side ever since. During the AAS press conference last week, when questioned about Asada's work, Kopeikin was visibly frustrated and said Asada had made a mathematical mistake.

Fomalont said this morning that Asada's paper was "not valid." But because it was published, however, it had been given "a standing which it does not deserve."

Today, also in the *Nature Science Update* article, Peter van Nieuwenhuizen, a physicist at Stony Brook University in New York, called the interpretation of the results by Fomalont and Kopeikin "complete nonsense," but the comment was not expanded upon.

Fomalont chose not to respond to van Nieuwenhuizen's choice of words. He also said he had no regrets over announcing the results prior to peer-reviewed acceptance in a journal.

The whole issue seems to have caught many physicists by surprise.

Fomalont notes that during the two or three years that scientists had to review the idea, most did not think the measurements could even be made (regardless of what was being measured) so few spoke up about the potential interpretation of the results (that the speed of gravity could be determined).

"Then they see that we can measure it, and that fostered a lot of bubbling up of criticism," Fomalont said.

There remains little doubt that something was measured last September when the largest planet in our solar system fortuitously passed in front of a bright galaxy some 9 billion light-years away. What remains is for physicists to agree on what was seen.

**Evansville, Indiana
21 June 2003**

Dear Dave,

Is this the Sontag piece (below) you referred to several issues ago in *Cerebus*?

Missed that *New Yorker*. Just tracked it down.

Is your recommendation to exclude her remarks from the larger discussion of foreign policy based essentially on the temporal proximity of her statements to the central event, or on the specific contents of what she has to say about it?

Given the known historical record of U.S. covert action in the Middle East over the last several decades, it's probably at least pertinent to address the striking similarity between "terrorism" and "armed insurgency." Specifically: What is the definition of "aggression" in relation to international politics? It seems that any real argument constructed on the assumption that "terrorism" oversteps civilized boundaries has to be grounded in simple definitions -- and must delineate boundaries that are clearly visible in the first place. An inconsistency in the recognition of such boundaries tends to deflate the moral platform that condemnations of uncivilized behavior issue from.

Better minds than any mentioned above excogitate in frustration on their long careers, having failed to establish these central working definitions. The United Nations has struggled since its inception with the inability of member nations to agree on even basic terms of civility when it comes to dealing with mechanized warfare. It should be clear by now that we can't simply fall back on the idea that "everyone knows what we mean." There should be a foundation for the language we use to describe these events, if those descriptions are to be treated as representative of reality, or built upon when stipulating accepted modes of behavior through legislation.

The fact that Sontag alludes to this problem in her September piece would not seem to immediately disqualify her from the larger debate when we're honestly considering the facts (though other factors could probably be sussed out if the need were to arise-- few human beings manage to fix a grip on existence without accumulating their own complicating histories, if one digs fervently and is motivated enough to eliminate their ideas from a discussion). Any sweeping generalization in this case is probably confusing the issue of legitimate dissent: When is it too soon to point out that the ship is leaking?

Two weeks? Six months?

Ray Earles

postscript:

Note the subtext here. I'm not asking you to defend your position on Sontag's content -- but I am asking you to support the assertion that her comments should be automatically excluded from debate (apparently) simply because you disagree with what she has to say. I don't think you've provided a solid argument for her irrelevance outside of simply restating your shopping list of claims about the reality of what's going on, on the international stage. You might be evoking the "self-evident" too frequently here to be understood clearly.

The Sontag piece:

The disconnect between last Tuesday's monstrous dose of reality and the self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators is startling, depressing. The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined together in a campaign to infantilize the public. Where is the acknowledgment that this was not a "cowardly" attack on "civilization" or "liberty" or "humanity" or "the free world" but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions? How many citizens are aware of the ongoing American bombing of Iraq? And if the word "cowardly" is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to

those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others. In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards.

Our leaders are bent on convincing us that everything is O.K. America is not afraid. Our spirit is unbroken, although this was a day that will live in infamy and America is now at war. But everything is not O.K. And this was not Pearl Harbor. We have a robotic President who assures us that America still stands tall. A wide spectrum of public figures, in and out of office, who are strongly opposed to the policies being pursued abroad by this Administration apparently feel free to say nothing more than that they stand united behind President Bush. A lot of thinking needs to be done, and perhaps is being done in Washington and elsewhere, about the ineptitude of American intelligence and counter-intelligence, about options available to American foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East, and about what constitutes a smart program of military defense. But the public is not being asked to bear much of the burden of reality. The unanimously applauded, self-congratulatory bromides of a Soviet Party Congress seemed contemptible. The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators in recent days seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy.

Those in public office have let us know that they consider their task to be a manipulative one: confidence-building and grief management. Politics, the politics of a democracy "which entails disagreement, which promotes candor" has been replaced by psychotherapy. Let's by all means grieve together. But let's not be stupid together. A few shreds of historical awareness might help us understand what has just happened, and what may continue to happen. "Our country is strong," we are told again and again. I for one don't find this entirely consoling. Who doubts that America is strong? But that's not all America has to be.

Susan Sontag

**Kitchener, Ontario
3 July 2003**

Dear Ray:

Re; Sontag piece. Both. Her befouling of the Sincere Moment is inexcusable and her misconstruction of what was going on ("The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy.") This presupposes that a mature democracy always blames itself and always seeks for unpleasant truths in explaining itself to itself (the central vice, in my view, of the 60s generation). As a means of self-improvement, this has its role, but when it crosses the threshold of seeing nothing to be a truth about itself *unless* it is unpleasant (I am loathsome, therefore I am) then it becomes, as I say, a vice and a self-destructive one (I am inherently loathsome, so why make an effort?). You see it wasn't sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric, but rather an awakening of America's Soul and the *casting off* of sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric of the kind best evidenced by Sontag and her ilk. To

reiterate one of my earlier points, the spontaneous outbursts of "God Bless America," rather than "The Star-Spangled Banner" bespoke the reawakening of God Awareness in the Shining City on the Hill, a response to God's (possible?) chastisement upon the nation among nations upon whom He has bestowed most favourably His Grace and His Richest Blessings. Sontag and her fellow travelers are dead to this awareness. Stone cold, irretrievably dead. Part of the awakening was to realize that there is no need to engage her and her like thinkers in debate -- to come to the full realization, in fact, that to engage them in debate is to return to the mire and the muck with them. As Jesus said to the young fellow who agreed to follow him, but first wanted to return home and bury his father; "Let the dead bury the dead." Leave the Democrats to "on the other hand" themselves into oblivion at their convention, let them try to take back the White House, the House of Representatives and the Senate. Today, in the largest meaning of the term, Today, it is our turn. Our turn to fulfill the destiny God has had in store for America from before the foundation of the earth -- to do right, to do our duty (as Douglas MacArthur put it in his farewell address) "as God gave me the light to see that duty."

I might be evoking the "self-evident" too frequently here to be understood clearly. Granted. But not to those for whom these truths are self-evident. It's hard to say this without being unkind: You are in the ranks of those who see nothing to be self-evident. You take the 40 pages of *Cerebus* 289-290 and zero in on one footnote because of your insatiable left-leaning need to undermine everything purely for the sake of undermining it. I suspect you understood me very clearly, it scared you and you retreated into sophistry and forensic debate. Which, judging by your mini-comic which is beautifully drawn and well composed, is the thing that is making you the most miserable. You're trying to build Alan Moore's bigger filing cabinet to house all aspects of human knowledge both conventional and arcane so that you can sort everything into where it belongs and arrive at an Overview. But Overview is for God alone. Your brain couldn't contain one one millionth of the human knowledge and "knowledge" which exists. Even if you could read all that, missing out on .999,999% of that which could be read, you would only *retain* one one millionth of that initial one one millionth and would probably misconstrue 99.9% of it. Do you see? Your brain is very very small not only in cosmological terms, but in earthly terms, even in human terms (ratio to body weight). You exist somewhere inside of a filing cabinet which is larger than you can possibly conceive of, a tiny dust mote in a remote corner of a piece of paper in a minor file.

But you have a destiny. Or you don't have a destiny. The choice is yours. 1 or 0. Through prayer and through the submission to the Will of God, that destiny will be made apparent to you. It will not be explained to you, you wouldn't understand it if it was. You are too small, your brain is too small, your reasoning is imperfect as all human beings are too small, with brains too small and with imperfect reasoning. God is the Only One who knows where you fit in, what you were sent here to achieve. If you choose not to submit yourself to the Will of God, you will still have the rest of your life to do with as you will. You can sit and read every alchemical text you can find or every book in the Library of Congress that starts with the letter "f" (you might even get through one one thousandth of them). And when you're done, into the fire you will go. Don't go away mad, don't go away sad, just go away.

What is taking place in the United States is that there is no longer any perceived need on the part of Christians, believers in God, to engage in discourse with the left. The awareness has sunk in that each person chooses his or her destiny. There is no outrage that the left has returned to the mire and muck of their "on the other hand" mind games. It's what they do. Continue to be that way or choose to improve, but we're too busy doing what we were put here to do to care which one you ultimately decide on. Leftists and atheists are, as they always have been, playing to an empty house. The only one who cares about your decision is God. But make no mistake, it is you who have to prove your faith in Him, not He who has to prove His existence to you. Everything else is just time-wasting, infantile, atheistic mind and word games.

Anyway. Thanks for the letter. Hope you make the right choice.

Dave Sim

Evansville, Indiana
11 July 2003

Dear Dave,

Just picked up *Cerebus* #291. Whoah! Shep!

One presumes that the "Elder Cerebus" is something you've been itching to draw for quite a while. The enthusiasm is palpable. You seem to be using larger dots on Cerebus.

Has Gerhard switched the type of pens he's using?

I'm deep into the first issue of a new mini-comic, *Cowboy Actor*, so fine-grained technicals of penciling and inking are all I'm seeing in the world at the moment, whether I'm looking at an actual comic book or the Sears Tower.

And with that, back to my day job.

But first, the prepared text.

Some thoughts on the latest installment of "Why Canada Slept", from *Cerebus* #291:

1.) You mention one of the founding fathers of the United States that you read about (but can't remember which one) who was summarily ostracized from his community for declaring that he was merely a Deist. This example seemed to have been offered by way of demonstrating how far we've fallen from that rarefied plateau of spiritual "correctness." This notion seems to be one of the major underpinnings of your assertions about the (quite literally, in your view) righteous nature of American-style democracy. Leaving aside that some of the founders (such as Jefferson and Franklin) openly derided organized religion where possible (and, it should be noted, with few repercussions), it seems likely you may have been referring here to Thomas Paine.

Have you read Paine's *Age of Reason* (c.1974)? An unabashed Deist, Paine nevertheless came out strongly against organized religion, and Scripture in particular (excepting the book of Job, where Paine did find some material worth exploring, as quoted here:

The Book of Job and the 19th Psalm, which even the Church admits to be more ancient than the chronological order in which they stand in the book called the Bible, are theological orations conformable to the original system of theology. The internal evidence of those orations proves to a demonstration that the study and contemplation of the works of creation, and of the power and wisdom of God, revealed and manifested in those works, made a great part in the religious devotion of the times in which they were written; and it was this devotional study and contemplation that led to the discovery of the principles upon which what are now called sciences are established; and it is to the discovery of these principles that almost all the arts that contribute to the convenience of human life owe their existence. Every principal art has some science for its parent, though the person who mechanically performs the work does not always, and but very seldom, perceive the connection.

It is a fraud of the Christian system to call the sciences human invention; it is only the application of them that is human. Every science has for its basis a system of principles as fixed and unalterable as those by which the universe is regulated and governed. Man cannot make principles, he can only discover them.

Paine's observation was that Belief in the spiritual must be based on direct personal experience rather than obscure dogma, since the authenticity of obscure dogma can never be established beyond the demonstrably reproducible aspects of its claims. Here he is on the Koran and the Testament:

When I am told that the Koran was written in Heaven and brought to Mahomet by an angel, the account comes too near the same kind of hearsay evidence and second-hand authority as the former. I did not see the angel myself, and, therefore, I have a right not to believe it.

When also I am told that a woman called the Virgin Mary, said, or gave out, that she was with child without any cohabitation with a man, and that her betrothed husband, Joseph, said that an angel told him so, I have a right to believe them or not; such a circumstance required a much stronger evidence than their bare word for it; but we have not even this- for neither Joseph nor Mary wrote any such matter themselves; it is only reported by others that they said so- it is hearsay upon hearsay, and I do not choose to rest my belief upon such evidence.

It is, however, not difficult to account for the credit that was given to the story of Jesus Christ being the son of God. He was born when the heathen mythology had still some fashion and repute in the world, and that mythology had prepared the people for the belief of such a story. Almost all the extraordinary men that lived under the heathen mythology were reputed to be the sons of some of their gods. It was not a new thing, at that time, to believe a man to have been celestially begotten; the intercourse of gods with women was then a matter of familiar opinion. Their Jupiter, according to their accounts, had cohabited with hundreds: the story, therefore, had nothing in it either new, wonderful, or obscene; it was conformable to the opinions that then prevailed among the people called Gentiles, or Mythologists, and it was those people only that believed it. The Jews who had kept strictly to the belief of one God, and no more, and who had always rejected the heathen mythology, never credited the story.

Thomas Paine did reserve publication of *Age of Reason* until the end of his life -- ostensibly to avoid the backlash he presumed would (and did) follow its publication -- but it's worth pointing out that U.S. Presidents (like Jefferson and Lincoln) who have made scathing remarks about or critical assessments of the Scripture in public were not put to death. The affirmation of Deism (or rather, rightly, Theism, in this context) you see in the founding documents of the United States was in large measure a concession to a placeholder that was necessary to "justify" and "explain" *why* "these truths are held self-evident." As was seen in Rhode Island and New York after the Revolution, without Divine (or in that case, Royal) authority to support the pretense of their legal systems, it was difficult to establish the authority of private property. Legally speaking. The authors of the documents themselves were almost unanimously "non-traditional" in their approaches to religion -- if not outright dismissive of Scripture in general.

2.) Anyone who is not a Conservative is a Democrat?

You attempt to clarify the concatenation of an armload of labels into the specious characterization of "Liberal" by stipulating the (your) dictionary's definition of the word "socialist" -- and seem to be claiming that generally any worldview which does not conform to what you're saying Conservatism *is* (like, for example, most actual American Conservatives -- though it seems clear you don't actually intend to catch them in your net) are overt Socialists. It is difficult to keep the terms straight, as they've essentially been stripped of meaning when you apply them universally to any person or concept that you disagree with on any singular point. How can you expect to be understood (unless you're only writing this stuff for people who will find it self-evident anyway, in which case one wonders about the utility of sating your complaints about not getting any letters) when you're picking and choosing between accepted definitions? This may move into the area of forensic debate again for you, since the issue I'm raising here is really your style of argument rather than the content; but again here the language used is a hurdle we have to cross before the actual content can be weighed. Are you saying that anyone who is not a Conservative (by your measure of Conservative) is a Liberal (also presumably

by your unique measure of what constitutes a Liberal), or are you saying that there is a narrow definition of Liberal which applies to some non-Conservatives as well as overtly self-describing Liberals alike? The (my) dictionary seems at odds with your loose vacillation between the meanings of these words.

You do not seem to see anything "Socialist" about the commandeering of tax dollars to fund foreign wars. The omission of this dichotomy leads me to question the actual depth of your knowledge about American politics and history (as traditionally, "Conservatives" have objected to foreign wars and in many cases even the maintenance of a standing military -- remember that even by Kennedy's time his "Liberal" position that America should hike up our arms production was controversial). For example, every major war in the 20th century in which America participated was committed to by a Democratic President. If, as above, you are arguing for that much more inclusive definition of "Liberal," then something doesn't quite wash when you continue to use the less-inclusive definition of "Conservative" elsewhere.

In your last letter to me you said you were trying to remain polite, but did manage to accuse me of sophistry and (by allusion) "word games and mind games." I hope that's not intentional on either of our parts, but I do recognize that sophistry slips into even the best-intentioned arguments on account of the simple inability of the human mind to construct perfectly crystalline (or recognizable) models of reality. I just don't want to misunderstand you.

3.) It almost sounds like you think everyone living in Iraq is squatting in a mud hut obsessively starting over at the beginning each time they reach the end of a quick run through the Koran. Iraq is *not* Afghanistan, even while under the rule of Hussein. It's a modern country, with modern cities and modern technology. Average citizens have unfiltered access to the Internet (unlike China, which we've so far failed to invade in a bid to liberate its similarly brutally oppressed populace *or* to disarm their nuclear/chemical/biological capabilities). You neatly bypass any distinction between the United States intervening in Iraq to defend themselves against WMD attacks and the United States intervening in Iraq to liberate its oppressed people. It is possible you don't *see* a distinction, but the difference is real. You saw sophistry in my letter but fail to recognize the earmarks of manipulation in the P.R. material issued from the White House? It appears that, in spite of what you had to say about Susan Sontag, you postulate some acceptable threshold for betrayal to the "Sincere Moment" when circumstances dictate. How else to account for numerous examples of deception originating in the administration you continue to openly support?

See the enclosed excerpts from James Bamford's *Body of Secrets*, for some corroborating background on the covert activities of the United States, somewhat removed from the immediate epicenter of 9/11. Is forty years too soon to point out that the ship is leaking?

Overall, I've enjoyed "Islam My Islam" and "Why Canada Slept." Where I don't agree with some of your conclusions, the essays are generally informative (at least on what *The National Post* is reporting these days). I think with your exposition on the history of Islam in particular, a lot of people reading your book would otherwise never come into contact with the background of modern Arab culture. For that alone it's a worthwhile exercise (in the writing as much as in the reading, I'm sure).

-

From your response to Ralph Kidson in *Cerebus* #268's Aardvark Comment:

"On a more serious note, the mention of Waco (et al) reminds me that I should mention how incredibly impressed I was by Gore Vidal coming forward and saying publicly that -- while he deplores Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City (as, I am sure, we all do) -- he stands with McVeigh in opposing the totalitarian abuse of federal power and the

(let's face it) government-sanctioned murder of American citizens (particularly women and children) by the FBI and the ATF as ordered by Janet Reno (had the Attorney General been a man, I'm sure he would have been indicted for his responsibility in ordering such a massacre). Considering that I had pretty much written off Gore Vidal and anticipated that he would live out the rest of his life in decadent or semi-decadent pagan self-exile in Rome and environs, to see him come roaring back in his more admirable and (one hopes) natural role as a True Patriot of the Great and Ongoing American Experiment is inspirational in the extreme. That having been said, I fundamentally disagree with his assessment that Timothy McVeigh is "not crazy". The murder of women and children (under any standard of personal masculine honour, however degraded by feminist totalitarianism) has to be considered as insane. How does one, honourably and in a masculine fashion, respond when the Attorney-General of the United States commits just such an act with total impunity? Interesting question."

Over the last few months I've picked up and read the latest small-format books by Gore Vidal and Norman Mailer. I'm including them in this package in case you haven't had the chance to peruse them. I've read both (I'm giving higher marks to Mailer than Vidal, this time), and while I think that each raises valid points, I was somewhat disappointed with the quality of arguments offered within. They seemed to be appealing too often to an emotional response on the part of their readers -- and I think at this moment specifically an unfocused emotional response is not what's required to carefully parse the barrage of information being shot out of the media cannon. This put me in the curious position of having shared many of their underlying complaints; but disagreeing completely with the way they chose to present them. I'm curious to hear your impressions on these when and if you get around to it.

-

I have to confess that when I read you'd be running a correspondence with Chester Brown on his wonderful *Louis Riel*, I was very pleased.

Ray Earles

**Kitchener, Ontario
August, 2003**

Ray -

Look. It's *your* soul. You do what you want with it. Embrace pedantic evasiveness if that's what you want to do. Embrace conspiracy theories if that's what you want to do. But at the end of days, [**here Dave crossed out the word "the" and replaced it with "your"**] your answer will be the same as mine:

This was my soul and this was what I chose to do with it.

Dave

**Kitchener, Ontario
09 September 2003**

Dear Ray:

Sorry! I should've recognized the name right off -- watch for your letter -- *finally* in 294. Hope you enjoy the rest of *Cerebus*.

Dave Sim

**Evansville, Indiana
09 September 2003**

Dear Dave,

Age of Reason was, of course, published in 1794, not 1974, as I mistyped in my last letter.

You've avoided responding to specific points in my last two letters, so I'll drop a lot of this. You seem to have pre-selected your tautology, and don't seem at all interested in considering facts you haven't previously reviewed and already accepted as axiomatic, even when (especially if?) they appear to undermine your points ("You mean the Dead Sea Scrolls *aren't* word-for-word perfect to the modern Torah? Don't be pedantic."). With #300 right around the corner, I realize you have even less incentive than usual to discuss these issues with strangers, but please feel free to respond to any of it in the future if the whim strikes you (I'm specifically interested in any thoughts you might have on Mailer and Vidal in light of their published responses to the aftermath of 9/11 -- no, not their personalities, but what they actually have to say in the books I sent). If you're going to view my withdrawal here as evidence of a kind of left-leaning inability to address your specific arguments, please understand instead that I'm withdrawing specifically because you've made it clear you're not interested in arguing; if you'd prefer to continue I am prepared to tackle a lot of it point-by-point, as I find that your generally astute "high altitude mapping" is typically marred by factual mistakes that render your arguments neuter. I don't believe you're satisfied with "you *know* what I *mean*" style thesis-building either. I'm not going to badger you with pedantry if that's all you're prepared to see in what I'm writing -- though I would hope you can see that when your entire argument is based on anecdotal evidence that turns out in many cases to be false, it casts a shadow on your conclusions. Your work spurred me out of much intellectual laziness in my formative years, and it would be improper not to hold you to your own standard. I might return to mid-summer and start this correspondence over with no mention of back-of-the-book essays to begin with, but my time-traveling Audi A8 is on back order and I can't afford to drive it anyway. So here we are.

There are other things to talk about.

I did a four page comic (two leaves; eight page faces with the accompanying text piece and covers) a month or two ago, and last week received a check for fifty dollars from someone who saw it, requesting that I mail copies to a list of thirteen addresses which they included. This kind of thing always surprises me when it happens. Especially since the mini (you should find it enclosed) was cover priced at twenty-five cents. Politics: these same folks were vocally uncomfortable with my criticisms of the Clinton administration a few short years ago ("Ray, you'd find some problem with *any* President!") (I actually remember reading *your* assessment of Clinton at the time and wondering why you didn't notice the stuff you've started complaining about now, post-9/11). I'm curious to hear back from them after they see the second issue, which will probably be interpreted as apologism for the current U.S. administration...

[Intermission of some days]

I just called you and put in an order for a subscription to the remaining seven issues of *Cerebus*. I can't help but think that you must be impressed with my mutant ability to sound like a twelve year old girl over the phone. Call it an annoyance; but I just don't argue with most folks when they insist I "can't possibly" be me. It does provide an education on the mental shortcuts people use to "size you up" over the telephone -- and it's clear from experience how preconceptions about gender color a conversation about highly technical subject matter (I currently work in the telecom industry).

I first saw your comic book in an issue of *Comics Scene Magazine*, in the 1980s. A friend of mine was the only one of our group of friends (which consisted of him, his cousin, and myself) who had access to a real direct market comic shop. Some time later I made him track down a copy of *Cerebus* #77 -- the cover of which was featured in the *Comics Scene* article. I never understood the uproar over "four pages of pissing." Sometimes people piss for a long time... where's the controversy? I started buying monthly in late 1992, with #164. That same winter my regular shop had a fire sale of 80s overstock and I picked up most back issues from the early #50s on up along with huge crates of books that were going at roughly \$30 for a hundred comics. I reinvested the profits from sorting, bagging and re-selling most of the contents of those crates into a full collection of *Cerebus* phonebooks (and several packs of Diamondback cards, and *Sandman*, and a slew of Moore and Miller stuff, and reprints of just about every other comic I ever wanted). (Also in those crates came large quantities of *Dark Horse Presents* back issues, where I was first exposed to the fine work of Eddie Campbell, but that's another letter entirely).

I spent the entire next summer closely studying these artifacts.

I've considered subscribing several times over the years, but have always held the nagging suspicion that shipping from Canada would prove to be a problem (read: would prove to be prohibitively expensive). In any case, I figured, it's better to get them through the shop, if only to help keep the wheels of the direct market churning. Now, however, events have converged: Last winter I brought a friend almost up to date on the book by gifting him a set of phonebooks, and I intend to turn the copies of the last few issues which show up in my pull file over to him. Shipping from Canada be damned. (And now I find out there *is* no shipping charge on a subscription -- My first stop in the time-traveling A8 would be to thwack my younger self in back of the head.)

#293 will theoretically show up in my pull file tomorrow afternoon. Some shops seemed to be receiving their copies *last* week -- but my local one is typically on the tail end of scheduling (or so it seems) when it comes to Diamond. I have advance word that "Why Canada Slept" has expanded to 29 pages for this final installment. The *Cerebus* Yahoo Group has been studiously tight-lipped about the actual comics content of a given issue until after its broader release, but often start discussing your essays immediately.

Today my thoughts are scattered out all over the table, as I've been concentrating on moving all my belongings from Rental Property A into Mortgaged Property B for the last week or so. Little ideas are rolling around, inching perilously close to spilling over the edge and getting lost on the floor. I tread lightly. It's generally 10:00pm before I sit down and take my tea and assess the day. It occurs to me to somehow try and bend the floor down so everything at least rolls towards the middle, but no luck; and now my knees and elbows are bruised as well from crawling around after these little ideas. My hair is mussed. Let me arrange my papers.

Not sure how much fiction you're reading through these days, but I have to recommend Henry Miller. There are some striking passages in *Tropic of Cancer* that, contrary to received wisdom, have nothing to do with pre-, post- or extra- marital sex. I wasn't expecting this. Mailer is right about him I think; but maybe not in exactly the way he explains it in *Genius of Lust*. Still, it has to be acknowledged Miller got a basically raw deal, what with the book banning, besmirched literary reputation, etc., et al.

"I am thinking of that age to come when God is born again, when men will fight and kill for God as now and for a long time to come men are going to fight for food. I am thinking of that age

when work will be forgotten and books assume their true place in life, when perhaps there will be no more books, just one great big book -- a Bible. For me the book is the man and my book is the man I am, the confused man, the negligent man, the reckless man, the lusty, obscene, boisterous, thoughtful, scrupulous, lying, diabolically truthful man that I am. I am thinking that in that age to come I shall not be overlooked. Then my history will become important and the scar which I leave upon the face of the world will have significance. I can not forget that I am making history, a history on the side which, like a chancre, will eat away the other meaningless history. I regard myself not as a book, a record, a document, but as a history of our time -- a history of *all* time."

-- Henry Miller,
Black Spring, pg. 23

[Purchases *Cerebus* #293 and reads it over]

Nice. I eagerly await the *Latter Days* phonebook(s), as I'm certain this one is going to read very well in a single chunk. During the last few years you've been doing a lot that's very interesting with panel arrangements (and the arrangement of elements *within* the panel arrangements). Not sure whose idea it was, but the variable surface area covered by the backgrounds within each panel in the last few issues is brilliantly evocative of the shifting focus that *Cerebus*' consciousness is undergoing. I'm wondering just how many years he's been wandering from chair to bed and from bed to chair in that room -- we've seen that he hasn't flipped a calendar page in quite some time, but he doesn't seem to realize he's been forgetting.

Cerebus continues to entertain, invigorate and gladden droll days. I will be sorry to see it end -- consistent monthly pleasure that it's been -- but I will be satisfied to finally read it in completed form. Thanks for putting in all this work over the years to make it happen. I'm certain it can't have been a painless, trivial exercise to keep laying pavement as your new road snaked out into what looked like the middle of nowhere, waiting for "all the people" to show up. (He says, sitting on a handful of completed comic book pages and several outlines for undrawn stories.) Anyway, good show, old chap. I'll keep an eye open for whatever else you put out once *Cerebus* is finished.

Nice knowing you,

Ray Earles

postscript:

Not sure when you wrote this final installment of "Why Canada Slept," but you do realize that Toronto is far from the only place where SARS has been reported in North America, don't you? By July of 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was reporting 379 suspected cases in the United States alone (World Health Organization reports 33 confirmed from November, 2002 to August, 2003, with tests still ongoing -- so clearly you're correct in pointing out that this was hardly an "epidemic"). You spent the better part of a page explaining why the fact that the SARS "outbreak" was confined to Toronto was a self-evident message from God. You spent some time humiliating the (presumably atheistic. from your viewpoint) tendency to assign the implausible circumvention of these "astronomical odds" to pure chance (as a matter of course) instead of recognizing the event as a self-evident message from God. Do you see how it tends to erode your message when such snide derision doesn't dovetail with the facts?

You seem to have addressed my questions about Norman Mailer. Thanks.

Dave finally published my letter from 2000 (along with the following response) three years later (October, 2003), in *Cerebus* #294:

1.) I'm sure that your karmic debt is in the distant past now in more ways than you, yourself, would care to enumerate. I can only hope that this late publication of your undated letter provides for you a level of retrospective contentment that would have been beyond your capabilities to perceive at the time of the events you document. If, however, its publication causes you to attain to any state to the nether side of "rueful" then I have missed my guess and so, apologize.

2.) Too true, however Jules Feiffer did entitle one of his strip collections *The Explainers*. In another eight months or so, I will find out if I am irretrievably a life member of this compulsive constituency or, as I hope, I will discover that it was just a major part of my former job description as the creator of *Cerebus*. I sincerely hope that it proves to be the latter case.

I. Am. So. Tired. Of. *Explaining*.

3.) The Watcher is the higher incarnation of the Explainer. A bit complicated to go into here, but try this on for size: the Watcher need only perceive accurately, whereas the Explainer tries to explicate accurately. Whether he is explaining things to others or to himself, he is locked within a duality, splitting his own awareness into "Explainer" and "Explainee" or doing the same thing externally with himself in the former role and an audience of whatever size in the latter role. I tried to portray Suenteus Po as having a level of bemused self-awareness about himself as he became absorbed in *Cerebus*' story. Try as he might to merely observe, *Cerebus* had the same effect on him that he has on everyone: the magnifier. Once he started Explaining, it was like eating salted nuts and even the facade of the Watcher fell away until he was a full participant and, therefore, subject to the karmic forces and repercussions which participation implies. Would Cirin and *Cerebus* have had their pitched battle no matter what Suenteus Po said to them, or did they have their pitched battle, at least partly because of what he said to them, or did they have their pitched battle because of what he failed to say to them? Successive states of being, descending from the passive narrator who has, at least, introduced some overarching ideas in to the proceedings before the inevitable mayhem takes place, to the active participant who contributed in a major or minor fashion to the possibly inevitable/possibly not inevitable mayhem (there is no control group), to the active participant who actively failed and whose failure brought about the mayhem made inevitable by his participation.

Does the Buddha represent the highest state of enlightenment or does scrupulous non-participation represent nothing more than a failure to perceive accurately the need for participation? Do you evade dichotomy by asserting "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him?" Or is it a given that the Buddha -- because he is never "on the road" -- if he is encountered on the road is a false Buddha? Is the Buddha's non-participation a guarantee of the happiest of all possible outcomes or is the Buddha's non-participation an implicit failure?

For me, all of these issues began with the basic creative problem of how to introduce a genuinely omniscient character into the storyline at the end of *Church & State* who could enunciate what was, at the time, my own best assessment of my own, at the time, largest worldview (note the self-canceling duality implied: if you are assessing your own largest worldview what you are assessing can't, by implication, be a "largest worldview" since your assessment is external to it), the Judge. Even in a fictitious world omniscience is impossible to portray. It was only later when I read the Bible that I realized that God faced/faces/is facing/will face the same problem in the nearly (to human eyes, anyway) infinite realms inhabited by His creations. What character can He introduce into the world to tell people what's going on, given that this world no doubt differs from God's context about as much as this printed page differs from my physical being? It's one of the reasons that I've found reading scripture aloud to be efficacious. I understand very little of it -- my perceptions are tri-dimensional to such an extent that I don't even know how many dimensions there are to reality and I take it as a given that scripture documents people and events which resonate with dimensions beyond my ability to

perceive accurately or otherwise -- but, I do believe my soul understands scripture implicitly and scripture allows my soul to persevere even as my soul finds itself mired in a hopeless and dramatically degraded circumstance (that is to say, in me). Read the Synoptic Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and try to explain to yourself what it is that he said. "Blessed the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Is this a good thing? Who wants to inherit a finite ball of dust and rock whose core is inhabited by God's adversary? What do you do with it when you inherit it? It is beyond explanation insofar as it has an infinite number of explanations. But read it aloud and your soul is improved by it.

4.) In my view (and I really created characters here who are beyond my own ability to describe accurately), both Cirin and Suenteus Po indeed had telepathic contact with Cerebus off-panel, as they would have ongoing telepathic contact with each other. They "contended" for Cerebus in the way that "higher beings" would feel obliged to: by scrupulously avoiding contact with him and leaving it to Cerebus to find them (the process which began in Mind Game). My own view is that they were lying to themselves in a very conventional and human fashion even as they used their higher states of being to persuade themselves they were doing nothing of the kind. Suenteus Po, as an example, had most of his followers call themselves Suenteus Po, thus casting the widest possible net of proxy participants and guaranteeing that Cerebus would become aware of him -- and himself took the name from a previous Suenteus Po so as to divert responsibility from himself.

One of the best treatments of telepathy (which was very much on my mind in coming up with Cirin and Suenteus Po) was the 1973 movie *Zardoz*, which is worth watching at the very least for that: how telepathic beings would interact (and how squishy-soft, feminine and yet brutally tyrannical such a world would be). There is an interesting borderland between persuasion and information and there are a lot of persuaders who consider themselves mere imparters of information. Much of the *Cerebus* storyline between issues 20 and 186 was concerned with that.

5.) Duly noted.

6.) My pleasure I assure you.

**Kitchener, Ontario
03 December 2003**

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.

...Here my copy of this letter cuts off, though there were a couple more pages in the original that was sent to Dave. This concludes the 2003 correspondence.