

VALIS

An Introductory Guide

VALIS:
An Introductory Guide

A Senior Seminar Paper

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Michael George Gresham

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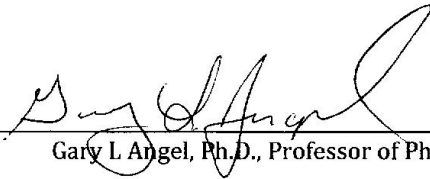


Michael George Gresham

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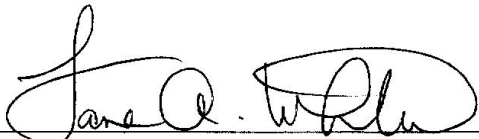
Edmond D. Hally, Ph.D., Political Science Coordinator



Gary L. Angel, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy



John V. Kitterman, Ph.D., Professor of English



Lana A. Whited, Ph.D., Senior Seminar Professor

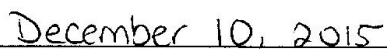
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Author (Full name)

December 10, 2015

Date

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Abstract

The purpose of this guide is to introduce *VALIS* to new readers via “duality.” The novel can be difficult for new readers, but the illumination of several key ideas—seen through the lens of duality—will hopefully make the experience more enjoyable.

The first part gives some needed background on the novel and the author. It introduces several elements the reader needs to know in order to understand the questions and answers that follow. These elements include: a brief plot summary, a look at the main character, a description of his private notebook, and the nature of the titular entity, *VALIS*. “Duality” is defined, and examples from the novel are presented.

The second part talks about Gnosticism. Its basic beliefs are presented, along with information about the discovery of Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi. The concept of a “syzygy” is introduced, followed by a description of Valentinian Gnosticism. Finally, the women in the main character’s life are discussed in relation to the Gnostic concepts previously considered.

The third part discusses C. G. Jung briefly, enhancing previous ideas and clarifying the purpose of the novel. Jung’s main ideas—the “collective unconscious” and “archetypes”—are introduced. Next, the *anima*, *animus* and the *Deus Absconditus* are explained in terms of *VALIS*. The last two questions speak further about the main character’s mental issues and his problems with women.

The final part describes where the reader may want to go after reading this guide.

An appendix at the end prints a comic by Robert Crumb that briefly summarizes Philip K. Dick’s strange religious experiences.

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Preface

My intention when composing this guide was to provide an introduction to *VALIS* for new or frustrated readers. In the midst of its composition, however, it occurred to me that I could offer a more entertaining and comfortable means of approaching the topic. The paper's structure evolved into a question-answer format that allows for easier browsing and, I hope, a more compelling experience. Be aware, these questions— and their answers—skim only the surface of Philip K. Dick's novel. This guide is only an introduction. Therefore a substantial number of names, terms, and ideas will not be mentioned, and the ones I *do* talk about will be examined only briefly. Readers are advised to travel down one of the many other rabbit-holes that appear whilst reading *VALIS*. They lead consistently to new ways of approaching the material.

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Section I
—The Basics—

*Tell all the truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind—*

Emily Dickinson

Who is the author of this guide?

My name is Mike Gresham, I'm 32 years old, and I'm finishing my degree at Ferrum College. I chose *VALIS* as my senior thesis topic because I reckoned I couldn't be the only person who struggled in trying to read the novel. Personally, I tried to read *VALIS* three times, succeeding only on my third attempt. The first couple of stabs ended with a restrained urge to slam-dunk the book into the closest trashcan. I found this puzzling, because I grew up reading Philip K. Dick—he is one of my favorite authors—and *VALIS* is one of his most critically-acclaimed novels. I eventually gave it a third try, but this time began researching unfamiliar names and concepts, annotating as I did so, and found my enjoyment dramatically increased, especially when I realized the importance of duality in the novel. From there, I decided to create a guide that explicated the parts of *VALIS* that I perceived to be the most difficult.

I found that reading *VALIS* was often a personal experience. My mother died when I was two years old, and as a result, I've found that my relationships are often strained. I am stubborn, can be obsessively single-minded, and have, as a friend once put it, "splintered edges." Therefore, I can empathize with many of *VALIS*'s themes. And though I have never experienced anything supernatural, I have relatives who claim to have experienced events every bit as strange as the ones Philip K. Dick claims to have endured. Reading and critically examining *VALIS* helped me to achieve a greater understanding of not only my own spiritual search, but also helped to better understand the experiences of my relatives.

Why is this guide necessary?

I couldn't find anything online that was comparable to this approach, for one thing, and surmised that I couldn't be alone in wanting an introductory guide that illuminated the tougher aspects of *VALIS*. Let's be honest, to call it a polarizing novel is to understate the case. The average reader, potentially unfamiliar with certain concepts, confronts an onslaught of academic confetti: unfamiliar authors, terms, and places are everywhere, typically with little to no explanation provided. Combine this with a plot that is slow-moving—one *Amazon.com* reviewer stated that she "got two thirds of the way through [*VALIS*] and still couldn't find an actual story" (*Amazon*)—and one has the recipe for a thoroughly defeated bibliophile.

This guide offers new and frustrated readers of *VALIS* a pathway to approach the novel via the theme of duality. Specifically, it will focus on a few prominent examples, followed by concise explanations of Valentinian Gnosticism and Jungian psychoanalysis, explicating afterwards how duality is woven into these subjects. While this guide only tackles a fraction of the possible topics that the novel deals with, it should provide an excellent position from which to further interpret and appreciate it.

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What is *VALIS* about?

VALIS is a partly autobiographical, though fictionalized, memoir of real-world experiences that the author underwent in 1974 and beyond. It is also a symbolic framework used to mythologize those experiences. The following description of *VALIS*'s plot is somewhat incomplete, but only because *VALIS* is not a straightforward novel. The plot starts out as a simple tale about a depressed man and his attempts to deal with spiritual and psychological issues, but by the end has morphed into something akin to pure allegory, framed as science-fiction. This summary relates only what is necessary to understand the topics examined in this guide.

VALIS tells the tale of a spiritual and psychological quest. The narrator of the novel, Philip K. Dick (NPKD from now on¹), explains that Fat is a third-person representation of his own self, an avatar that the narrator has created in order to “gain much-needed objectivity.” Throughout the novel, NPKD describes Fat’s attempts to understand the nature of a mysterious and extraordinarily powerful entity that may or may not be God. At the same time, Fat is struggling to cope with tragic life events that are exacerbating his depression, including his wife leaving him, a friend committing suicide, etc. (*VALIS*).

Fat claims to have experienced unexplainable temporal anomalies. He relates an incident during which he perceived Ancient Rome and present-day California coexisting simultaneously; later he claims that a mind originating from the time of Christ took control

¹ This is meant to lessen confusion, since the narrator’s and author’s names are identical. NPKD refers to the narrator, and APKD refers to the real-life author.

of his body for a short period. While under this mind's influence, Fat says, he was able to speak fluent Greek, was far better organized, and was much healthier in his habits (*VALIS*).

Fat also claims that a God-like entity, whom he calls Zebra, is beaming information to him. He describes being hit with a pink laser beam, and subsequently having entire libraries' worth of information downloaded into his mind. Intent on transcribing this knowledge he is receiving and deciphering it, he begins to keep a notebook that he calls the *Exegesis*. Later, he describes another incident, one in which Zebra saved his son's life by beaming information to Fat about a potentially fatal medical condition. When he rushed to the doctor and relayed the information—who performed the necessary procedure—it was discovered that his son would have otherwise died (*VALIS*).

The final section discusses the aftermath of seeing a movie called *VALIS*. The movie, a Hollywood picture with a nationwide release, is brimming with symbolic references to Fat's experiences. The movie even supplies Zebra's proper name: *VALIS*, or Vast Active Living Intelligence System. Fat proceeds to get in touch with the creators of the movie, the Lamptons, believing that *VALIS* is communicating with them too (*VALIS*).

Fat believes that *VALIS* has guided them to the Lamptons' daughter, the two-year-old Sophia. This young girl is the child of *VALIS*, and may or may not be the messiah. She seems to be omniscient, despite her physical appearance being that of an early adolescent. Upon meeting Fat's group, Sophia immediately recognizes Dick and Fat as two aspects of the same person, and subsequently forces Fat to disappear and reintegrate with the narrator. NPKD then begins to suspect, however, that Sophia's caretakers may be insane. This is proven when NPKD learns that the Lamptons have accidentally killed Sophia in an attempt to extract information from her via laser technology. After her death, NPKD and

Fat split into separate aspects again. The novel ends with Fat travelling the world looking for Sophia's reincarnation, while NPKD waits for VALIS to send him a message (*VALIS*).

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Why does the narrator have the same name as the author? Who is Horselover Fat? And what kind of name is Horselover Fat anyway?

“Horselover Fat” is a play on words. “Philip” is Greek for “Lover of Horses”, and “Dick” means “Fat” in German (*VALIS* 328). Thus, it is reiterated that Horselover Fat is the narrator, Philip K. Dick. Early in the novel, NPKD even explicitly states that “I am Horselover Fat, and I am writing this in the third person to gain some much needed objectivity” (*VALIS* 177). They are *not*, in a strict sense, separate characters; they are only represented this way in the context of the narrator’s story.

The name “Horselover Fat” is intentionally absurd, reflecting NPKD’s attitude toward the experiences Horselover—and, by extension, the real-life author—claims to have endured. The narrator is well aware, in other words, of the insanity of Fat’s claims. By projecting the part of himself that has “experienced God”, NPKD is then able to act as a rational counterbalance, while Horselover Fat waxes philosophical and religious via excerpts from the *Exegesis*.

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What is the *Exegesis*?

While the *Exegesis*² is a central part of *VALIS*, it was a real-life notebook as well. Specifically, it was the private notebook that APKD (author Philip K. Dick) started after his 1974 experiences with an entity he called VALIS. It serves a similar function for Fat in the novel. APKD had a variety of strange experiences throughout his life³, much like Horselover Fat. Post-1974, after directly experiencing God, or something approximating God, APKD began the notebook in an attempt to give meaning to his encounter. Jonathan Lethem and Pamela Jackson say it better, in the introduction to the published 900-page version of the *Exegesis*:

... to approach the *Exegesis* from any angle at all a reader must first accept that the subject *is* revelation, a revelation that came to the person of Philip K. Dick... and subsequently demanded, for the remainder of Dick's days on earth, to be understood... not for the sake of his own psyche, nor for the cause of the salvation of humankind, but precisely because those two concerns seemed to him to be one and the same. (*Exegesis* xii)

VALIS contains what APKD considered to be the most important excerpts from the *Exegesis*. These 52 excerpts, bolded in the text, comprise what the author termed the "Tractates Cryptica Scriptura"⁴. In other words, when an excerpt is provided from Fat's fictional

² **Exegesis** has a couple meanings, according to the *OED*. 1) "Chiefly with reference to scripture: a phrase, sentence, etc., which paraphrases or explains another." 2) "An explanation or interpretation of a text, esp. of scripture or a scriptural passage. Also more generally: a critical discourse or commentary" (*OED*).

³ For a brief synopsis, please see Appendix A – *The Religious Experience of Philip K. Dick*.

⁴ The "Tractates Cryptica Scriptura" is located, in full, as an appendix at the back of every copy of *VALIS*. It is roughly 13 to 14 pages in length, and directly excerpted from the real-world version of APKD's *Exegesis*.

Exegesis, it is actually taken verbatim from APKD's real-life journal. Surrounding these excerpts is a plot that serves as 1) a fictionalized, autobiographical interpretation of the events APKD experienced, and 2) a symbolic representation of the author's mind, cast in the light of both spirituality and psychoanalysis⁵ (*Exegesis*).

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⁵ It is not enough to simply call the novel a fictionalized autobiography. Observe that the novel starts off with NPKD describing Horselover Fat's *claims* of fantastical events—events that mirror real-life incidents of the author. NPKD's perspective seems almost entirely rational at this point. By the end, however, fantastical events are directly witnessed by *both* Fat and NPKD, events that seem science-fictional in nature. While some critics assert that this switch denies "textuality", I hold an alternate view; the end of the novel, with its unbelievable happenings, serves as a way to symbolize the author's relationship with his own mind, both conscious and unconscious, as well as his relationship(s) with the feminine.

What is Zebra/VALIS?

Zebra is the name Horselover Fat gives to the strange God-like entity. NPKD says:

Zebra. Because it blended. . . . Another name is mimicry. Certain insects do this; they mimic other things: sometimes other insects—poisonous ones—or twigs and the like. Certain biologists and naturalists have speculated that higher forms of mimicry might exist, since lower forms—which is to say, forms which fool those intended to be fooled but not us—have been found all over the world. (*VALIS* 233)

VALIS is Zebra's true name, revealed later in the novel, after Fat sees the film (*VALIS*).

But what *is* Zebra/VALIS? Honestly, this depends on which theory the main character is contemplating. VALIS could be part of an interstellar satellite network, having its origin in the Sirius star-system. It could be an alien. It may even be God. But, at a basic level, VALIS is a living entity made of information, able to replicate the physical world exactly. As mentioned in the quotation above, VALIS is able to hide itself, except on a much higher level. At the same time, it is able to replicate the physical world in which it is hiding, often using this power to introduce new information, in order to facilitate communication. Imagine, for example, letters on a sign that are able to be rearranged. To VALIS, reality is akin these letters, able to be shuffled and reorganized according to its wishes (*VALIS*).

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Is *VALIS* just a means of disseminating the author's beliefs?

This question may seem unusual, but the criticism has been suggested. Umberto Rossi, in his essay "The Shunts in the Tale," says there are "two competing textual levels struggling against each other" in the book, a struggle between "the autobiographical novel and religious science fiction" (Rossi 245). This struggle, this duality, is said to deny "textuality, because it reduces the fiction to a screen through which we look at Dick's belief in the existence of VALIS" (Rossi 243). The argument further states that since *VALIS* abandons the critical eye of NPKD at a certain point (after which he becomes a true believer of Fat's experiences), the novel functions as a method by which the author propagates his real-world ideas; therefore, the book cannot be taken as literature, per se. At one point in the essay, this conclusion is made clear: "*VALIS* is actually a sort of pamphlet that aims at wiping out the reader's disbelief, at persuading him that what happened to [the author] . . . is true. *VALIS* is only apparently fiction. . ." (Rossi 244). The ending of the novel, certainly, leaves it open to interpretation. APKD, for instance, could not, even by the end of his life, come to a reasonable conclusion, so this argument is not definitive. Whether it has merit, however, must be left to the reader to establish. What *can* be presented is evidence that duality in the novel goes far beyond two "textual levels" (Rossi 245).

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What is “duality” and how does it relate to *VALIS*?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “duality” as “the condition or fact of being dual, or consisting of two parts, natures, etc.; twofold condition” (*OED*). Duality in *VALIS*, then, refers to any aspect of the novel that represents such a “condition or fact.” We’ve already seen, for instance, that the novel is, in part, a fictionalized version of real-world events, e.g. the *Exegesis* existing in both fictional and real-world forms. Duality is such an important concept, and is so relevant to every aspect of *VALIS*, that it’s tempting to advise new readers to first examine the novel exclusively in light of it.

Duality is common in APKD’s writing. Lorenzo DiTommaso states, in his essay “Gnosticism and Dualism in the Early Fiction of Philip K. Dick:” “One key to proceeding to a better understanding of Dick’s fiction is to accept that this conflict . . . is most often expressed by means of the grammar and in the vocabulary of dualistic cosmologies.” (DiTommaso 8) Observe the constant questions about the nature of humanity versus the nature of robots in *Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, a novel about a bounty hunter tracking renegade androids. *A Scanner Darkly* is another excellent example; the novel tells the tale of an undercover cop begins to lose track of which of his two identities is real.

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Why was the author so interested in duality?

In terms of his novel *VALIS*, at least, APKD's interest in duality has its origins in his relationship with his sister. On December 26, 1929, his fraternal-twin sister passed away. Charlotte Jane was one year old. The twins were born premature, but in the 1920s there was scant medical knowledge regarding these circumstances. The parents had no idea that Charlotte was dying. Indeed, by the time a proper diagnosis was given, it was too late. Charlotte Jane Dick died on the way to the hospital. Lawrence Sutin, Dick's biographer, states that her death "remained the central event of Phil's psychic life . . . and manifested itself in difficult relations with women and a fascination with resolving dualist (twin-poled) dilemmas— [SciFi]/mainstream, real/fake, human/android, and at last (in as near an integration of intellect and emotion as Phil ever achieved) . . . in his masterwork *VALIS*." (Sutin 12) These "dualist dilemmas" are mythologized in *VALIS* using spiritual, philosophical, and psychological concepts. In this way, Dick relates his own struggle to the cosmic struggle, just as all good myths universalize the personal.

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What is an example of duality in the novel?

A couple examples have already been mentioned. First, the splitting of the narrator into two separate characters—Horselover Fat and NPKD—that represent the spiritual and rational sides of the main characters. Second, there is the contrast between autobiographical novel and religious science-fiction. Let's analyze a different example of duality, though, one that appears before the novel even starts. Prior to Chapter One, the following quotation is printed:

VALIS (acronym of Vast Active Living Intelligence System from an American film): A perturbation in the reality field in which a spontaneous self-monitoring negentropic vortex is formed, tending progressively to subsume and incorporate its environment into arrangements of information. Characterized by quasi-consciousness, purpose, intelligence, growth and an armillary coherence.⁶

—*Great Soviet Dictionary* (Dick)

First of all, the work from which this entry was taken, the *Great Soviet Dictionary*—along with this passage—is entirely fictitious. However, the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* is very real. Here, then, is the duality; the fictional book is being contrasted with the real thing. But this raises a couple questions. Why would Dick reference the *Dictionary* at the beginning of *VALIS*? Furthermore, why would he bother changing the title?

⁶ **VALIS** is the name of the Godlike being with which the main character comes into contact.

A **perturbation** is the "the disturbance of the regular order or state of a thing; irregular variation or disorder" (*OED*).

Negentropic is a shortened version of "*Negative Entropy*", and means: "of or relating to negentropy; causing or accompanied by a decrease in entropy or an increase in order (sometimes with the implication that the second law of thermodynamics is being contravened)." Contrast this with *entropy*, a word that refers to the natural tendency of a system to fall apart. (*OED*)

Armillary means "pertaining to bracelets or hoops." (*OED*) Ever seen a model of the solar system where the orbits are represented by metal rings, one within the other? That's an "armillary" sphere.

Let's answer the latter question first. The subtle change, from *Encyclopedia* to *Dictionary*, is a message to the reader that the novel has a genesis in reality. The author's real-life notebook encompasses almost 8000 handwritten pages (comprising nearly 1 million words). The Soviet *Encyclopedia* is symbolic of that colossal, real-life undertaking, while *VALIS*, only a couple hundred pages long, is the highly-compressed, fictional "dictionary". The *Dictionary vs. Encyclopedia* duality is a metaphor for *VALIS vs. the Exegesis*⁷.

That still leaves the last question though: Why would Philip K. Dick use the *Soviet Dictionary* as the source of his fictional entry? Remember that *VALIS* "subsumes and incorporates its environment into arrangements of information." Bearing that in mind, consider this: in the year the novel was published (1981), what country would the average American think of when the topic of "censorship" was introduced? Most people during that time period would probably say the Soviet Union. An *LA Times* article from 1991, in fact, mentions an instance "when Josef Stalin's infamous chief of the secret police, Lavrenti Beria, fell into disgrace and all *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* owners were ordered to cut his entry out of the "B" volume and paste in [a different article]" (Goldberg). Since we know this brand of suppression was normal in the USSR, the definition at the beginning of the book becomes a laughable idea. It wouldn't make it past the first round of rubber stamps! Laughable, that is, until the reader realizes the truth: *VALIS* is not only defined; it has

⁷ The final pages of *VALIS* attest to this: the "Tractates Cryptica Scriptura" is printed there, an appendix listing 52 short-to-medium-length excerpts from the *Exegesis*. In the novel itself, these selections are scattered throughout, with the plot acting as a framework, designed to give context to these dense pieces of writing. Compare the "Tractate," spanning approximately 13 to 14 pages, with the 8000 page monster spoken of previously. The symbolism of a lengthy and detailed encyclopedia article vs. a concise two-sentence definition (*Exegesis vs. VALIS*) is evident.

defined itself by introducing new information into the world, via the *Soviet Dictionary*.

VALIS has defined itself, while simultaneously demonstrating its power.

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What's the deal with those Handel arias in Chapter 2?

The quoted arias are another excellent example of duality. The first quotation is as follows:

And can I think the great Jehovah sleeps,
 Like Shemosh, and such fabled deities?
 Ah! no; heav'n heard my thoughts, and wrote them down
 It must be so."
 [...]
 'Tis this that racks my brain,
 And pours into my breast a thousand pangs,
 That lash me into madness . . . (VALIS 195)

This passage is taken from an oratorio by Handel called *Jephtha*. The quotation is from one of *Jephtha's* most famous arias in Act 2, Scene 4. The biblical story of Jephtha revolves around the titular character making a rash promise to God: if he (Jephtha) is victorious in battle, he will sacrifice the first person he sees coming out of the doors of his house upon his return. Unfortunately, this happens to be his own daughter (*Bible Gateway*). This passage operates on a couple of levels. First, it reflects Fat's own mind; he is suffering from the "thousand pangs, /That lash [him] into madness..." (VALIS 195) This madness is reflected by NPKD, the rational side of Fat, who fears that this is *only* madness, and that any attribution to a divine or alien power is mistaken. Second, it reflects Fat's problems with the women in his life. Just as Jephtha unwittingly sacrifices his own daughter, Fat feels guilt regarding his relationships with women. He feels that he is responsible for their fates . . .

perhaps he has made a deal with a divine power that has cost him the lives and love of the women he cares for the most.

This is the second quotation:

Total eclipse! no sun, no moon,
 All dark amidst the blaze of noon!
 Oh, glorious light! no cheering ray
 To glad my eyes with welcome day!
 Why thus deprived Thy prime decree?
 Sun, moon and stars are dark to me ! (VALIS 195)

While the first quote is Fat's lamentation, the second aria (from *Samson*, another Handel oratorio) is quoted by NPKD. He is saying that Fat may be blinded by his madness. Fat retorts that "[t]he opposite is true in my case. I am illuminated by holy light fired at me from another world. I see what no other man sees." (VALIS 195) Remember though, that, Samson also had issues with women; it was his wife who cut off his hair, depriving him of his power (*Bible Gateway*). This is a contrast to Jephtha, since it shows the side of Fat that sees himself as the victim, blaming women for his problems.

In other words, the two arias provide a commentary on the dual nature of the narrator's mind, reflecting the two possibilities—he is mad, or he is a prophet—while also commenting on his relationships with women. The biblical origin of these arias—both are influenced by stories from the Book of Judges—mythologizes the author's personal experiences.

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Can you compare Maurice and Dr. Stone?

The two doctors that Fat speaks with at the Orange County mental hospital are representative of the two sides of the main character, Narrator Philip K. Dick and Horselover Fat. There is a quotation from *VALIS* that states: “Knowing . . . by direct route from the divine, made Fat a latter-day prophet. But, since he had gone crazy, he also entered absurdities into his tractate” (*VALIS* 262). The two doctors represent the two separate parts of NPKD’s personality.

Observe what happens when Maurice, the Jewish doctor Fat speaks with at the mental hospital, attempts to discuss religion. Maurice becomes angry and demands that Fat go home and read *Genesis*, even though Fat is more familiar with the text. This misunderstanding occurs because Maurice is not familiar with Gnosticism, and so the limitations of ignorant orthodoxy are revealed. Such orthodoxy is often *dangerously* ignorant, despite and also *due* to its strength (Maurice is rippling with muscle, and a former freedom fighter for the Israeli army) (*VALIS*).

Then—providing a contrast to Maurice—there is Dr. Stone: he engages Fat in conversation as an equal, he is familiar with Gnostic concepts, and by the end of the conversation he declares Fat the expert on the subject. This is the opposite of orthodox ignorance; a foolish reliance on accepting all theories, no matter how ridiculous. Witness Dr. Stone’s recommendation that his patient try the Bach remedies—solutions prepared using dew from different flowers. This remedy, advised by a medical doctor, is practically useless (*VALIS*).

The dichotomy between religious orthodoxy and naïve acceptance represents, in part, the dangers Fat faces when interpreting his experiences. In ancient times, they would, perhaps, have lifted him to the realm of the prophets, but in modern times claiming to have experienced God can provide a one-way ticket to the mental hospital, or worse.

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Section II
—Gnosticism—

*"I have cast fire upon the world, and look,
I'm guarding it until it blazes."*

Gospel of Thomas

What is Gnosticism?

Believe it or not, that isn't a simple question. It's easy to mistakenly view Gnosticism as a singular entity—*this* group of people believed *that*—but the truth is more complicated. Gnosticism is a blanket term for a wide variety of concepts. Karen King, Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard, elaborates:

The term is used so widely and in so many different senses that its precise meaning . . . is often hard to discern. Indeed, not only is Gnosticism used to refer to certain types of ancient Christian heresy, but it has come to have significant application in a variety of other areas. (5)

“Gnosticism” describes “a broad variety of religious teachings that were rife in the Hellenized Near East of the first centuries CE.” Proponents claimed to have access to secret wisdom that mainstream Christianity did not. A “radically dualistic mood” permeates Gnostic thought, a duality between “man and world,” as well as “between the world and God” (Borchert 97-98).

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What were the basic beliefs of Gnostic sects?

Gnostic thought “can be summarized in the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into this world of fate, birth and death, and needing to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally reintegrated” (King 169). The true God in Gnosticism is transcendent. He/she exists entirely outside of our physical universe. Gnosticism tells how the perfection of the divine was shattered, leading to the emergence of lower powers who became “the makers and rulers” of a flawed physical world (Borchert 99). Gnostics view the world of physical matter as profane, a prison. They believe that the true aspect of mankind is divine, and that the physical nature of our universe is the result of divinity being corrupted. The goal of the Gnostic is to overcome the physical prison of the body through *gnosis*, or “knowledge”, and achieve spiritual release. (King)

Corruption is the result of Wisdom, or Sophia, being desperate to know her creator. When she attempted to do so, this “primordial error . . . usually identified as a reckless desire to know the transcendent God,” resulted in the birth of Yaldabaoth, the Demiurge. This Demiurge was an imposter, mistakenly believing he was the *only* God, and from his flawed attempts at creation arose the physical world, human suffering, and so forth. This version of God is well-known, albeit from a different perspective; the Demiurge—the deluded God—is the God of the Old Testament (Borchert; King).

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What is Nag Hammadi? What is Chenoboskion?

Nag Hammadi is a town in Egypt near which a collection of Gnostic texts was discovered in December of 1945, and Chenoboskion is the name of a small settlement east of that town. The discovery was overshadowed by the events of World War II, but it was considered revolutionary amongst academics. Two Egyptians “uncovered a sealed clay jar containing a hoard of papyrus manuscripts.” These manuscripts dated back to fourth-century CE, and included “a wealth of ancient religious literature, a total of forty-six different works, almost all of which were previously unknown” (King 149).

These Gnostic texts were important because the majority of scholarship on Gnosticism prior to this discovery focused on works that criticized Gnostics as being heretics. People such as Irenaeus and Justin Martyr were, for a long time, among the only reliable sources for information about early Gnosticism. They indeed made for excellent source material, especially concerning mainstream Christian thought, but could only function as secondary sources in terms of Gnosticism. Finding primary texts written by Gnostics of that time period was therefore an incredible discovery. More than a few of these texts focus on a sect of Gnostic thought called Valentinian Gnosticism. This is the brand of Gnosticism that the novel *VALIS* draws from most heavily (King).

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What is a syzygy?

“Syzygy” (pronounced /'sɪzɪjē/) is a word that means “the conjunction of two organisms without loss of identity,” as well as “a pair of connected or correlative things; in Gnostic theology, a couple or pair of opposites” (*OED*). A “divine syzygy,” in this context, refers to the male and female parts of God. The shattering of this syzygy and the subsequent yearning to rejoin it provides a means to mythologize APKD’s *own* struggles with women. The Gnostic Sophia is a reflection of his dead sister, reborn, a font of pure wisdom, and the many women in the main character’s life are distorted reflections of her.

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What are the beliefs of Valentinian Gnosticism?

Valentinian Gnosticism, the sect that is referenced in *VALIS*, is a complicated variation of Gnostic belief. As with all historical topics, there is a great deal of spirited academic debate concerning the details. This answer provides only the basic ideas necessary for understanding the parts of *VALIS* that refer to Valentinian Gnosticism.⁸

Valentinus, the founder of the Valentinians, taught that Jesus gave his disciples secret teachings. He claimed that when Jesus preached in the world, he was using metaphors that didn't tell the whole story. If the average layperson, unknowing of this tradition, were to only read the scriptures, he would never learn the truth. Only Gnostics would know the path to salvation (Owens).

Valentinians believed that God could not be known by physical means. The divine was infinite and the source of all things, but unknowable. It was also believed that God was androgynous. The male and female aspects of God, acting together, were manifested in the Son (also androgynous); the Son's energies, in turn, were manifested in spiritual entities called Aeons. These Aeons were independent entities, joined together in male and female dyads; these dyads were known as divine syzygies. Collectively, these Aeons constituted the Fullness (Owens).

The Aeons did not know who created them, but yearned to understand their source. The youngest of the Aeons—Sophia (Wisdom)—attempted, in her curiosity, to know God, but failed, because she attempted it through “thinking alone, something that is impossible.”

⁸ Note, also, that this description is primarily derived from the *Gnostic Society Library*. I mention this only because the *Gnostic Society's* descriptions of Valentinian thought differ significantly from the other interpretative source I located—written by a member of an Orthodox theological school—that cites the early Orthodox scholar Irenaeus almost exclusively. I therefore chose the *Gnostic Society's* version, since the Nag Hammadi texts—heavily referenced in the novel—serve as a primary source.

Sophia became split in two: the higher part remained with her divine syzygy, but the lower part, mired in illusion and suffering, was cut off from the other Aeons (Owens).

Remember the phrase “armillary coherence”? The Gnostic universe is represented the same way (Owens):

- The outermost sphere, encompassing everything, is God.
- After that is the Son.
 - Within the son are the Aeons.
- The innermost sphere is the fallen aspect of Sophia, a deficiency that is separated from God.

There is, in this model, a boundary between God and the Son; hence why the Aeons were unable to know God. There is also a boundary between the Son and the physical realm, due to the physical’s profane nature.

After Sophia’s split and the creation of the deficient, physical lower-realm, the Aeons were finally granted knowledge of God and then integrated into the personality of the Son. This reintegrated Son was dubbed the Savior, and was destined to be the bridegroom of the fallen aspect of Sophia. (Owens).

The Savior descended past the lower boundary, into the physical world, and freed the lower Sophia from her ignorance by granting her knowledge (*gnosis*), thus freeing her from her suffering. The now complete Sophia, overcome with joy, created spiritual seeds in the image of her Savior. These seeds represent the spiritual element present in every Christian. However, these seeds were immature, and so part of the lower realm remained. This remaining deficiency was molded into the physical world as we know it today, in order to provide a place for the growing spiritual seeds, trapped in flesh, to become mature and

eventually free, reuniting with their spiritual counterparts in divine syzygies of their own (Owens).

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What is the significance of Sophia at the end of *VALIS*?

Losing his twin sister shaped the author's psychological life, both in terms of the women he cared about, as well as affecting how he dealt with inner self. The two-year old Sophia at the end of the book is the manifestation of APKD's desire to see his sister alive, as well as the desire to repair the shattered relationships with the women in his life. APKD says in his *Exegesis*, "My search in this world, in all worlds, is for my sister, my female counterpart whom I have lost—been separated from. She is very close to me . . . ultimately, as holy wisdom herself." (*Exegesis* 410) She is the culmination of his search, but the inevitable corruption of her innocence (represented by the other women in the novel) poisoned his view of women. Sophia is symbolic of the emotional and spiritual fallout of his sister's death. Sophia's family represents the consequences of that toxicity, in that they are dying or going mad from prolonged exposure to the godchild; this reminds the narrator of "something which [Paracelsus] had discovered. Poisons, in measured doses, are remedies... So put another way, medications can be poisonous, can kill" (*VALIS* 336).

Dunlap and Ramey discuss Sophia's role in their essay "Sophia Within": "These women are variations on Sophia, who was, for [APKD], psychologically rooted in his twin sister, Jane. . ." The essay describes how Sophia is a stark contrast to the devouring nature of the women in his life. Sophia, innocent and untouched by the world, is killed "before she can become the devouring one." (Dunlap 151) The essay continues, saying that APKD was well aware of how poisonous this duality was. The medicine and the poison coexist in the same bottle.

The author is mythologizing his struggle with the feminine in terms of the Gnostic syzygy. Just as Gnosticism portrays Sophia, once complete in perfect union, as becoming separated and then reconnecting via spiritual salvation, Fat too seeks salvation. In a sense, he is battling with the feminine aspect of *himself*. His inability to save his sister, in other words, has mutated into a desperate struggle to save the women in his life as a substitute. He overlays this struggle atop every woman he meets, culminating in his encounter with Sophia! The women in Fat's life become savior figures for him, just as he perceives himself as *their* savior; this perversion of the Gnostic syzygy is one of the strongest examples of duality in the novel.

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What is the significance of Gloria Knudsen?

We've seen the author's representation of his sister, the godlike manifestation of feminine innocence that is inexorably destroyed, and so now we proceed to the "devouring" women in Fat's life, the other side of the equation. The first illustration of this in *VALIS* is Gloria Knudsen. The narrator receives a call from Gloria, wherein she reveals suicide plans. He goes to visit her in hopes that he can save her life. When he asks her why she is killing herself, she tells a story that he says is "lapidary⁹ in construction." By using the word "lapidary", the narrator is saying that Gloria has practiced her response to the suicide question so many times that it has become like a finely-cut gemstone in terms of attention to detail. Since cutting and polishing a gemstone removes large portions of the original stone, the metaphor becomes even more telling. She is shedding pieces of herself as she tells the story, until Fat realizes that she is, mentally at least, already dead. (*VALIS* 179)

Gloria, who is already dead inside, is a distorted reflection of the main character. Just as Gloria sheds pieces of herself the way a gem-cutter discards pieces of stone, the narrator of *VALIS* has split himself into two characters, so as "to gain much-needed objectivity." This second character, Horselover Fat, is thus the shedding of an unwanted aspect of the narrator; it is the part that experienced God, the part that NPKD fears may be evidence of mental illness. It is the part that is wracked with guilt over his sister's death.

Second, Gloria represents the "devouring females" in Fat's life, "who are blamed with all such violent appropriations: if someone gets eaten up, it's the girl to blame. We

⁹ **Lapidary** refers to the art of cutting gemstones (*OED*).

might call this a psychological symptom that poisons the universe of the text.” (Dunlop 190). Fat cannot blame Sophia, so he seeks out women who will “devour” him as a substitute, a perversion of the divine syzygy. If he can save Gloria, Fat believes, perhaps he can in turn be saved by her, and if not, he will justify it by claiming he *deserves* to be devoured. This fate is inevitable, since Fat seeks a union with a woman who cannot even love *herself* enough to continue living. He seeks a form of salvation—a divine syzygy—that is instead a kind of punishment; he seeks the medicine, but fails to recognize the poison.

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What is the significance of Sherri Solvig?

Horselover Fat supports Sherri while she battles cancer, an illness from which she miraculously recovers. She is described by NPKD, however, as believing she is doomed to die from a relapse. He compares her situation to Gloria Knudsen's:

[Sherri] believed that cancer lay in the deck of cards in front of her . . . Gloria wanted to die for strictly imaginary reasons. Sherri would literally die whether she wanted to or not.

Sherri, like Gloria, represents Fat's attempts to help a "devouring woman." Dick states that it is his curse to help people, that "helping people was one of the . . . basic things Fat had been told long ago to give up" (*VALIS* 244). Fat, who cannot even save himself, seeks out relationships that are doomed to fail.

At one point in the novel, Sherri is dying in her hospital bed, and Fat's protective instincts—his desire to save her, and vice versa—nearly overwhelm him. Upon witnessing a visit by one of Sherri's childhood friends, NPKD says that "Fat had never come so close to coldcocking anybody into tomorrow as at that moment" (*VALIS* 261). Remember that Fat's relationship with Sherri, as with Gloria, is tainted by a death-trip, a perversion of the Gnostic syzygy; NPKD at one point even likens Sherri's mind-state to a "malignant death-game" (*VALIS* 243). While Fat certainly cares for her, he fails to recognize obvious signs: that she views herself as doomed, that she is spreading this poison to others, and that, same as Gloria, she does not *want* to be saved. Fat even says, when talking about moving in with Sherri, that "it was as if Gloria, upon [committing suicide], had been reborn twice the size

with twice the mental strength.” Despite him recognizing this, he still can’t “wait to move in with Sherri and save her” (*VALIS* 243-244).

Fat is repeating the same mistakes, first with Gloria, and then with Sherri, until finally, at the end of the novel, he meets the symbolic representation of this cycle in the child savior Sophia. Sophia is innocent, omniscient, and *appears* to be a legitimate messiah figure, yet she poisons anything living that comes anywhere near her! Sophia is representative of Fat’s unconscious mind, the ultimate mythological metaphor for his struggles, one in which the narrator cannot even continue to remain an observer. *Fat is struck from the novel’s fictional reality*, a blatant example of the direction the end of the novel takes. *This* is how powerful the young goddess’s hold is over the main character. The divine syzygy expressed by Fat and the young Sophia is the culmination of multiple threads of duality: sanity and madness, masculinity and femininity, spirituality and psychoanalysis . . . all of these represented by Sophia, the linchpin of Valentinian Gnostic faith.

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Section III
—Jung—

"Religious experience is absolute, it cannot be disputed. You can only say that you have never had such an experience, whereupon your opponent will reply: 'Sorry, I have.' And there your discussion will come to an end."

Carl Jung

Why does Jung have a section in this Reader's Guide?

To answer this question, let's digress a moment. Language, according to Jung, has a genesis in the vocal expression of emotions, "sounds which express terror, fear, anger, love . . . and sounds which imitate the noises of the elements." To extrapolate these grunts and cries into the conversations and newspapers of today is a relatively simple leap. We can move further, however, and apply the underpinnings of the unconscious—both personal and collective—to artistic expression. Jung expresses the following in *Symbols of Transformation*: "one of the basic principles of analytical psychology is that dream images are to be understood symbolically." With art we synthesize dreams in the forge of reality; the craftsmen and women who identify as poets, painters, musicians, etc. are in this way liaisons between our conscious and unconscious minds. They speak in their respective tongues what *cannot* seemingly be spoken. (*Basic*)

Similarly, the author's unconscious surges through *VALIS* and the *Exegesis*. The symbolism of the author's dreams is manifested in the shifting realities of the novel. A Jungian view of these symbols and the associations is inevitable, especially in light of the novel's multifaceted duality. Jung was very much inspired by Gnostic thought—especially Valentinian thought—drawing upon its "mythical schemas" to help formulate his ideas of the collective unconscious, and the means by which an individual may come to realize his or her true self. Psychoanalysis can speak on religious experience, investigating its contents from a unique perspective. Jung frequently spoke of the unconscious from a mythological standpoint; he understood that accepting religious experiences as legitimate personal realities was a pathway toward psychological and spiritual healing. This is

invaluable when discussing how Philip K. Dick mythologizes *his* struggles and religious experiences.

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Who was Carl Jung?

Carl Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology. He was a disciple of Freud in his early years, but the two split due to disagreements over the nature of the unconscious. While Freud focused primarily on “sexuality as a motivating force,” Jung disagreed with this conclusion. Additionally, “[Jung] also felt that Freud’s concept of the unconscious was limited and overly negative.” Where Freud saw only “repressed thoughts and motivations”, Jung saw a potential “source of creativity” (Cherry 1).

According to James Hollis, Jung “had a deep appreciation of our creative life and considered spirituality a central part of the human journey” (Hollis 1). Jung’s debt to Gnostic thought, for example, can be seen in the idea of the syzygy: the idea that every male has a projected female counterpart (the *anima*), and that every female has a projected male counterpart (the *animus*). Jung utilized the mythological nature of humans, thought to help explain certain elements of the unconscious, to demonstrate that the stories we have projected upon the constellations may in fact be aspects of a collective unconscious. Be aware that this section will brush only the surface of Jungian thought. Specifically, I will focus on brief explanations of the “collective unconscious” and the “archetype”, the *anima* and *animus*, and the *Deus Absconditus*.

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What is the “collective unconscious”?

In *VALIS*, NPKD describes the collective unconscious in terms of Recapitulation Theory, best known for the phrase “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.” In biology, it theorizes that animals—when developing from embryo to adult—go through phases that are representative of the successive evolutionary stages of their ancestors. Though it has been largely discredited in biology, some other fields still consider it plausible when applied to their subjects (origin of language, cognitive development, etc.). In terms of the collective unconscious, for example, it can be a useful way to better understand what is meant (University of California 1). *VALIS* refers to “phylogenic memory” at one point, for example; “phylogenic” is the same as “phylogenetic”. The word relates to “the evolutionary development of a species or other group of organisms through a succession of forms.” (*OED*). So, phylogenic memory can be thought of as the memory of a species’ history, constituting the *deepest* form of memory.

Jung gives an explanation in *The Concept of the Collective Unconscious* that rings a similar bell:

The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. (*Concept*)

Jung states that the collective unconscious is comprised of archetypes, “literally a preexistent form”. This collective unconscious is the same for every person, it is a “second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature.” Being aware of

archetypal manifestations can help us to interpret the thoughts of the personal, “immediate” consciousness (*Concept 1*).

Jung further says that the unconscious not only contains the repressed elements mentioned by his mentor Freud, “but also all psychic material that lies below the threshold of consciousness.” In essence, the individual has a “conscious and personal psyche” that can be contrasted with an “inherited and universal psychic disposition;” this is what is meant by the collective unconscious. Jung sees this as similar to comparing and contrasting an individual vs. society (*Basic*).

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What is an “archetype”?

This concept is not specific to Jung; he was simply the first in his field to apply it to psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Jung says it is “an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious.” Archetypes are universal concepts that are familiar to all humans, and form the basis of the collective unconscious. Jung continues:

Mythological research calls them “motifs”; in the psychology of primitives they correspond to Levy-Bruhl’s [concepts,] and in the field of comparative religion they have been defined . . . it should be clear enough that my idea . . . does not stand alone but is something that is recognized and named in other fields of knowledge. (*Collective*)

Any student of anthropology, or myths in general, will recognize this idea. Jung is taking the concepts of mythology and using them to modify and enhance Freud’s idea of the unconscious.

Jung stresses that an archetype “is itself irrepresentable but has effects which make visualizations of it possible.” An archetype will also by nature contain aspects of its opposite. Blue will contain red, so to speak, and the visualization of blue will thus come to be rather violet instead. If we examine Fat’s issues with the feminine from a Jungian standpoint, for example, we can infer that Sophia is the projection of his own feminine aspects. This is known in Jungian psychoanalysis as the *anima* in males. In females, it is a projection of male aspects, and is called the *animus* (*Basic*).

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What is the *anima*? *Animus*?

There is a veritable glut of definitions for the *anima* and the *animus* out there, so let's work with what Jung says. The *anima* and *animus* represent archetypes of contrasexuality¹⁰; that is, the *anima* in men expresses repressed female qualities, while the *animus* in females represents repressed male qualities. In APKD's—and, by extension, Fat's—case, the *anima* is significantly affected by the death of his sister. This loss, all the more tragic due to it happening before he could talk, influenced the relationships throughout his life. That said, it can be theorized that this loss perhaps made Dick more aware of these unconscious influences. After all, VALIS is bursting with self-aware commentary. NPKD is aware, for example, that Fat seeks out women he cannot save. This is only a step away from the realization that, from an unconscious perspective, Fat is trying to save Sophia, or rather, the projected *image* of his own repressed female qualities, projected via the image of APKD's sister. (*Basic; Psyche*)

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¹⁰ **Contrasexuality** refers to personality traits that most people repress because they are characteristic of the opposite sex.

What is a *Deus Absconditus*?

Deus Absconditus is Latin for “hidden God”. Jung used this phrase to refer to the “turbulent and potentially consuming side of the unconscious” (Dourley 102). Jung elaborates in a statement given at a seminar held on December 7, 1932:

Absconditus means concealed, it is the hidden or concealed god, and [Martin Luthor] meant by that the god that was the opposite of the *Deus Manifestus* . . . opposite [the *Deus Manifestus*] there must be another, the same god, but the hidden side . . . (*Visions* 845)

Jung here is speaking perhaps of the *shadow*, that part of our unconscious mind that contains aspects of ourselves that we refuse to accept. Indeed, one of the primary goals of individuation is to accept the darkest parts of ourselves, to come to terms with the “monster”, as Jung calls it, and integrate these elements into our personality (McManus). The journey toward full individuation may take many years, but coming to terms with it even partially can yield a healthier mind.

In *VALIS*, Dick turns the concept of the *Deus Absconditus* inside-out. *VALIS* is said to be a *Deus Absconditus*, normally remaining hidden, and revealing itself only rarely. However, *VALIS* is cast as a force of good; indeed, Dick views the physical world as irrational, and *VALIS* as an opposing force of rationality and light. This is an interesting contrast to a *Deus Absconditus* being used as a Protestant method of dealing with biblical paradoxes¹¹ (*Vision*). Instead of being a potentially evil, hidden part of God, the *Deus Absconditus* becomes a redeemer. Perhaps this is a statement on the nature of orthodox religion, or a

¹¹ Jung uses the bet God made with Satan concerning Job as an example.

statement on humanity in general. After all, the darkest parts of ourselves are often discovered, in the light of day, to be much smaller than we imagined, and only cast monstrous shadows due to the strength of our gazes. The *Deus Absconditus*, besides speaking of VALIS's nature, may also reference Horselover Fat. Since Fat represents the parts of NPKD that have been cast away—split into a separate, third-person character—the *Deus Absconditus* may express the hidden parts of the narrator. Fat gives NPKD the “much-needed objectivity” required to interpret these hidden aspects of his mind (*VALIS*).

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Is Fat's mental split explainable in a Jungian context?

From a Jungian point-of-view, the two aspects of the main character, Horselover Fat and NPKD, represent the author's struggle in coming to terms with his own unconscious mind. NPKD casts away his *Deus Absconditus* into the absurdly-named Horselover Fat, until Sophia, late in the novel, declares that Fat and NPKD are one person, forcing Fat to disappear into non-existence.

"It was Horselover Fat," I said.

Sophia said, "Phil, Kevin, and David. Three of you. There are no more."

Turning to speak to Fat—I saw no one. . . . Fat was gone. Nothing remained of him. (*VALIS* 348)

This scene is representative of NPKD undergoing individuation, since he is being forced to reintegrate those aspects of his personality. That NPKD and Fat end up as separate characters by the *end* of the novel is a testament, perhaps, to how truly difficult the struggle of integration can be, though I perceive it as a hopeful sentiment (see next question). Most people can identify with the struggles inherent in dealing with the duality of one's self, darkness versus light, and so forth. We all have a *Deus Absconditus* within us that we must integrate and learn to accept. And, in the end, perhaps this is what redeems us.

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How does Jung relate to Gnosticism? How is it different?

The concept of the “divine syzygy,” which in Gnostic thought represents the divine union of male and female, is used by Jung to talk about the *anima* and *animus* in union with each other. He says that “the syzygy consists of three elements apiece: the femininity pertaining to the man and the masculinity pertaining to the woman, the experience which man has of the woman and vice versa, and finally the masculine and female archetypal image” (*Psyche* 20). In this way, Jung classified the parts of the unconscious mind that represent contrasexuality in men and women. He was able to then utilize the concept of the syzygy to describe how men interact with the women in their life, and vice versa.

In addition, mythology (especially religious mythology) helped to inform Jung’s psychological ideas. Hoeller says:

The fact remains that Jungian depth psychology is more than a therapeutic discipline, just as Gnosticism is more than an ancient religion. Both are the expression at their particular levels of existential reality of a Gnosis, a knowledge of the heart directed toward the inmost core of the human psyche and having as its objective the essential transformation of the psyche.

(Hoeller 1)

Most of all, then, Jung was inspired by the Gnostic idea that knowledge of one’s self can lead to salvation, and knowledge of one’s contrasexual characteristics can lead to significant insights.

Viewing Sophia as NPKD’s/Fat’s *anima* yields a different angle than viewing it from a Gnostic perspective. Sophia can be seen, from a Jungian point-of-view, as an expression

of NPKD's and Fat's contrasexual aspects. If this is so, APKD is utilizing Gnostic concepts in order to glean a more significant, psychoanalytical understanding of his failed relationships. Along these same lines, the reader may view the end of *VALIS*, with its radical shift in genre, as an allegorical summation of this quest. That is, Sophia is the ultimate incarnation of NPKD's *anima*, and while the confrontation with her does not lead to a *final* conclusion—Fat and NPKD are separated again, after all—it *does* lead to a happier person, and the intimation that full reintegration is inevitable. Witness what happens in the final chapter, when NPKD sees Horselover Fat for the first time since Sophia's death:

Grinning, carrying a briefcase; our friend back home. [Fat] wore a suit and tie, a good-looking East Coast suit, fashionable in the extreme. It shocked us to see him so well-dressed; we had anticipated, I guess, some emaciated, hollow-eyed remnant scarcely able to hobble down the corridor. . . . Fat seemed withdrawn, but not actually depressed. (*VALIS* 378-79)

The “shunt” in the “tale,” (Rossi) then, is the author's means of taking the cold knife of reality—the death-grip of depression, the fear of insanity, and the search for a “devouring woman”—and morphing it into mythology, into allegory, and from there emerging, not quite whole, but a great deal healthier. It is the author's exclamation of hope.

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Section IV
—Final Thoughts—

*What would Phil have said about it?
He would have said six different things!
I'll say this. Anybody who takes this
without a laugh misses it all.*

Norman Spinrad

Where should I go from here?

Well, if you haven't read VALIS, I would recommend giving it a try. You'll find that there are many aspects of it I haven't touched on, because there is simply neither the room nor the time. For example, did you know that Eric Lampton is actually a fictionalized representation of David Bowie? The movie that Eric Lampton created, meanwhile, is a fictionalized version of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, a real-life movie in which David Bowie played the main character. The plot of the fictional movie, however, is actually taken from a posthumously published novel of Dick's called *Radio Free Albemuth*, a book that also wrestles with Gnostic themes. There's likely more than a few papers that remain to be carved out of that sequence! And this is just one of countless examples of content I've been forced to omit.

I've attempted to address in this guide what I felt were the most difficult aspects of VALIS. At the very least, I hope that I've provided enough insight into the novel that it becomes more enjoyable. Once the book starts waxing religious and metaphysical, the basic concepts I've outlined should provide enough ground for a layperson to stand on, so to speak. From there, many avenues remain to be explored. This paper has barely scratched the surface of possible topics. Not only this, but the full 8000-page *Exegesis*, "possibly the largest archive of unreleased and unpublished material written by any major 20th century author," is now available in online form at a site called *Zebrapedia*, a collaborative endeavor dedicated to "exploring [the] massive text." (*Zebrapedia*)

After signing up, anyone is free to peruse the *Exegesis*, examine its contents, and comment on them, in a Wiki-based effort of cooperative critical scholarship. It goes to

show that even now, after his death, the work of Philip K. Dick is stretching the boundaries of the present, pushing us ever further into a new age. Collaborative, worldwide, instantaneous information-gathering *is* the future, and will only become more accurate, more agile, and more advanced over time; rather apropos, given the nature of the information-based entity with which PKD was obsessed. And perhaps one day, many years from now, we will come to realize that—rather than just discovering it—we have *built* a Vast Active Living Intelligence System, using the fiber-optic nervous system of a connected planet. Truly, the future envisioned in Philip K. Dick’s imagination has only just begun.

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*"If you think this universe is bad,
you should see some of the others."*

Philip K. Dick, attributed

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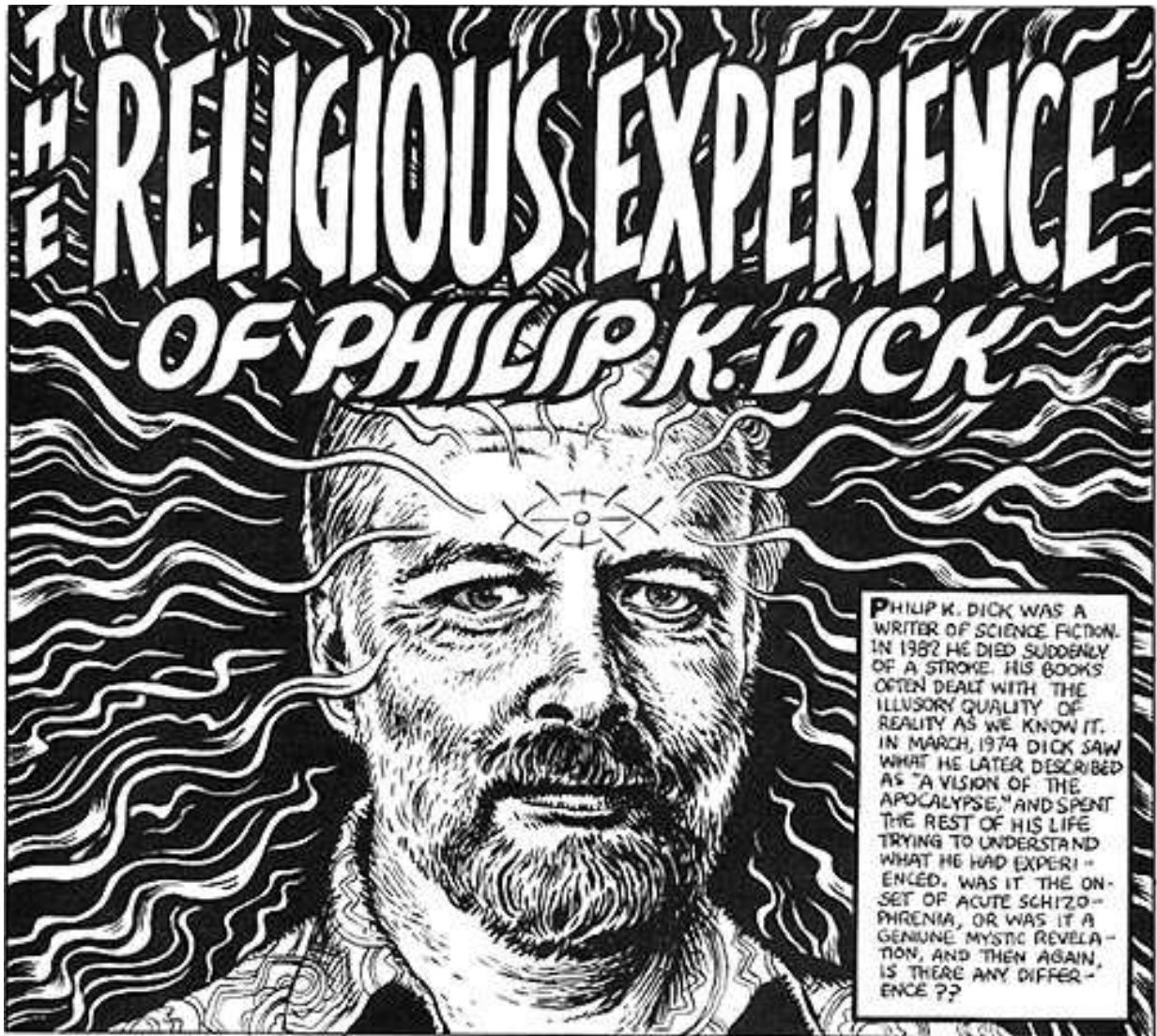
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Appendix A
—The Religious Experience
of Philip K. Dick—

*“One does not become enlightened
by imagining figures of light, but by
making the darkness conscious.”*

Carl Jung



PHILIP K. DICK WAS A WRITER OF SCIENCE FICTION. IN 1982 HE DIED SUDDENLY OF A STROKE. HIS BOOKS OFTEN DEALT WITH THE ILLUSORY QUALITY OF REALITY AS WE KNOW IT. IN MARCH, 1974 DICK SAW WHAT HE LATER DESCRIBED AS "A VISION OF THE APOCALYPSE," AND SPENT THE REST OF HIS LIFE TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HE HAD EXPERIENCED. WAS IT THE ONSET OF ACUTE SCHIZOPHRENIA, OR WAS IT A GENUINE MYSTIC REVELATION, AND THEN AGAIN, IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE??



FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA, MARCH, 1974: "I HAD A WISDOM TOOTH EXTRACTED. THEY GAVE ME A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF SODIUM PENTOTHAL. I CAME HOME AND WAS IN GREAT PAIN. HE HADN'T GIVEN ME ANY PAIN MEDICATION AND MY WIFE CALLED THE PHARMACY."



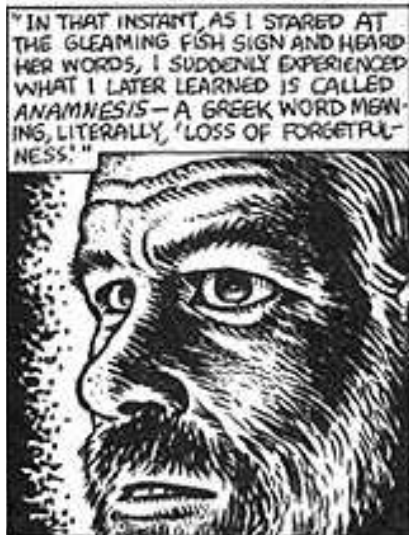
"I WAS IN SUCH PAIN THAT I WENT OUT TO MEET THE GIRL WHEN SHE CAME. SHE WAS WEARING A GOLDEN FISH IN PROFILE ON A NECKLACE. THE SUN STRUCK IT AND IT SHONE, AND I WAS DAZED BY IT."



"FOR SOME REASON I WAS HYPNOTIZED BY THE GLEAMING GOLDEN FISH. I FORGOT MY PAIN, FORGOT THE MEDICATION, FORGOT WHY THE GIRL WAS THERE. I JUST KEPT STARING AT THE FISH SIGN."

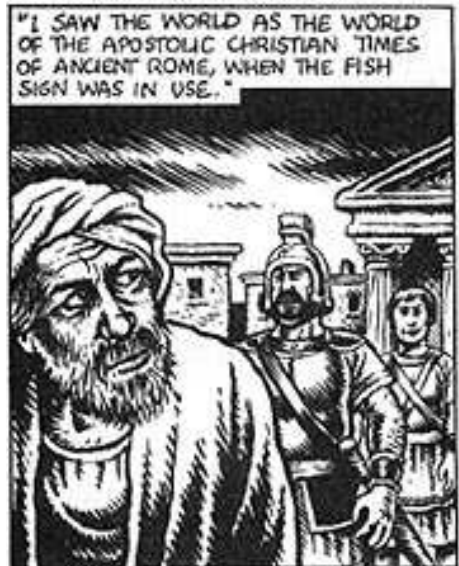


"WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?' I ASKED HER. THE GIRL TOUCHED THE GUMMERING GOLDEN FISH WITH HER HAND AND SAID, 'THIS IS A SIGN WORN BY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.' SHE THEN GAVE ME THE PACKAGE OF MEDICATION."



"IN THAT INSTANT, AS I STARED AT THE GLEAMING FISH SIGN AND HEARD HER WORDS, I SUDDENLY EXPERIENCED WHAT I LATER LEARNED IS CALLED ANAMNESIS—A GREEK WORD MEANING, LITERALLY, 'LOSS OF FORGETFULNESS.'"

"I REMEMBERED WHO I WAS AND WHERE I WAS. IN AN INSTANT, IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE, IT ALL CAME BACK TO ME. AND NOT ONLY COULD I REMEMBER IT BUT I COULD SEE IT. THE GIRL WAS A SECRET CHRISTIAN AND SO WAS I. WE LIVED IN FEAR OF DETECTION BY THE ROMANS. WE HAD TO COMMUNICATE IN CRYPTIC SIGNS. SHE HAD JUST TOLD ME ALL THIS, AND IT WAS TRUE."



"I SAW THE WORLD AS THE WORLD OF THE APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN TIMES OF ANCIENT ROME, WHEN THE FISH SIGN WAS IN USE."



"IT ONLY LASTED A FEW SECONDS. I WENT IN AND TOOK THE PAIN MEDICATION. I WAS HEMORRAGING. I WAS BLEEDING BADLY, IN GREAT DISCOMFORT."



"AND THEN A MONTH LATER, IT ALL BEGAN TO SEEP THROUGH. THERE WASN'T ANYWAY I COULD HOLD IT BACK. THE TRANSFORMATION OCCURRED AND IT STAYED FOR A YEAR... I SAW THE WORLD UNDER THE ASPECT OF THE CHRISTIAN APOCALYPSE."

ΕΛΘΩΝ ΕΡΩΤΗΣΑΤΑ
 ΚΑΝΤΕ ΕΠΙΘΥΜΙΑ
 ΗΝ ΗΙ ΣΤΕΦΑΝΟΣ ΗΑΝ
 ΗΝ ΑΙΩΝ ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΗ

"IT WASN'T LIKE AN ALTERNATE REALITY, IT WAS LIKE WHAT I CALL 'TRANS-TEMPORAL CONSTANCY'... IT WAS AN ETERNAL TRUTH, LIKE PLATO'S ARCHETYPICAL WORLD, WHERE EVERYTHING WAS ALWAYS HERE AND ALWAYS NOW, AND HAD BEEN THAT WAY AND WOULD BE THAT WAY."



"BUT THERE WAS SOME KIND OF DYNAMISM, WHERE IT WASN'T STAT-IC. THERE WAS SOME KIND OF TIME, BUT IT WAS A DIFFERENT KIND OF TIME... A DREAM TIME, WHERE THE DEEDS OF HEROES OC-CUR. IT WAS SOME KIND OF MYTHOLOG-ICAL TIME, EVERYTHING ASSUMED A MYTHOLOGICAL QUALITY."



"I WAS ABLE TO FUNCTION PERFECTLY, I WASN'T PSYCHOTIC. I WAS ABLE TO HANDLE ALL MY BUSINESS--IN FACT I HANDLED IT BETTER... I WASN'T SCREWED UP."



"IT INVADDED MY MIND AND ASSUMED CONTROL OF MY MOTOR CENTERS AND DID MY ACTING AND THINKING FOR ME. I WAS A SPECTATOR TO IT... THIS MIND, WHOSE IDENTITY WAS TOTALLY OB-SCURE TO ME, WAS EQUIPPED WITH TREMENDOUS TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE. IT HAD MEMORIES DATING BACK OVER TWO THOUSAND YEARS..IT SPOKE GREEK, HEBREW, SANSKRIT, THERE WASN'T ANYTHING THAT IT DIDN'T SEEM TO KNOW."



"IT IMMEDIATELY SET ABOUT PUTTING MY AF-FAIRS IN ORDER. IT FIRED MY AGENT AND MY PUBLISHER...MY WIFE WAS IMPRESSED BY THE FACT THAT, BECAUSE OF THE TREMENDOUS PRES-SURE THIS MIND PUT ON PEOPLE IN MY BUSINESS, I MADE QUITE A LOT OF MONEY VERY RAPIDLY. WE BEGAN TO GET CHECKS FOR THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS-- MONEY THAT WAS OWED ME..."



"I DIDN'T WANT TO INVOLVE MY WIFE IN THIS. SHE WAS A WIT-NESS ON ONE CRUC-IAL MATTER. SHE WAS THERE WHEN ALL THAT INFORMA-TION ABOUT OUR LITTLE BOY'S BIRTH DEFECT WAS TRANSFERRED TO ME. SHE SAW ME SIT-TING THERE LISTENING TO THE BEATLES RECORD ON THE PHONO-GRAPH."



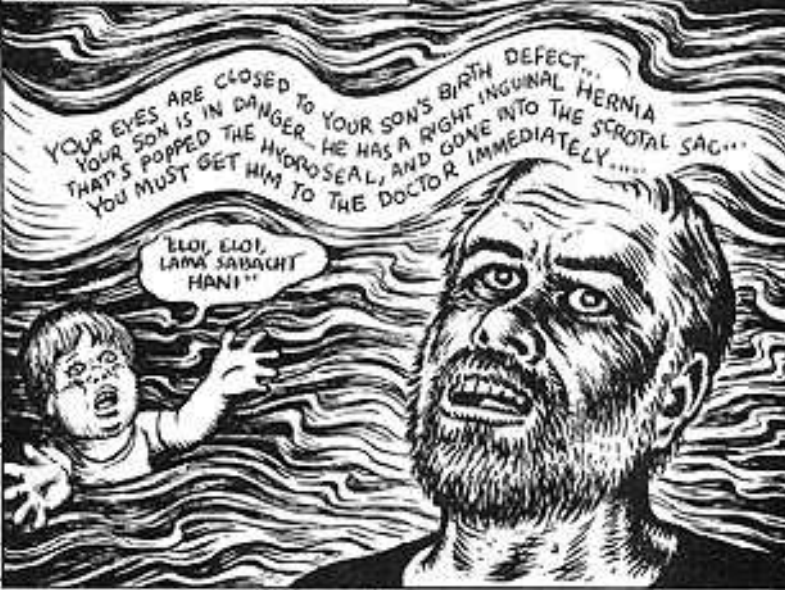
"HE WOULD HAVE DIED...HE WAS IN IMMINENT PERIL. IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF TIME, ONLY A MATTER OF TIME... SO I WAS SITTING THERE LISTENING TO 'STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER,' WITH MY EYES SHUT, WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN THIS TREMENDOUS LIGHT HIT ME."



"LITERALLY, IN THE SENSE I SAW THE LIGHT, I WAS BLINDED...I THOUGHT, JESUS CHRIST! WHAT'S HAPPENING? I'M BLIND, MY HEAD HURTS, CAN'T SEE NOTHING. ALL I CAN SEE IS PINK... A PHOSPHENE AFTER IMAGE, LIKE YOU SEE WHEN A FLASHBULB FIRES OFF."



"ALL I COULD SEE WAS A PINK HAZE, AND THE WORDS OF THE BEATLES SONG GOT ALL CHANGED AROUND."



"YOUR EYES ARE CLOSED TO YOUR SON'S BIRTH DEFECT... YOUR SON IS IN DANGER... HE HAS A RIGHT INGUINAL HERNIA THAT'S POPPED THE HYDROSEAL, AND GONE INTO THE SCROTAL SAC... YOU MUST GET HIM TO THE DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY..."

"I LEAPED UP... TESS WAS IN THE OTHER ROOM CHANGING CHRISTOPHER—I WALKED IN AND SAID 'TESS, HE'S GOT A BIRTH DEFECT, AND IT'S GOING TO KILL HIM, WE'VE GOT TO GET HIM TO A DOCTOR!'"



"I WAS SO UPSET I COULDN'T EVEN DRIVE, SO SHE CALLED THE DOCTOR AND SAID IT WAS AN EMERGENCY."



"SHE CAME BACK AN HOUR LATER AND SHE WAS ABSOLUTELY ASHEN. SHE SAID 'HE DOES HAVE A RIGHT HERNIA, AND IT IS DOWN INTO THE SCROTAL SAC... I'VE GOT THE NAME OF A SURGEON... THE DOCTOR SAYS HE SHOULD HAVE SURGERY IMMEDIATELY.'"



"WE TOOK HIM INTO THE SURGEON'S THE NEXT DAY, AND SCHEDULED SURGERY IMMEDIATELY. THE SURGEON SAID, 'YOUR BABY COULD HAVE DIED ANY TIME.'"



"BUT THAT WAS ONLY ONE THING THAT HAPPENED... THERE WERE LOTS OF OTHERS. THAT WAS JUST ONE... I WOULD NOT BE SITTING HERE TALKING TO YOU TODAY *IF THAT WEIRD-LOOKING SHINY FIRE HADN'T COME AROUND AND ZAPPED ME... SHOOTING UP THE WALLS AND THROUGH THE APERTURES OF THE DOORS..."



*1981 INTERVIEW WITH GREGG RICKMAN

"THERE IS NO REASONABLE ARGUMENT THAT WOULD ELUCIDATE WHAT THAT WAS THAT WAS FLOWING AROUND THE ROOM LIKE ST. ELMO'S FIRE...AND IT THINKS! IT GOT INTO MY BRAIN AND MADE ME THINK! ...IT DIDN'T THINK WHAT WE THINK...."



"...I WAS LOOKING AT MY NOTES—IT'S OVER SEVEN YEARS LATER, AND I'M STILL TAKING NOTES, IN AN EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND. IT DID NOT THINK IN THE SENSE THAT WE THINK. WE THINK IN DIGITAL, SYNTACTICAL, VERBAL INTEGERS... IT DID NOT THINK IN VERBAL TERMS... IT THOUGHT PURE CONCEPTS, WITHOUT WORDS, BUT IT KNEW WITHOUT RATIONATION. IT TRANSFERRED TO MY MIND CONCEPTS THAT IN SEVEN YEARS OF TRYING TO ARTICULATE THEM IN WORDS I'VE ONLY NOW BEEN ABLE TO REDUCE THEM—"

"I'VE FINALLY FOUND A MODEL THAT WAS SUGGESTED TO ME BY A PROFESSOR FRIEND. IT WORKED LIKE A BINARY COMPUTER, ON A FLICKER PULSATION OF 'OFF' AND 'ON'. IT JUST WASN'T A MIND LIKE WE HAVE MINDS."



"ONE OF MY EXPERIENCES—IT WAS '74—I BOUGHT ONE OF THOSE FISH SIGNS WITH THE GREEK LETTERS ON IT, AND PASTED IT UP ON MY WINDOW."

"I WAS SITTING THERE ONE DAY AND THE UPSILON, WHICH LOOKS LIKE A CAPITAL 'Y', SUDDENLY TURNED INTO A PALM TREE, AND THEN OPENED UP INTO THE ENTIRE MESOPOTAMIAN WORLD, THE MIDDLE-EASTERN WORLD."



"...THAT PERSONALITY GRADUALLY TOOK ME OVER FOR A MONTH, AND THEN FOR ABOUT A YEAR I WAS THAT OTHER PERSONALITY...IT WAS SO FUNNY—I USED TO BE ABLE TO PICK UP HIS THOUGHTS WHILE I WAS FALLING ASLEEP... AND I PICKED UP HIS THOUGHTS ONE NIGHT, AND HE WAS THINKING, 'THERE'S SOMEBODY ELSE INSIDE MY HEAD, AND HE'S LIVING IN ANOTHER CENTURY', MEANING ME."

"I THOUGHT, 'TELL ME ABOUT IT! I CAN SAY THE SAME THING!' AT FIRST HE THOUGHT HE WAS STILL BACK IN ROME. HE HAD EVERYTHING WRONG. HE THOUGHT THE ROMANS WERE GOING TO COME AND GET HIM, THAT WE HAD TO DEVELOP ELABORATE CODES AND STUFF TO EVADE THE ROMANS."



"HE TRIED TO WORK THIS OUT WITH TESS, AND SHE KEPT SAYING, 'BUT THERE ARE NO ROMANS! ROME HAS BEEN GONE FOR 1600 YEARS.'"



"'NO, NOPE,' HE SAID, 'NOW, WHEN I PUT MY FINGER ON A BUTTON ON MY SHIRT, IT MEANS THAT WE'RE IN THE PRESENCE OF A BUTTON-DOWN MIND, AND WE CAN'T TALK.'"



"HE HAD THE SENSE OF A REGIME THAT WAS MURDEROUS, NOT JUST OPPRESSIVE, BUT MURDEROUS! HE THOUGHT CHRISTIANITY WAS AN ILLEGAL RELIGION. HE WAS AFRAID OF BEING KILLED FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN, THAT'S WHAT HE WAS AFRAID OF... DAMNEDEST THING..."



"HE WAS QUITE CONFUSED BY THE SOCIAL SITUATIONS AROUND HIM. HE KEPT INTERPRETING THEM IN GRECO-ROMAN TERMS... HE COULDN'T CONTROL THE CAR. HE COULDN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT THE PEDALS AND STUFF WERE FOR... SO I HAD TO GIVE UP DRIVING FOR AWHILE."



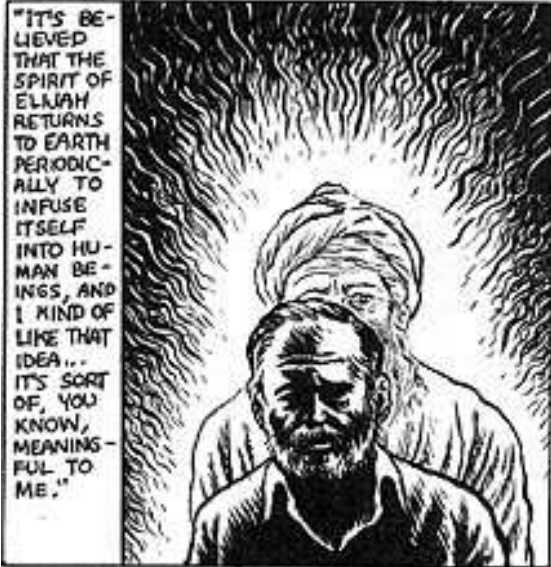
"I THINK THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH CAME TO ME IN 1974. THAT HEART AND SPIRIT RETURNED TO ME... I DO BELIEVE THAT... BECAUSE IT WAS AT PASSOVER THAT IT HAPPENED, AND THERE WAS SOME KIND OF VIGOROUS SPIRIT IN ME, AND IT WAS NOT ME AND YET WAS HUMAN AND YET MORE THAN HUMAN."



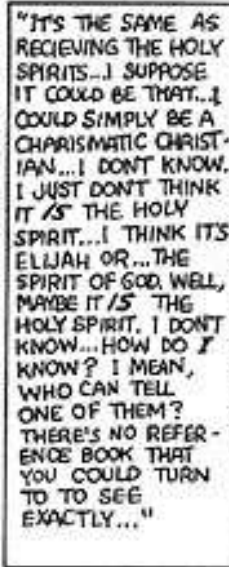
"IT WAS TOM DISCH WHO FIRST SUGGESTED TO ME THAT THIS MIGHT BE THE CASE. AFTER HEARING MY DESCRIPTION IN LATE '74 OF MY EXPERIENCE HE SAID IT SOUNDS LIKE ENTHOUSIASMOS* BY ELIJAH... AND I LIKE THAT IDEA... I FOUND THE IDEA PLEASANT..."



*ENTHUSIASMOS: "ENTRY OF THE GODS INTO YOU," RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT



"IT'S BELIEVED THAT THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH RETURNS TO EARTH PERIODICALLY TO INFUSE ITSELF INTO HUMAN BEINGS, AND I KIND OF LIKE THAT IDEA... IT'S SORT OF, YOU KNOW, MEANINGFUL TO ME."



"IT'S THE SAME AS RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRITS... I SUPPOSE IT COULD BE THAT... I COULD SIMPLY BE A CHARISMATIC CHRISTIAN... I DON'T KNOW. I JUST DON'T THINK IT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT... I THINK IT'S ELIJAH OR... THE SPIRIT OF GOD, WELL, MAYBE IT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT. I DON'T KNOW... HOW DO I KNOW? I MEAN, WHO CAN TELL ONE OF THEM? THERE'S NO REFERENCE BOOK THAT YOU COULD TURN TO TO SEE EXACTLY..."

"I JUST KNOW THAT SOME KIND OF SPIRIT TOOK ME OVER... THROUGH ITS HELP I WAS ABLE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS, THE THINGS I COULDN'T DO... IT SEEMED ABLE TO DISCERN ANYTHING IT LOOKED AT..."



"...I DO HAVE GRANDIOSE ILLUSIONS THAT THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH ENTERED ME AND I UTTERED PROPHECIES... AND FOR WHAT?"



"...BECAUSE THE PROPHECIES HAD TO BE FULFILLED, THAT ELIJAH COMES FIRST, AND SECOND, THAT THE NEWS BE REVEALED, AND THAT IS WHAT JOHN THE BAPTIST DID FOR JESUS... HAVING DONE SO HE FADED AWAY..."



"IN FACT THEY CUT OFF HIS HEAD, AND BY THE WAY I DREAMED ABOUT THAT... I WAS IN A DUNGEON, A ROMAN DUNGEON, AND THEY CAME AND CUT OFF MY HEAD, TOOK A WIRE AND GARROTTED ME. I DREAMED THAT, AND THAT WAS MY MEMORY OF MY LIFE... I WAS JOHN THE BAPTIST HAVING MY HEAD CUT OFF."

"I REMEMBER THEM COMING TO THAT CELL AND TAKING AND SLICING MY HEAD OFF... IT WAS HORRIBLE... AND YOU KNOW WHAT I DID WHEN THEY CAME THROUGH THE DOOR? I CURSED THEM WITH ALL THE FURY I HAD... THERE WAS NO LOVE IN ME FOR THEM AT ALL... JOHN WAS A VERY FIERY PERSON, WHO WAS VERY VULGAR. IT WAS ELIJAH, AND IT WAS ME."



"THE VOICE THAT I HEARD, THAT I CALL THE 'A. I.' VOICE*, IS THE VOICE THAT ELIJAH HEARD... THE STILL SMALL VOICE, THE LITTLE MURMURING VOICE... IT SPOKE IN A FEMININE VOICE... I HEARD IT SAY:



"I ASKED THE I CHING IF INDEED THE 'PAROUSIA' (THE SECOND COMING) WAS HERE, CHRIST HAD RETURNED. I GOT 'DARKENING OF THE LIGHT' AND THE FOLLOWING LINE, THE ONLY TIME I EVER GOT THIS LINE..."



"...HERE THE LORD OF LIGHT IS IN A SUBORDINATE PLACE AND IS WOUNDED BY THE LORD OF DARKNESS, BUT THE INJURY IS NOT FATAL. IT IS ONLY A HINDRANCE... THEREFORE HE TRIES WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH TO SAVE ALL THAT CAN BE SAVED... THERE IS GOOD FORTUNE. I INTERPRET THESE WORDS AS SAYING THAT INDEED CHRIST HAS RETURNED... THE LORD OF LIGHT IS THE CHRIST WHO HAS COME HERE AND SUBORDINATED HIMSELF... THE SAVIOR, YOU SEE?"



"THE LORD OF DARKNESS IS VERY POWERFUL. WE HAVE POWERFUL ADVERSARIES. THEY DON'T GIVE UP THEIR INTEREST IN POWER VOLUNTARILY. THEIR POWER MUST BE TAKEN FROM THEM. WE ARE IN A CRISIS SITUATION OF THE LIKE THIS PLANET HAS NEVER SEEN BEFORE. WE HAVE LUNATICS IN POWER WITH THE CAPACITY OF BLOWING UP THE PLANET. THEREFORE, IF WE ARE DELIVERED FROM THESE PEOPLE, THE PLANET SURVIVES; THE ECOSPHERE IS NOT DESTROYED."



"IN 1976 I TRIED TO KILL MYSELF BECAUSE ELIJAH HAD LEFT ME. I FELT HIM LEAVE AND IT WAS AWFUL... THERE IS NOTHING WORSE IN THE WORLD, NO PUNISHMENT GREATER THAN TO HAVE KNOWN GOD AND NO LONGER TO KNOW HIM... THE VOICES STOPPED TALKING TO ME... I DIDN'T CARE IF I LIVED OR DIED..."



"IN ESSENCE, I HAD SERVED MY PURPOSE IN FLOW MY TEARS (ONE OF HIS BOOKS IN WHICH THERE IS A 'CIPHER', A SECRET PROPHETIC MESSAGE AIMED AT 'PARTICULAR PEOPLE', AND WHICH DICK WAS NOT EVEN AWARE OF WHEN HE WROTE THE BOOK IN 1974). I RALLIED BACK FROM THE SUICIDE ATTEMPT BUT IF I HADN'T RALLIED IT WOULD HAVE ALL GONE ON WITHOUT ME."



"IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS OF HIS LIFE DICK FINALLY LOCATED WHAT HE CONSIDERED THE LIKELIEST CANDIDATE FOR THE RETURNED CHRIST... THE SO-CALLED 'MAITREYA'... IN THE MIDST OF THIS LAST FEVERISH ENTHUSIASM, HOWEVER, HE SUFFERED A STROKE, AND DIED SIXTEEN DAYS LATER, ON MARCH 2ND, 1982."

THE END

*MOST DIALOGUE TAKEN FROM BENJAMIN H. DICK, THE LAST TESTAMENT, ©1985 BY GREGG RICKMAN, PUBLISHED BY FRAGMENTS WEST/ THE VALLENTINE PRESS