



## Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas

*Michael Bishop*

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It is 1982. The United States has a permanent Moonbase. Richard M. Nixon is in the fourth term of the "imperial presidency." And an eccentric novelist named Philip K. Dick has just died in California.

Or has he? Psychiatrist Lia Pickford, M.D., is nonplussed when Dick walks into her office in small-town Georgia, with a cab idling outside, to ask for help. And Cal Pickford, a longtime Dick fan stunned by the news of his hero's death, is electrified when his wife tells him of the visit.

So begins a sequence of events involving Cal in the repressive Nixon regime, the affairs of an aging movie queen, a hip but frightened Vietnamese immigrant and an old black man who works as a groom--all leading up to a fateful confrontation between Dick, Cal, and Nixon himself on the moon.

## Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas Details

Date : Published January 1st 1994 by Orb Books (first published 1987)

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Author : Michael Bishop

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## From Reader Review Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas for online ebook

### Mike says

I struggle with how to characterize this book. In a sense it is a pastiche of Philip K. Dick's novels, but Michael Bishop rather pointedly avoids mimicking Dick's writing style (for better or worse, as the case may be). Many of the plot elements are pure Dick, though. I love the fact that the book's villain is Richard Nixon, although I was very much less enamored of the Big Reveal at the end about Nixon. Without getting into spoilers, let me say that the climax really sort of blew the whole book for me, and knocked it down from 4 to 3 stars.

The subplots involving the minor characters were also needlessly elaborate. I can at least understand the necessity for the Lone Boy character, he figures in certain plot points, and provides some exposition for the Nixonian alternate world. Horsey Stout baffles me, though. He seems like he was tossed into the book to make it weirder and more surreal. The bishop character annoyingly appears out of thin air about 75% of the way into the book. Since Dick was known to do this at times in his own books, it's not entirely inappropriate in a Dick pastiche. But I hated the bishop's big scene, so I hated the character, too.

I enjoyed much of the book, and I appreciate the fact that PKD and his work had such an impact on Bishop that he wrote it as a tribute. He's an author who means a great deal to many people, myself included. It's just too bad the climactic scene is so hokey. A stupid ending to a smart book.

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### Howard says

I learned from reading this book that I do not possess an intimate knowledge of Philip K. Dick's lexicon. I knew that going in, but didn't think it would matter. I've loved the few Dick books I've read and was intrigued by an effort to make him a central conceit in a fantasy/surrealist novel. Maybe if you knew Dick as well as the author you'd really like it. I lost interest in the book about half way, completely uninterested in how the plot would resolve. Mostly, I found the writing style and character dialogue unrealistic, as if

imagined by someone with less insight than his own characters should have. I suppose my review is somewhat unfair, having not finished it. But it's fair to say that I would choose hundreds of books to read before this one.

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### **Carles-Llonch says**

En esta novela/tributo, Bishop reproduce fidedignamente algunos de los elementos más característicos de las obras de Philip K. Dick. Lo hace de tal manera que consigue hacernos creer que efectivamente estamos leyendo una de las mismas. Realidades históricas alternativas, libros prohibidos, universos paralelos a esas realidades históricas alternativas, cosmonautas, un Nixon desatado, tiendas de mascotas ...elementos en apariencia discordantes se van uniendo para tejer una historia coral imprevisible. Se trata de un libro entretenido además de un interesante ejercicio literario.

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### **Ubik says**

Excellent pastiche by Bishop. I believe he captured the meat of PKD literature very well. The main theme in Radio Free Albemuth is definitely evident here. I loved the way it ended up; almost as a sacrifice by Philip K Dick in a way to have lived this "alternate" life pretty much the way he was in actual reality. PKD in real life, as amazing an author of SF as he was, wanted SO BADLY to be recognized as a "real" novelist. He considered himself as writing "schlock" just to pay the rent. As it stands, he only had one non science fiction novel published in his lifetime, Confessions Of A Crap Artist. You can tell that Michael Bishop here really understood that about PKD when he opted to make the main storyline (the original dimension/reality) be the one where his largest body of work were his non SF stories (albeit most all were banned in the current [novel's] government and therefore only available in samizdat form).

The story, the characterizations, tempo, etc were all top-notch. If I only had one complaint, it would be the method that is used to "abreact" to the other reality. I can't actually recall what exactly it was, but I recall it being kinda hokey and the only thing that kinda jolted me out of the fluidity of the overall novel.

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### **Simon Mcleish says**

Originally published on my blog here in October 2002.

Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas is a direct tribute to the famous science fiction author; not only does it use many themes from his work, but Dick himself is one of the major characters. The novel begins with the death of Dick and the rising of a ghostly form from his body. But this is not the world we know, but an America which won in Vietnam, and where the increasingly dictatorial Richard Nixon is approaching the end of his fourth term in office. This is an America where travel is severely restricted, black people have almost all been "repatriated" to African countries, and the remaining population live in fear of the secret policemen known as "No Knocks". Dick is an almost forgotten author, though his earliest novels are still required reading for the Vietnamese who come to the States and are "Americulturated" - indoctrinated into the American dream. Dick's later work (more like the satirical science fiction for which he is really known) was

never published but circulates in photocopied samizdat form, among the remnants of the sixties counter-culture. It is to one of the owners of these dangerous manuscripts, a pet shop employee, that the ghost appears, driving him on a course which both of them hope will change this nightmare reality.

Among the themes that Bishop picks up from Dick's novels are alternative realities, external supernatural intervention, a blue collar central character (rather than the middle class scientists/engineers of the genre before him), the importance of the desire to care for animals (as in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*), and the triumph of American popular culture. Although rather uneven (in this reality, there is a lunar base, and the chapters set there fail to grasp the reader), it must be one of the best homages to another author ever written. Bishop even re-uses something of Dick's style.

To choose this way to memorialise one of the greatest of all science fiction writers - one who (eventually) massively raised the literary profile of the genre - seems entirely appropriate, and this is perhaps the best indicator of how successful Bishop has been in this novel. Genre fiction, like popular culture generally, has a tendency to forget most of its past, and so reminders of just how good some of the earlier masters were serve an admirable purpose.

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### **Matt says**

I really enjoyed "Ancient of Days," my one previous Michael Bishop book, but I don't think it prepared me for this. A truly fantastic, top-notch homage to PKD, I enjoyed pretty much all of this book.

An engrossing, Dickian story featuring Dick's transcendent spirit as a major character/Christ figure, in a spiritual duel with Richard Nixon for America's soul. This is a fun read, with a real moral sense, and some complexity underlying it. I recommend it to my fellow PKD fans, and to anyone who enjoys funny, weird, sci fi.

And Dick jokes. Obviously.

It's a book that makes me wonder what PKD would do right now, in Trump's America. Just keep fighting, just keep writing?

For more on comics, horror, humanity, morality and the world check out The Stupid Philosopher, aka a place where I put my words.

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### **Gertie says**

A hesitant 4... perhaps a 3.5.

Not bad... it took a bit of reading before I became interested in the plot, but then it got fairly interesting. For some reason it reminds me of *The Traveler* by John Twelve Hawks. Must be that subversive character approach. :P

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### **Ezra says**

An excellent Dickian story in the irreverence that he would appreciate. The current fear, uncertainty, and doubt about the current environment made this a compelling read. The parallels between the Richard Nixon character and US politics reminded me of the fears about where we are headed to day.

Also, the inclusion of so many places in Georgia amused me.

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### **Ushan says**

An homage to the great science fiction author by someone who might not be as talented but is at least sane and not drug-addicted.

In 1982, the year of Philip K. Dick's death, Richard Milrose [sic] Nixon is in his fourth term as President of the United States of America. America has won the Vietnam War, invaded and occupied Cuba, has constructed a Moon base, and is about to launch a manned Mars mission. The emended Bill of Rights bans subversive literature, including the science fiction of Philip K. Dick, which circulates in samizdat. Critics of the government disappear, including folk singers Joan Baez, Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger. Immigrants have to go through an "Americulturation" indoctrination program; in a group-therapy setting, one Vietnamese immigrant declares that he "ha[s] overcome [his] natural aversion to tossing beer or soda cans from the windows of moving vehicles"; others congratulate him on this accomplishment. A large number of black Americans have been relocated to Sub-Saharan Africa, and the rest resettled across the country to achieve "a benign demographic picturesqueness". The divergence from our timeline seemingly has to do with the work of Philip K. Dick, whose realistic novels have been published in his lifetime, and whose science fiction hasn't been.

After a series of adventures, with the help of resurrected Philip K. Dick, other characters exorcise Satan, who has lodged himself in the body of Richard M. Nixon, and shift reality to a still different timeline, better for humanity than both ours and the one in the bulk of the novel.

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### **Erik says**

Bishop takes an interesting concept and completely mangles the execution. A better writer could have made a masterpiece of this. In the intro, Bishop states he purposely didn't write this in PKD pastiche, but in his own author voice. I think he did this because he's a shit writer, and he knows it.

The high level concept is neat - PKD as a character in a different world, taking elements of Valis, the man in the high castle, the divine invasion, as well as inverting his status as a genre writer to mainstream literary success. Initially, the alternate timeline Nixon world is interesting and rather fleshed out in Georgia. Big investment in the beginning in setting, and some key characters.

However what it ends up being is

- a huge investment in characters that aren't at all important except to advance the plot (Cal's wife, Grace, Lone

Boy) - no pay off in their stories

- a lot of pet store melodrama. Ill never look at guinea pigs the same.

- Really Badly written action sequences

- Too many characters that we dont care about literally because "7 is a holy number". The journeys of the moon colonists / Cal seem trivialized because of additional last minute characters.

- Critically important Bishop character introduced as last minute - literal deus ex machina

- Climactic battle with with Satan Nixon Baloon and possessed black dwarf (yes)

- Satan Nixon baloon popped with a pin. A pin that is an obvious macguffin from the start. The book screams "LETS DROP EVERYTHING AND FOCUS ON THIS MYSTERIOUS PIN WOOOOOOO"

Its clear that Bishop doesnt understand PKD novels, or was too lazy to put them in.

- He makes a christian heavy story but fails to leverage any gnostic voodoo stuff in PKD's voice. It would have added a lot of depth. I bet he never read the exegesis.

- PKD specialized in layers of reality - a typical PKD book would "invert on itself" multiple times throughout the read - completely upending the readers understanding of reality. Theres many opportunities for this to happen in the book, but doesnt happen because Bishop is a lazy writer

- For a tribute book, very few actual references to PKD, except in some book titles and a winking reference to Yubiq. For the first couple of chapters he wants to name check all the non-science fiction books PKD wrote , i feel like to prove what a big PKD nerd he is. But its all fronting.

- would have appreciated an autofac, a homepape, a vidphone or something - the everyday future tech that made PKD books very tangible while compelling.

Bishop loves his fucking modern brands, chick filet all over the place (although it is native to georgia)

I liked the Coda, i felt like this was written first.

Honestly the most interesting bit was the Frank Miller Daredevil series, although it had no relation to the book. Bishop is a big comic book nerd and he couldnt resist, even in this book.

This is my second Michael Bishop book, and will probably be my last. He has good ideas but hes a terrible writer.

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### **Jake says**

Helps being an admirer of PKD's work.

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### **Craig says**

A sweet, smart, and funny memorial to a great writer by a damn good one. As a huge PKD fan in my younger days, this book made me very, very happy.

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## **Melanie says**

I don't know much about Philip K. Dick, but fictional representations of U.S. presidents are pretty solidly My Thing. (Seriously: What is with my fascination with Nixon, or at least the Imagined Nixon [see also: Coover, Roth, *Futurama*]? I have no idea.)

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## **Cliff Jr. says**

### **For Philip K. Dick fans, of course.**

Thoroughly weird and full fun PKD nods and references. I really loved the stuff at the very end, but for me, that could have been half the book, not just an epilogue. There was a lot of crazy sci-fi action, but somehow not as much as I expected. Overall, this book made me miss PKD, which I really should have expected.

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