

Arts/Lit  
« V.20 No.11 | March 17 – 23, 2011

## Interview

### Dickhead

Local writer summons Philip K. Dick in novel

By **John Bear**

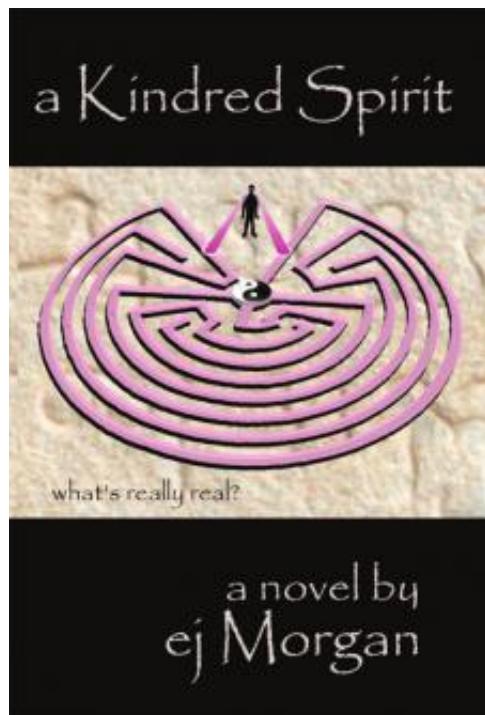
Philip K. Dick was a strange guy—or at least his writing is. You’ll find his works in the science-fiction section of a bookstore, but his writing isn’t that easy to classify. His words can seem like the musings of a philosopher and the ramblings of a mentally ill person, all at the same time.

He wrote about the bleak near-future in many of his books and short stories. One of his later novels, **VALIS**, concerns a mystical experience Dick claimed to have had in the ’70s involving a pink laser beam and God. In *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*, the protagonist gets caught up in someone else’s hallucination. The narcotics officer in **A Scanner Darkly** is trying to bust himself after the drug he’s been using splits his brain into two warring personalities.



ej Morgan

Strange as it is, his writing has been made into popcorn movies like *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, *Minority Report* and the recently released *Adjustment Bureau*. His books are sought after by collectors, some of whom will buy multiple copies of the same book to get different cover art. He died in 1982, just as he was finding mainstream success.



Albuquerque writer ej Morgan’s novel **A Kindred Spirit** finds a fictionalized version of herself running into Dick, shamans and UFO contactees during a road trip that evolves into a complicated journey through time and space. Morgan says the book has been called “transrealism,” a literary mode that mixes real life with fantastic elements. The book is now available as an e-book that can be read aloud with a robot voice feature on Kindle. This reminds Morgan of Dick’s “**homeopapes**,” talking electronic newspapers, which are present in several of his novels. “It’s cool,” she says.

We asked Morgan via e-mail about her book, film adaptations and being a so-called Dickhead.

Explain your book ... what’s it about?

The reason we’re talking about *A Kindred Spirit* at this particular time is because one of the dead authors [the protagonist] encounters, the primary one in my story, is Philip K. Dick. A big part of my story is his story. Phil (in real life) spent the last eight years of his life trying to understand a mystical experience he had in 1974. Was it

God? Were ETs or some Vast Active Living Intelligence System (VALIS) contacting him? He saw a pink

beam of light and then began to know things and received cosmic transmissions. My story is set in 1982, the year PKD died. Strange things begin to happen to our young heroine. I don't want to give away the whole story, but Phil's afterlife becomes a central theme in the novel.

What got you interested in Philip K. Dick in the first place?

When I read VALIS, one of Phil's final novels. I was just blown away. I had never seen anyone incorporate real life, metaphysical concepts, theology, UFOs and so many diverse concepts (successfully) in one story. A friend suggested I read VALIS because I was interested in those same topics. I jumped up in the middle of the night (this was several years ago) and jotted an outline for my own follow-up—an homage, if you will—to Phil. Mind you, I had never written more than a couple of short stories, but I was a journalist by profession. This story was truly inspired by Phil. As I say in the book, "The story must be told."

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**“Phil fans love his convoluted, philosophical ramblings and unorthodox writing. That just can't be conveyed well in the typical blockbuster action movie.”**

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Philip K. Dick

You call fans of the writer “Dickheads.” Do you consider yourself one?

I didn't initially, but I sure do now. The fans call themselves Dickheads, and it's better than calling myself a Dick Chick. We have enough trouble online with these "handles." Honestly, I was very worried about how PKD fans would accept a story about Phil written by a non-Dickhead. But once I got in contact with Paul Williams [Dick's literary executor] and he embraced it, the problem was solved. Phil fans love Paul Williams. He edited Phil's story collections, wrote introductions, commentary, the now famous Rolling Stone article about Phil (that launched his notoriety) and the PKD Society newsletter. All that came to a halt around 2005 due to Paul's deteriorating health. He is now in long-term care. I am anxious to donate some of the proceeds from this novel and e-book to help with his care.

You've said that Dick fans don't always like the movies made from his writing. Why do you think

that is?

Hollywood has a way of reducing intricate storylines down to the usual formula or action flick. Phil fans love his convoluted, philosophical ramblings and unorthodox writing. That just can't be conveyed well in the typical blockbuster action movie. The special effects might be great, but readers often have a special relationship with authors—more of a personal conversation, don't you think?

Having said that, what's your favorite movie based on a Dick story?

Without a doubt, **Blade Runner** (1982). It was based on Phil's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* It's the ultimate, original "what if" story about what makes us human. I think the “Star Trek: The Next Generation” concept of Data, the sentient android, was definitely inspired by PKD themes like Rachel in *Blade Runner*. PKD themes certainly inspired [“Star Trek” creator Gene] Roddenberry and others who wrote TV plots at the time of Phil's heyday.

Can you choose a favorite Philip K. Dick book?

What I previously said about how VALIS inspired my story, that one is pretty obvious. But, I'd also like to give a shout-out to *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* (TToTA to us Dickheads). That one is about Bishop James Pike, what leads up to his death and speculation on what becomes of his

"soul." Pike is also a very important character in my story. He and Phil are sort of "joined at the hip" or head, actually. You'll see when you read it. *Ubik* is another PKD story that heavily influenced my writing—about half-lifers, people who still communicate from the Other Side.

Do Dick fans seem to like your book? What about people not familiar with him?

Thankfully, the Dickheads love it. They invited me to hold the "intergalactic release" of *A Kindred Spirit* at their first PKD festival near Boulder. That was before the book was officially published, so I took reduced-price FDO editions. Can you guess what FDO is? For Dickheads Only. Since then my editors and I have been cleaning up the grammar, typos, and now this final version is ready for prime time (I hope). And, you do not have to know anything about PKD to enjoy the story. I was very aware of that as I wrote the novel. There are all kinds of hidden references to Phil and his books in there, what I've heard people call "Easter eggs." But if you don't know those references, you just read the main story and it's still a spiritual quest. I'm delighted, though, when people tell me they started reading PKD after finishing my novel.

### ***A Kindred Spirit* signing with ej Morgan**

**Saturday, March 19, 2 to 4 p.m.**

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