

Valis Study Guide

Valis by Philip K. Dick

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Plot Summary

Valis follows the spiritual quest of author Philip K. Dick and his alter ego, Horselover Fat, as an extraterrestrial power draws him towards its Gnostic message of the conquest of evil and death.

Valis by Philip K. Dick is a fictionalized, partial autobiography. Phil, a successful science fiction author, narrates the story but often in Fat's voice, claiming that this provides objectivity. Phil is a cool, pragmatic individual while Fat is a rich Renaissance mind disintegrating into insanity. Fat attempts suicide twice before he first confides to Phil in March of 1974 vivid dreams about three-eyed people. He sees St. Elmo's Fire and takes on a new, unfamiliar personality. Some of the information transmitted to him in a burst of pink laser light saves son Christopher's life, for it reveals an overlooked hernia, which is successfully repaired.

Fat also experiences troubling visions of rushing, floating colors and visions of Ancient Rome and modern California superimposing and merging in time. He begins spending his nights composing an enormous journal, which he calls the Exegesis and later extracts into a briefer Tractate that deals with how the cosmos is formed. Phil has successfully stopped taking drugs but cannot help himself from helping others, and the deaths of two women friends shake him badly. Phil fears that Fat has lost all touch with reality. Fat, by contrast, concludes that the universe is ruled by irrationality and that space and time do not exist. He calls the being that beams information into his head Zebra, for its ability to hide until the time is right. Later, he learns that its name is VALIS.

In his dreams, Fat receives a cipher that allows him to make contact with Eric and Linda Lampton, who together star in a science fiction film that has eerie parallels to Fat's experiences. It is called Valis and features the powerful, benign extraterrestrial being, VALIS. With friends David and Kevin, Phil and Fat meet the Lamptons, whom they determine to be crazy, but become devotees of their two-year-old daughter, Sophia, who fits the bill as the world's Fifth Savior. She commissions them to proclaim her doctrines. Sophia obliterates Fat by denying his existence, freeing Phil where analysts have failed. Phil recognizes that Fat is a mental projection, but misses his companionship. When Sophia dies, Fat returns and begins a worldwide search for the Savior, while Phil watches television for subliminal messages from VALIS.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Phil is a science fiction writer who, to gain objectivity, tells his story in the third person about Horselover Fat. Fat begins a nervous breakdown in 1971 when Gloria Knudson asks for sleeping pills to kill herself. His psychiatrist has warned against drugs and trying to help people, but Fat stops neither. He coaxes Gloria into driving to Marin County, where he plans to save her. Shortly before she leaps from the tenth floor of the Synanon Building, Fat tries to get her to move in with him, although he sees that she is dead inside. She stays overnight and then vanishes. After the funeral, Fat learns that her mother had talked her into seeking help, where the standard Synanon techniques to tear down her personality prior to rebuilding had backfired.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The first chapter establishes several key facts. Philip K. Dick, who is indeed a prospering science fiction writer from California, is writing a book about events in his life from 1971 until 1979. He claims that he needs to write about himself as Horselover Fat in order to gain objectivity. He explains that Horselover is a translation of the Greek name Philip and Dick is a German translation of his surname, Dick. Greek and German both figure later in the novel. His nervous state begins failing in 1971 when an acquaintance (not a lover), Gloria Knudson, asks for help killing herself. He is already seeing a psychiatrist, who has warned that he must give up taking drugs and trying to help people, but he stops neither.

Fat's plan to prevent Gloria from taking her life ends dramatically and negatively, with help from supposed experts at Synanon, a controversial drug rehabilitation facility of the day that uses tough love to break down addicts and re-mold their personality. It also develops a reputation for cult-like activities. Given the religious themes of the novel, this is fitting. Gloria does not stand for the abuse and throws herself out a tenth-floor window. Many times during the novel, the gory scene on the roadway below is retold for shock value. From characters at Gloria's funeral, her ex-husband and mother in particular, Fat concludes that there is not a single sane person in Northern California, thanks to the drug culture. He decides to move to Canada, where he knows a few U.S. draft dodgers.

The narrator already lapses between calling his chief character Fat and Phil, and the confusion only grows deeper going forward. He will, throughout the novel, display dissociation (multiple personality disorder) including amnesia and channeling. Phil often bates Fat to get him to talk about his bizarre theological and metaphysical theories. For most of the novel Phil treats Fat as a distinct, dysfunctional but somehow sympathetic human being, but for a brief period late in the book Fat is eliminated as a character, only to return and show even greater independence, traveling far from Phil geographically. It

is never easy to establish what the actual situation is. Both are heavy drug users, including LSD (acid), a mood- and perception altering hallucinogenic drug popular in the era.

The narrator establishes a theme: God shows great mercy to humankind by occluding them, that is, by not allowing them to see the future (or the past or present, for that matter). The mystery of the time/space continuum is a major element in the novel. Thus, in 1971 Fat does not anticipate his own suicide attempts in 1972, which occur in Vancouver, BC, and in 1976, which takes place in Orange County, CA. He realizes that his attempt to intervene with Gloria had been amateurish. Details about these events are developed later. Phil wishes that he could help poor, psychotic Fat. He establishes the image of the Chinese fingertrap, which gains a stronger hold on the participants, the harder they fight to escape. This image returns whenever struggles are depicted.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Stephanie, a drug dealing high school girl, sees Fat's psychological decline, befriends him, and gives him a hand-made ceramic pot in which he believes God slumbers. He develops an abnormal love for God, who fires into his head a pink laser, which he longs to experience again. It reveals that Fat's son is suffering from an undiagnosed inguinal hernia, and quick surgery saves his life. Fat records in a journal that he calls his Exegesis theories about the universe being made of information.

Phil joins friends Kevin and David in angering Fat by posing theological questions. They discuss Sherri Solvig, who is in remission from cancer. Fat claims that God harms no one and that there is no opposing force, as powerful but destructive. Kevin insists that because God lets his cat be run over by a car, God is evil, dumb, and weak, and he intends to demand an answer on Judgment Day. Sherri and David, both religious, argue that her remission shows God's love, while Kevin says that it is science and luck, and secretly hopes that she will die to prove his thesis. He sees misery and hostility as always winning out. David maddeningly attributes all evil to free will and dodges questions by quoting C. S. Lewis. Kevin uses the two-proposition, self-canceling structure that Freud discredits. Phil adjusts his responses to each friend individually.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 introduces three major characters, Kevin, David, and Sherri Solvig, friends of the narrator, who egg on Fat's contemplations about God. Fat becomes obsessed by God when he is given a ceramic pot by his local high school-aged drug dealer. Phil makes clear that Stephanie is a better friend to Fat than Fat had been to Gloria, preventing him from destroying himself. Still, his mental decline is remarkable.

Fat believes that God has fired a pink laser into his head, speaking with him directly. Part of the revelation saves Fat's son's life. This launches him into research on the phenomenon of light and feverish, all-night writing sessions to record his philosophy in a diary that he calls his Exegesis. He explains that in Greek exegesis means a commentary on a sacred text. Note that Fat is not so much drawing out meaning from a discrete text as creating a new text in the form of revelations that he considers a priori holy. He views all of life as a special kind of language and the universe being made up of information. It is still unexplained why Fat has such an attachment to Greek, but this chapter strongly suggests that he has a grounding in ancient Greek texts. He explains the meaning of idiot as signifying private entities not connected to other entities except subliminally and claims that the Logos communicates with him directly. Phil sees this as a means for him to discount or interpret his own hallucinations.



Religion becomes a dominant theme as Phil describes how he and friends Kevin and David enjoy getting Fat angry about theological questions. The character of Sherri Solvig focuses them on theodicy, the ancient question of why an omnipotent God would allow innocents to suffer and die. When she goes into remission, Sherri and David see it as God's mercy. Fat denies that God harms anyone and rejects any system of dualism, by which many ancient systems posit a second, evil god opposing the good God. The evil one is often the creator God whose imperfect work must be redeemed and perfected. Kevin is a skeptic, obsessively angry at God for letting his pet cat be run over by a car. This theme recurs throughout the novel, usually in farcical references. Kevin insists that in the absence of a convincing answer, God must be seen as evil, dumb, and weak. Framing the argument in such common terms, without euphemism, heightens the conflict with the believers.

David attributes all evil to human free will and dodges questions by quoting C. S. Lewis, a popular apologist for Christianity whose writings are filled with allegories. Note that Lewis had lapsed into atheism before being philosophically converted. David's friends are put off by his proof-texting. Fat also quotes scripture, but selectively, omitting parts that are inconvenient to his argument. Kevin annoys Phil by using the two-proposition, self-canceling structure that Freud has denounced. The friends thus present a cross-section of Western religious and philosophical approaches. Phil notes that the quotation from the I Ching, "Always ill but never dies," applies to Fat (pg. 18), and Eastern approaches to theodicy are added later. He notes that in many religions God saves at the eleventh hour, adding that in Sherri's case, it is 10:59.

Passing mention to a number of topics suggests how dense the reading will get, going forward. The two-proposition, self-canceling structure is illustrated by several convenient examples to help the uninitiated, but the Fraunhofer Lines in physics and optics are left utterly obtuse. The Principle of Scientific Parsimony is said not to be part of Fat's approach to data, which is by now understandable without knowing the definition. Arias by Handel are quoted to build an atmosphere of confusion. Classical music occupies an important place in the novel, going forward.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

In 1964 a huge hit of LSD makes Fat think and speak in Latin and write phrases in the koine Greek of New Testament times, neither of which he knows. He also begins obsessing about God, churning out theories about God but taking no joy in God. Kevin suggests substituting drugs and Phil poetry, while Sherri talks concretely about the Soviet T-34 tank being God's instrument during World War II. Kevin's cynicism intensifies Fat's madness by making him combative. Fat writes about the derangement of the Ultimate Mind (God), which speaks through humans and infuses sorrow. When Fat reflects on the death of a primordial twin whom the Mind wishes not to forget, Phil sees a reference to Fat's grief over Gloria.

God, not the viewer, controls theophanies, which resemble hallucinations. Fat could know Greek only through phylogenetic memory. A true god hides most of the time and reveals himself on rare occasion. Heraclitus claims that the universe might be a forgery. Fat deduces that everything is defective and that there is no way out, as in the labyrinth of Crete. Phil considers how time turns into space in Wagner's Parsifal, written decades before four-dimensional space-time is postulated, and how Eliade talks about ritual and sacrament overcoming time. In 1974, Fat sees the landscape of first-century Rome superimposed on modern California and wonders how God makes things look as though time has passed. Fat also hears impossible sentences on the radio. When the pets die, it cannot be seen as part of Fat's psychosis.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 looks back to the drug culture in 1964 and posits that Fat's obsession with God begins with a huge hit of the psychedelic Sandoz LSD-25. Fat knows no Latin or Greek prior to this trip, but speaks Latin fluently during it. Later, phrases in his journal are in koine Greek. A lengthy aside talks about how this becomes the lingua franca of the Eastern Roman Empire and discusses some challenges to exegetes in parsing texts. Except for showing that Phil is a rounded man of literature, the aside adds little to the story. Fat begins churning out theories that have God as a common theme, but God brings him no joy. His friends find this unfulfilling. Sherri offers another long and complex aside about the Soviet T-34 tank during World War II, analyzing the monumental Battle of Kursk. Sherri does not know that Fat sees the movie Patton on the eve of Gloria's funeral. She concludes that the T-34s are God's instrument. Kevin's cat is referred to in several derogatory ways during the ensuing argument over the purpose of the universe. Fat sees that the Ultimate Mind (God) is deranged and talks about a myth in which one of a set of primordial twins dies but whom the Mind does not want to forget. Phil observes that anyone unable to see that Fat is writing about himself - an obvious reference to Gloria's death - can understand nothing.



Phil discusses theophanies: God's self-revelation to humans, familiar examples in the Judeo-Christian tradition being the Burning Bush and Elijah's low, murmuring voice on Mount Horeb. God's theophany to Fat offers no remission to his plunge into madness. Phil observes that Spinoza would describe the whole universe as a single theophany, whereas Buddhist idealists deny that the universe exists at all. He declares with Jung that Fat could know Greek only because ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. That this refers to the biological stages through which developing fetuses go is left vague. The text is growing denser all of the time. Phil notes that a real god must of necessity be, most of the time, a *deus absconditus*, a concealed or unknown god, who reveals himself only on occasion. He notes that only one absolutely verified theophany is required to prove that God exists, but also that anything can be faked.

Phil focuses on Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher, who claims that nothing is permanent. He quotes from Edward Hussey's book, *The Presocratics*, offering full bibliographic citations and drawing conclusions about the interrelationship between obvious structures and unseen latent structures. This leaves no room for anything except theophanies. Fat understands the truth since the moment of Gloria's phone call, when he goes insane. Phil is having difficulty keeping his perspective straight at this point, making the reader wonder whether Phil and Fat are alternate personalities within the same person. He first mentions the myth of the labyrinth of Crete, composer Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, and the 20th-century religious historian, Mircea Eliade's views on how ritual and sacrament overcome time. All of these elements are developed further in later chapters.

Also introduced, only to be developed later, is Fat's 1974 vision of an ancient Roman landscape superimposed on today's California. At this point, it seems surrealistic, but will begin to make sense as the time/space continuum is analyzed. Fat also reports hearing impossible sentences on the radio at this point. He is then married to Beth, who has studied Greek and believes none of Fat's philosophy, but she is asleep at the time of the apparitions, so Fat has no witnesses. Their pets, however, develop massive tumors and die. Phil says that this is too objective to dismiss as part of Fat's speeding mental breakdown. The radioactive nature of the pink beam communications will later be brought out and make all of this somewhat clearer. At this point, the flood of information serves to show how hopeless Fat's mental condition is becoming and that mental illness is not fun, This is about to be shown when Fat is briefly locked up for observation.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

After Beth runs away with their son Christopher, Fat attempts suicide by taking massive amounts of Digitalis and other drugs, slashes his wrist, and sits in a running car. The combination fails miraculously to kill him, and he is put in the Orange County Mental Hospital (OCMH) for 48 hours observation. Previously, Kevin had told Fat about painful Australian bush initiations akin to Fat's impacted wisdom tooth and analogies between his colors and journeys to the next world in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. During his first evaluation, Fat claims to have learned his lesson, and sits watching a woman vomit her overdose of Thorazine, while he wishes that dream-time - the only real time - would come. He needs the action of the gods. He recalls the upper and lower realms of astral determinism and contemplates how the Empire has never ended. This is the tag line in his Exegesis, originally suggested in a dream, in which he sees himself going through old science fiction magazines and seeing the phrase. In March of 1974 he sees ancient Rome and today's California superimposed and understands that the Empire and its Black Iron Prison enclose everyone who has ever lived. Gray-clad secret early Christians successfully assault the prison and Fat, with them, is filled with joy. Fat also finds the prison in a science fiction novel set in the distant future. The Void tells Fat that it loves him more than anyone and longed for him.

When the psychologists announce that on suspicion that he is a danger to himself, they will hold Fat for 14 days of evaluation, with an option for another 90, Fat prudently keeps quiet. He is locked into the North Ward with Debbie, a heavy-set Mexican Jehovah's Witness, Doug, who sees demons but takes nothing seriously, and 33 others. They share a single Bible, play cards, and are watched constantly. Fat does not know that he is losing everything to Beth and his creditors and that the County will bill him for services. Beth is disgusted that he cannot even kill himself properly. He fakes his way through psychological tests and avoids talking about God, with whom he is angry. He lets down his guard with Doug and with Dr. Stone, the psychiatrist who offers him Fat Bach remedies to remove his helplessness, fear, and inability to act, and who talks to him as a human being.

Fat and Stone discuss parallels between the Tao Te Ching, Parmenides' two forms, and Fat's own Exegesis. They cover the Presocratic philosophers and the Black Iron Prison. Fat risks bringing up his most fantastic thesis: that the plasmate/Logos, which is living information, goes dormant for 2,000 years at Nag Hammadi from Roman times until 1945. The plasmate originates in the Sirius star system and leaves traces in Japanese myths. Stone refers to Xenophanes of Colophon to confirm that the universe might be irrational. Fat is sure that time ceases in Roman times and picks up again in 1974.



Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 shows the aftermath of Beth running away with her and Fat's son Christopher, the event from which Fat measures the beginning of his new world. The narrative is a bit muddled in the time aspect, but the facts are clear: Fat attempts suicide by combining three sure-fire means and still fails by a series of freak events that Fat can see as the workings of God. Hospital personnel are fascinated to watch the effects of 12.25 times the prescribed amount of Digitalis on his heart rhythm. Medical students eagerly watch his monitor. Hearing that Fat has botched another attempt, Beth treats him with scorn and moves permanently to somewhere in Canada.

The novel turns briefly to describing the Orange County Mental Hospital (OCMH), where Fat is put under observation. Some minor characters are introduced and hospital routine is described, with an emphasis on refuting depictions in books and movies of the eternal strife between inmates and guards. Some posted regulations are played for humor. Fat knows better than to talk about God, with whom it is stated he is angry, but he really needs the action of the gods at this point. He thinks about how the Empire has never ended, which is the tag line in his Exegesis. Its origin is examined, in a dream about going through science fiction magazines in his boyhood and finding the phrase, and then, in March of 1974, seeing ancient Rome and contemporary California superimposed. He intuits that the Empire's Black Iron Prison encloses everyone who has ever lived. The fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. is a critical event, some 30 years before militant, secret early Christians successfully assault the prison. Still, it stands, even in the distant future. These become on-going elements in the novel, which are gradually, albeit only somewhat, clarified by the end.

The introduction of Dr. Stone, Fat's ward psychiatrist, returns the novel to a deeply philosophical level. Fat quickly determines that Stone is crazy in a good way and begins evaluating how sanity and power relate. Stone identifies Fat's problems as helplessness, fear, and an inability to act. Stone is a graduate of Oxford University, as is Edward Hussey, the chief source for Fat's information about the Presocratic philosophers. Fat opens up the most fantastic parts of his Exegesis, which Stone ratifies. Fat's 1974 vision of ancient Rome overlaying contemporary California appears to show a restarting of time after a roughly 2,000 year hibernation. An extraterrestrial plasmate/Logos, which is living information, goes dormant at Chenoboskion, Egypt until 1945, when the Nag Hammadi Gnostic library is discovered. The March 1974 event will be further clarified, but some pieces are falling together. The reader continues to have to wade through a confusing body of philosophical and mythological materials, which will to a degree diminish going forward.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Fat sees Stone once more, on the day of his discharge, when Stone gives him a translation of a Gnostic text about the immortals being offended when Samael, the blind god, claims exclusivity and threatens to trample him into clay. When Stone pronounces Fat the authority on Nag Hammadi, this restores Fat's self-confidence, which Gloria had stolen. Fat leaves OCMH as strong as he will ever be. Like Stephanie, who gives him the clay pot, Stone is to Fat a micro-form of God. Fat has a high regard for the rational God, the Logos and Jesus Christ. Fat compares Christian texts seeing and being like God with the Nag Hammadi texts that show humankind allied with the rational God against the demigod and its irrational world. God promises to invade the world ready to do battle. Fat is both afraid and excited by this.

Fat names the invader Zebra because it blends well to avoid detection until it chooses to disclose itself. It could be an extraterrestrial gone dormant for 2,000 years. Fat agrees with some ancient Greeks that every object is independently alive and yet shares one mind with the whole living universe. Fat sees an analogy to transubstantiation: the universe is turning into the Lord. Sanity will be restored. Fat's friends argue that he has seen not God but something exactly like God, but Fat knows that Zebra has broken through to fire life-saving information into his brain. St. Paul experiences the same on the road to Damascus, but talks not of Zebra but St. Sophia. Fat contemplates how Gloria pays back her friends' love by dying in an act of nihilism.

Having nowhere else to go, Fat attaches himself to Sherri, to help her during and after her remission. Phil sees that Sherri wants to die and is furious at her doctors for saving her. Like Gloria, Sherri wants to destroy her friends. Sherri lives in a tiny, squalid place. It never occurs to Fat that she likes this, when he tries to convince her to move in with him. Fat and Sherri agree that God exists and that Christ dies to save mankind, but Sherri is the epitome of piety. She calls her priest by his first name, Larry, and consults with him about anything doubtful that Fat brings up, like the secrecy theme in the Gospels and John the Baptist being an Essene. She chides Fat about his friend and hero, Bp. Pike, dying of thirst in the Dead Sea Desert. Fat accepts that Sherri is incapable of gratitude and ignores her malice. Fat longs for Sherri sexually, but she knows that her time is limited and, rather than seize the day as most cancer patients do, she shuts all pleasure out. She enjoys her returning lymphoma. Fat fails to see that they live in different worlds and, feeling cured by Dr. Stone, is determined to improve her life.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 examines Fat's mental state as he leaves OCMH. Phil several times expresses his views on Fat's condition and predicament as Fat attaches himself to death-seeking Sherri in a repeat of his tragedy with Gloria. Stone returns Fat's self-



confidence by declaring him an authority on the Nag Hammadi Gnostic materials. Fat is amazed that Stone gives him a text in which the gods threaten to trample Samael, the blind god, into clay. This dovetails with his experience with Stephanie, the clay molder. Fat also marvels at how it takes a suicide attempt to bring him in contact with someone who shares his views and interests and appreciates his insights.

There follows a long aside on Fat's appreciation for the declaration in 1 John 3:1-2 that "we shall be like him" and "we shall see him as he really is." Fat sees a rational God invading an irrational world like a champion, ready to do battle. Fat names this invader Zebra because it blends well in order to avoid detection until it chooses to disclose itself. There follows an aside on how mimesis or mimicry work in nature and how the whole universe is alive and shares a single mind. Fat sees an analogy to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation: the universe is turning into the Lord. He likens his own experience with Zebra to St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. The Gnostic-tinged Christian themes are concluded with a brilliant paraphrase of Hebrews 10:31, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Fat knows from personal experience what it is like to be "bushwacked by the Living God" (pg. 72), once God ceases to conceal himself.

The focus shifts to Sherri, whose lymphoma is in remission, and whose remaining life Fat is determined to improve. Phil recalls that a psychiatrist had advised Fat to lay off drugs and trying to help people. Fat is off drugs but determined to help Sherri. He cannot see, as Phil sees, that she wants to die and in the process hurt as many people close to her as she can. She is a repetition of Gloria, whose suicide launches Fat's decline into madness. Sherri is a certified Christian who wants some day to enter the convent. She is a naïve literalist who never admits to not knowing the answers to theological questions but depends entirely on her priest, Larry, for definitions of what constitutes orthodoxy. Larry's character is built up in later chapters. For a second time, the secrecy theme in the Gospels is mentioned before Fat and Sherri discuss whether John the Baptist is an Essene. When he mentions his theory of theophany/epiphany, Sherri understands him to mean the feast day celebrated on 6 January. Her explanation suggests that she is an Eastern rite Christian.

Sherri happily chides Fat about his friend and hero, Bishop James Pike, dying of thirst in the Dead Sea Desert. An historical figure, Pike is a controversial figure in the 1960s, espousing views that most Americans consider radical views. In 1969, he and his new wife disappear into the Dead Sea Desert in Israel and only she survives. While in itself a gem of irony, Sherri's reminding Fat that it would be irrational to fear imbibing antifreeze along with life-giving water from the radiator demonstrates a hardness of heart. She is incapable of gratitude and writes off her malice. There is a long aside on masochism and anhedonia, the incapacity for experiencing pleasure. Sherri enjoys waiting for her lymphoma to return. She is a much less appealing figure than when first introduced, lying in bed with her rosary beside her.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Fat's new therapist, Maurice, helps him cope with divorce and tries to bully him into enjoying life. Fat should take drugs and have sex - or kill himself immediately rather than wait for Sherri to die. Maurice considers cancer a deliberate failure of the immune system and declares that Sherri is a rip-off artist, tapping Fat and Medicare. Fat tries to avoid talking about God but, once drawn in, shocks Maurice by his Gnostic ramblings, Maurice demands that he read Genesis and prioritize its themes. Fat's self-image is deflated.

Fat and Sherri share an apartment in a crime-ridden part of Santa Ana. She calls her church job Jesus' sweatshop. Administering social programs that junkies try to exploit adds to her cynicism. Sherri resents everyone except Larry, the priest for whom she lusts. He does little to resolve her problems at work with employees who earn more than she. Sherri lacks Christian charity, hates her wealthy sister Mae and her best friend Eleanor, who becomes a nun in Las Vegas, while Sherri suffers in Santa Ana. Sherri's complaining drives Fat to work all the harder on his Exegesis and Tractates: Cryptica Scriptura, dealing with how the cosmos comes into existence.

Fat's two-source cosmogony has The One's androgynous twins separate prematurely, one becoming dark and defective and the other thriving. They correspond to the Yin/Yang of Taoism and Forms I and II of Parmenides. Both become many, forming hyperuniverses. Ours, a Form II, is filled with illness, madness, and chaos, which abort the One's plan and require that Jesus Christ be sent as a healing psyche, only to be killed. The Holy Spirit then must rescue all life forms or abolish all influences by Form II. The successful transformation will be the Kingdom of God. Within time, the Empire never ends, but in eternity it has already been killed by the healthy twin.

Sherri grows tired of Fat's writing and requests for help with expenses. She has cooked for him but not refrained from seeing other men. When she moves out, Sherri takes everything. When Sherri's cancer returns, everyone argues that Fat has no moral obligation to Sherri, but he truly loves her. Fat makes an important entry about defective DNA memory and how anamnesis (the loss of amnesia) is the only cure. Gnosis consists of disinhibiting instructions, such as the rituals. Humanity falls because of an intellectual (not a moral) error, but the Empire still claims that humanity has sinned. As Fat's mind goes completely, he writes entries at random, agonizes over how God/Zebra could know about his son or Sherri and do nothing, and knows that he is going crazy. Kevin suggests that only the mysterious Great Punta knows. As Fat writes down Zebra's prophetic statements, Phil declares that Fat has lost touch with reality.



Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 continues watching Fat's mental decline. He has a new therapist, Maurice, to help him cope with divorce. Maurice is a former political radical and Israeli commando. As a Jew, he cannot separate religion and morality. Still, he recommends drugs, sex, and suicide over helping Sherri until she dies. He recommends that if Fat wants or needs to help people, that he give money to professional care-givers rather than intervene personally. Maurice first suggests that Sherri is a rip-off artist, tapping Fat and SSI (Medicare). It seems rather brutal, until it proves true. Maurice contrasts sharply with Stone, who had seen eye-to-eye with Fat about his Gnostic views. Maurice is shocked by them and looks at Fat like a bug. Maurice strips away the self-confidence that Stone had instilled in Fat.

The scene shifts to Fat's downtown apartment, which he shares with Sherri, and initially focuses on her relationship with her unnamed church that is also her employer. Her attitude is reflected in her name for the place: Jesus' sweatshop. Phil refuses to name it, because the parish still exists and what he has to say about it is not flattering. Religion does not seem to be its primary reason for existence. It performs social work, underfunded and with a quarreling amateur staff. One imagines that Maurice would recommend that it leave things to secular professionals. Working for the church only adds to Sherri's cynicism. The priest Larry, for whom she lusts, does little to resolve her problems. Introduced as a mindlessly pious character, Sherri has become the antithesis of Christian charity. She moves out on Fat, rather than contribute to the household from the SSI (Medicare) payments, and shortly thereafter suffers a relapse and begins chemotherapy. Even her friends try to talk Fat out of standing by her, but Fat loves her despite how she treats him.

Fat has begun to extract material about cosmology from his massive Exegesis, forming the Tractates: Cryptica Scriptura, whose dense and disorganized text is given in full in the Appendix. Fat labors to find room for Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in a dualistic system that has parallels with the Yin and Yang of Taoism and Forms I and II of Parmenides. After quoting long, confusing passages, Phil eases the reader's mind by declaring that Fat is completely insane by the time he writes this. Fat distinguishes time and eternity: in the former the Empire never ends, while in the latter, what is to be the Kingdom of God has already triumphed. All of this is wrapped up in a myth of androgynous twins born to The One who loves them both and mourns the loss of the evil twin.

Fat also writes about defective DNA memory and how anamnesis (the loss of amnesia) is the only cure. He notes that Greco-Roman mystery religions accomplish this through rituals and sacraments. He includes Christianity among these systems. He holds that The Fall is not based on a bad moral choice, but on an intellectual error. As Fat struggles with the eternal question of theodicy - how God (or in Fat's case, Zebra) can allow suffering without doing anything - Kevin suggests his own non-religious construct, the Great Punta. This returns later in the novel.



The final pages of Chapter 6 are full of disjointed excerpts that are developed later in the novel. These include: 1) Fat's defense of Jesus' statement that some then living would see the coming of the Kingdom (Mt. 16), because time in 103-1978 C.E. is excised; 2) both the Hermetic alchemists and the Dogon tribe of Africa talk about a race of three-eyed invaders; these are loosely associated with the reforming Pharaoh Ikhnaton of Egypt and emanate from the Sirius star system; 3) the universe is a hologram (providing the technical term for which Apollonius of Tyana/Hermes Trimegistos had struggled); 4) identifying as one the Greeks' Dionysos, the Jews' Elijah, and the Christians' Jesus (this explains Jesus' enigmatic cry from the cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani"); 5) the Sibyl of Cumae foresees the murders of the Kennedy brothers, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bp. Pike; and perhaps the most important: 6) the Sibyl predicts that in March of 1974 conspirators will be seen and in August 1974 justice will come to pass. This, of course, refers to the Watergate break-in and Richard M. Nixon's resignation. Nixon will shortly come to personify evil in the novel.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Fat says that in August 1974 Zebra comes from Sirius to overthrow the Nixon tyranny and establish a peaceful kingdom on earth. He copies part of a hymn by Ikhnaton, whose descendants secretly rule the world. Ikhnaton passes knowledge to Moses, who passes it to Elijah, who becomes Christ. All are names for one Immortal Man, who is all humanity. In March 1974, Fat first tells Phil about vivid dreams about three-eyed people, cyborg entities wrapped in glass bubbles, sometimes attended by Soviet technicians. Afterwards, Fat's blood pressure spikes, his pets die and he sees St. Elmo's Fire, which gives him a new, unfamiliar personality. He understands Greek and forgets how to drive. He is told to expect letters from the Soviet Union and two days later does. Some of the information saves his son and he sees ancient Rome superimposed over California.

In 1977 Phil uses some of Fat's materials in a novel, *A Scanner Darkly*. The protagonist injects himself with a mild euphoric and for six hours sees abstract painting flash by. GABA fluid blocks neural circuits until a proper disinhibiting stimulus fires. For Fat, this is sodium pentathol during a dental procedure. Afterwards, a beautiful delivery woman brings pain medication and, seeing her fish necklace, Fat flashes back to Apostolic times and then to the present. Later he hears hideous sounds on the radio and sees rushing, floating colors. Then Rome and California appear superimposed and merged in time, and Fat thinks in Greek. He becomes two personalities. Thomas, the wise who dominates, comes in from the first-century when Fat receives the fish symbol intended for him. Both are perplexed. Thomas recalls incarnations back to Post Neolithic times. He has placed himself in this fish symbol expecting to be reborn in 40 years, but it takes 2,000, during which death and time are abolished. Only after the Logos/plasmate is found at Nag Hammadi does immortality come about, as the extraterrestrial Christ, living information, passes into contemporary brains and symbiosis occurs. Fat's contribution is to see (like Plato) rationality invading the irrational rather than vice versa. He has no idea how many minds have been penetrated to join him in striking out against the Empire.

Phil has images of a vacation spot in Northern California where maps show no lakes. Although he is a bachelor living alone in a Southern California apartment, Phil dreams of living in a nice house with a pretty wife with whom he gardens and visits the lake. Phil has read about early settlers at the lake who shun wooden cradles because they steal powers from baby wizards. Because of his leftist background, Phil is uncomfortable being well-to-do in his dream. He realizes that the dream house resembles his father's home in Menlo Park, CA and recognizes his mother as his dream wife. Phil considers that DNA-borne memory of the species could extend equally to the future where three-eyed descendants and wizard-like technology could time-travel back to the present and make it appear as the past.



Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 tells how in March 1974, Fat first confides to Phil details of his vivid dreams. about three-eyed people, cyborg entities wrapped in glass bubbles, sometimes attended by Soviet technicians. After explaining that GABA fluid blocks neural circuits in the brain until a proper disinhibiting stimulus fires, he reveals that Fat is given sodium pentathol during a dental procedure and the visions, already described, begin in conjunction with a dangerous spike in blood pressure. A beautiful woman bringing pain medication wears a fish necklace (Ichthys, an ancient Christian symbol). A psychological test shows that he is mildly neurotic but not schizophrenic.

Fat is taken over by a first-century Christian, Thomas, both of whom live in both places and find the experience perplexing. Facing imminent death, Thomas places himself in this fish symbol, expecting to be reborn in 40 years, but it takes 2,000. The overlapping of time is thus explained as the abolishment of time in the interim. This ratifies one of Jesus' most controversial sayings: death and time are abolished. The Nag Hammadi discovery similarly releases Christ. Fat accepts his role, fighting the Empire.

These details help Phil understand a dream about a lifestyle that has little resemblance to his real one. The details gradually clarify until he realizes that he and his father (with whom he is not close) are one, as are Fat and Thomas. DNA-borne memory of the species, several times mentioned earlier in the Exegesis is again considered, but pushed into the future, where three-eyed descendants of the human race might have the technology to time-travel back to the present and manifest the past. Increasing complexity serves to make the situation seem clearer.

Phil notes that in 1977 he incorporates Fat's flashing images into a science fiction novel, *A Scanner Darkly*. Dick does, indeed, write such a partly autobiographical work. This prefigures the art film *Valis*, which Fat, Phil, David, and Kevin are about to see at a theater. This begins a more active adventure tale and clarifies Fat's experience and the question of whether Fat is simply Phil's alter ego. The clarity, however, is destined to vanish. The imagery of Chapter 7 proves vital to appreciating Chapter 9.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Phil decides against telling Fat that he has encountered himself at various points into the far future, because Fat seems happy to have met God. Overcoming time is an age-old quest, with the sacraments and the plasmate extracting people from the lower realm without their being aware. Siddhartha recalls all of his past lives and is called Buddha (The Enlightened). His knowledge passes to the Pythagoreans, most of whom keep it secret but Empedocles goes public. Phil does not tell Fat that he is a Buddha; Fat is more like a hit-and-run accident.

When Sherri's remission ends, Fat worries about her but obsesses about finding the Savior who is being reborn, wherever he is. This is the fifth (or seventh) Savior. The friends realize that Gloria and Sherri are the objects of the quest, which is like the Grail legends, especially as seen in Wagner's opera Parsifal. Fat cannot understand spiritually why Sherri - or Christ - have to suffer. Suffering does not fit in his grand design. When Sherri dies, Fat goes through no crisis. He follows Zebra wherever Zebra leads. Phil does not argue. Fat has saved up \$5,000 and plans to start in China or France. Phil and Fat go for a drink in the Sombrero Street bar, where a waitress asks about Sherri and they indulge in gallows humor and reminisce before Fat admits that he will self-destruct unless he finds the Savior. Phil would also die, for neither can exist without the other. Thomas is in Fat's head, remembering Jesus and preparing to welcome him back. Fat has missed God's recognition for five years.

In the opera, Parsifal makes Klingsor and his castle vanish by signing them with the spear that pierces Christ's side. Their delusional nature is thus confirmed. The spear also heals Amfortas' wound, the shrine opens, and heavenly voices proclaim, "The Redeemer Redeemed!" This and verses about "Pity's highest power" puzzle Phil. He wonders whether the sign of the Cross will abolish Fat's Empire. Phil has figured out that Fat is the Savior, but dares not tell him that he is searching for himself. Gloria's and Sherri's deaths prove that pity has no power. Some other future magic is required. Phil is sure that when Wagner asks to enter heaven because he has written Parsifal, the gates will slam on him. On the other hand, Aristotelian two-value logic (either A or not-A) may be false and everything is a Zen paradox.

Phil fears that Fat is dead, dragged to the grave by two women because he is a fool. What good has the women's suffering contributed to Fat or anyone? Suffering must be abolished. Fat has told Christ that people need medical attention. Christ, Asklepios and Elijah all raise people from the dead, but the Empire never ends. It must be killed by Christ consuming the toxic metal in the universe-organism (phagocytosis) and the Holy Spirit, which is living information and light, must fight the dark Empire. Everyone must choose sides. Zoroaster, the first Savior, knows this. Phil sees sense in this. Schopenhauer finds it untrue that every creature must die, for then life would pass out



of the universe. Since life goes on, death must not be inevitable. Fat has died with Gloria and Sherri, but lives on as the Savior he seeks.

Chapter 8 Analysis

In Chapter 8, Phil increasingly differentiates himself from Fat. He struggles to understand Fat's philosophy and has understood that Fat is the Savior whom he seeks. It is better to let him think that he has met God. Phil quotes more of Fat's writings about astral determinism (fate) and the action of the mysteries in moving individuals between the upper and lower realms. Phil then turns to stories about how Siddhartha becomes the Buddha (the Enlightened One) by recalling all of his past lives. This knowledge passes to the Pythagoreans. Phil refrains from telling Fat that he is a Buddha.

Kevin, the voice of cynicism, returns in a minor role again mentioning his dead cat in the august context of the opening of the Book of Life and the Book of Daniel's Ancient of Days. He is put in his foolish place. Pious David hopes that the Savior for which Fat searches is Christ, but in Fat's system, Christ/Sofia is one of the Saviors, along with the Head Apollo, Siddhartha/Buddha, and varying others (Zoroaster, Muhammad, Mani, and Asklepios). Late in the chapter, Fat declares Zoroaster to be the first Savior.

Wagner's opera Parsifal also returns and is analyzed in some detail for its Gnostic theme. Phil casts Kevin as the evil magician Klingsor and has him carp at Fat about being horny. This flows into a discussion of the constant tension between death (thanatos) and sexual love (eros). Phil puzzles about some lines in the opera, particularly "The Redeemer Redeemed!" and "Pity's highest power." Gloria's and Sherri's deaths prove that even pity as intense as Fat's has no power. Phil's view is that because the opera is so unclear, Wagner will be turned away from heaven at the Judgment. He declares it, unclearly, another case of the Chinese fingertrap.

Fat does not fall apart when Sherri dies, as Phil had feared, but determines to go on his quest, wherever Zebra leads him. Fat admits that he is programmed to self-destruct unless he finds the Savior and adds that Phil will also die, for neither can exist without the other. If they are dual personalities in the same body, this is certainly the case. Thomas is actively in Fat's head. Several times Fat comments that suffering must be abolished; it serves no good purpose. This opens a discussion about healers in history and myth: Christ, Asklepios the physician, and Elijah. They raise the dead, but the Empire continues. Fat conjectures that Christ must become a phagocyte, enveloping and consuming the toxic metal in the universe-organism, much like the Holy Spear alone can heal the wound that it inflicts. When the Holy Spirit acts, everyone must choose sides. The chapter ends with a quotation from Schopenhauer about the inevitability of death. By considering the case of a cat, it ties in nicely with Kevin's prime concern.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Fat inquires about airline tickets to China before joining Phil and Kevin for a science fiction movie that Kevin strongly recommends. Valis deals with the era of Richard M. Nixon's reelection campaign. Called Ferris F. Fremount, Nixon is very popular. A second story line has Nicholas Brady, an electronics genius, supporting a has-been rock star, Eric ("Mother Goose") Lampton and his wife Linda, who has no sex organs. Brady, who occasionally morphs into Fremount, lures Eric into a room-sized mixer and explodes his head, revealing electronic components in lieu of brain tissue. Linda puts Eric's head back together and is shocked when he speaks like Fremount. In the White House, Fremount orders Brady murdered and cheerleaders chant "Kill Brady!" both in Washington, DC, and in Burbank, CA. Some strip in ecstasy, revealing no sex organs.

Time passes. Two Fremounts face one another across a hologram that pulses pink light. Eric and Linda reveal secret sex organs and make love before a laser beam fires from above, exploding Eric's eyes and creating a third one in his forehead. Eric composes pleasant folk music to which Brady adds a subliminal "Kill Fremount" track. As Fremount studies the Lamptons' dossiers, pink light makes him shred them. He learns about VALIS, a top-secret satellite system, and orders it shot down, but this fails. Fremount wins reelection. Even his wife misses that he has Brady's face.

Driving home, the friends discuss aspects of the film that parallel Fat's experiences. They suspect subliminal messages in the film and its music. Kevin, who has seen it before, points out details that the others miss: a clay pot like Stephanie's (that is sometimes a water pitcher), decorated by a fish sign that is also the double helix of DNA. The VALIS satellite controls minds in the way that true early Christians were able. The satellite is run over in the gutter like a beer can. The Brady/Fremount change shows that the whole U.S. is occluded. Planning on seeing Valis again, Kevin concludes that it stimulates phosphene activity in the audience's retinas.

Kevin, who now believes Fat's stories, suggests that Phil contact the Lamptons through Robin Jamison, the film's still photographer who once photographed Phil. Fat is perplexed that cynical Kevin is the means by which his experiences are confirmed. Gradually, they conclude that Zebra removes Nixon from office in August 1974. Phil wonders if the Fifth Savior is a rock star. Because Valis is filmed in 1977, three years after Fat's experiences, they must determine what Goose is going through in 1974 to understand the time dysfunction aspect of the film. They conjecture that ancient Rome might truly have broken through into the modern world in the person of Thomas, who has left Fat and may now have replaced Nixon, who is left wandering a beach, wondering. The fictional president's initials are FFF, which in numerical terms is 666. This signals the Final Days. Valis contains no coincidences and Mini's music induces a theta state of sleep, during which Kevin return to his Celtic origins and participates in human sacrifices.



Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 describes in detail and then has the characters analyze, a science fiction movie called Valis. This is named after a top-secret satellite system, the Vast Active Living Intelligence System. Four new characters, who become important in the following chapters, are introduced: Eric ("Mother Goose" or simply "Goose"); Linda Lampton; Brent Mini, composer of the film's score; and Robin Jamison, the film's still photographer who once shot Phil to accompany a newspaper interview. Eric is a first-rate rock star who writes the screenplay (his first) and stars in the film, under his own name. Linda also appears. Kevin has seen Valis before and points out details that the others miss. He assures them that people miss 90% of the detail on first viewing.

Much of the imagery and the effect on viewers of the laser technology have been introduced in Chapter 7. Crucial elements are a clay pot decorated by a fish sign that is also the double helix of DNA. A flash-cut of a man fishing reinforces the image. Fat has already claimed that early Christians can make people see or not see what they wish. The friends conclude that the subtle time dysfunction allows two characters, Nicholas Brady, an electronics wizard, and Ferris F. Fremount, President of the United States, to morph back and forth. They conclude, from the film and from Fat's March 1974 dream about conspirators being seen and dealt with, that Fremount represents Richard M. Nixon, the only U.S. president to resign from office. There is a subtle reference to his successor, Gerald R. Ford. Thomas, the first-century Christian, has left Fat's brain and conceivably could have entered Nixon. Fremount's initials, FFF, numerically suggest 666, the number of the Beast in the Book of Revelation, who introduces the end of time.

The friends experience a proper sense of awe and decide that Phil must contact Jamison to arrange a meeting with the Lamptons. As a pretext for meeting, Phil provides full bibliographic information on a number of his novels that they could discuss filming. They are actual Philip K. Dick titles. Phil wonders if Goose is the Fifth Savior. This would be convenient and economical for Fat's quest.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

After watching Valis again, the friends agree that Fat's experiences are real. They wonder if the Empire ends when Nixon is unseated. Kevin studies the Bible's two apocalyptic books and discovers a description of Nixon: harsh, grim, powerful, but then broken, not by human hands. Fat begins worrying about actually finding the truth. David sees Valis and is pleased that it shows that whatever God does and believes is real. Kevin baits him about the meaning of nothing and God's will. They realize that they are no longer friends comforting Fat, but people controlled by VALIS/Zebra. They could see the flash of pink and end up anywhere in space and time. Human history has been deflected. The plasmate of apostolic times has emerged angry after 2,000 years and has struck the imperial U.S. presidency. They realize that Sherri's Christianity would not bear these revelations.

When Phil phones Jamison, he has a two-word cypher with which to entice him. It is taken from Fat's writings: KING FELIX. It signifies that the Iron Age has ended and is intended for three-eyed descendants of Ikhnaton. Jamison agrees to pass word to Eric through his agent, who may then contact Phil's agent. This is how things are done. A week later, Eric sends a one-word message: KING. Phil adds FELIX and mails it back, closing the link. In the Bible, "felix" suggests happiness and prosperity. Eric phones Phil late at night and asks them to fly to Sonoma soon, to accommodate his busy schedule. Eric questions Phil about drug use and his criminal record and observes that Horselover Fat is the same name as Philip Dick. Turning serious, Eric commiserates with what Fat/Phil has suffered and urges him to let go of Gloria. Eric has to interpret "The Buddha is in the park" in cultural terms as, "Jesus is in Bethlehem." Time is not real. There are many Buddhas and only one, just as musicians play only once for a recording that then plays 50 times.

Phil realizes that a lifetime of shaking has ended. His wound is healed. In the morning he arranges for the foursome to fly to Oakland, CA. Wanting to give themselves a name, they consider the Siddhartha Society, because of Eric's reference, but Kevin objects, fanatically. When Fat tells of a dream about a large fish with a fan-like fin that cannot hold an M-16 rifle, because of its fish connotation they adopt the name Rhipidon Society (from the Greek for fin) and the motto "Fish cannot carry guns," and toast the Savior's return.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The main thrust of Chapter 10 is for the four friends (David, as fanatically Catholic as ever, is reintroduced) to arrange to meet the principals of the film Valis. They feel that if powerful Nixon can be dealt with according to a text in the Book of Daniel, that they could end up anywhere in time and space, because they are so deeply into this mystery.



Phil considers the "paradox of piety" (pg. 162), that believers can have their faith shaken by finding that what they believe in is true. The ancient plasmate has emerged angry after being couped up in Nag Hammadi for 2,000 years and has lashed out at the imperial U.S. presidency, the closest thing to the Black Iron Prison. They laugh that Sherri's Christianity could not bear such revelations, but are silent on David's inflexibility, which shows when he insists that God's will is all that matters and when he insists that the name adopted by the foursome is somehow Christian.

Fat's writings include references to KING FELIX, which signifies that the Iron Age has ended and is intended for three-eyed descendants of Ikhnaton. Fat tells Phil to use this as a cypher for making contact with Eric Lampton. Claiming that in 1974 U.S. Army cryptographers try but fail to decipher it, Fat is unusually sparse with information. The cipher succeeds in connecting Phil and Eric, and a face-to-face meeting is set up. Eric is quite cautious about the foursome.

There is a long discussion about the cipher, particularly about the meaning of the Latin word "felix." A variety of nuances are discussed. The bottom line is a sense that a new reign of happiness is about to begin, which perfectly fits into Phil's long quest. It is interesting that after the diverse philosophical and religious discussions, Phil does not understand Eric's phrase, "The Buddha is in the park." It refers to Siddhartha Gautama's birth in Limbini Park. When Eric says, "Jesus is in Bethlehem," the connotation of a great event being at hand becomes obvious. Eric declares that there are many Buddhas and only one, just as musicians play only once for a recording that then plays fifty times. Time is not real. This frees Phil from a lifetime of anxiety. He feels whole and makes arrangements for the foursome to fly north.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In Sonoma, the foursome meet Eric and Linda and drive out to their farm. Kevin is so excited that he stammers, talking about Meister Eckehart's differentiating between God and the Godhead, with which humans can attain union. The same is taught earlier by Sankara in India. Eric declares that VALIS is the source and that both teachers are the same person living in two places at two times. Eric recites verses that Fat recognizes as Psalm 104, based on Ikhnaton's hymn. It is older than the Bible. Linda identifies herself and Eric as the ugly builders with claw-like hands who work with the god Hephaistos and kill Asklepios. The foursome needs not fear, for Shiva both destroys and restores and the time for restoration has begun. Phil realizes that the Rhipidon Society is out of its depth.

Death hides in every religion. VALIS has given healing and abolished the toxic Age of Iron, but the Renaissance physician Paracelsus who used poisonous metals as medications dies of them. Gods and heroes always form partnerships: Nommo and Yurugu, Osiris and Seth, and Yahweh and Satan in the Book of Job. If the partnerships do not end when creatures appear, the creatures die. Holy Wisdom must prevail. Because God can be good and terrible at the same time, humans need mediating priests and sacraments to keep them safe. Fat has seen God escape and transubstantiate the world. In Greek religion, Dionysos, the mad god of intoxication possesses his congregation and overtakes those who accept Pan's advice and run. It is crazy, like Jonestown.

The Lamptons grow their own grapes and make their own wine. Eric plays a tape of Mini's music with his words. Mini appears in a wheelchair. He suffers terminal multiple myeloma. When he asks if VALIS makes contact with the foursome, Fat talks about St. Elmo's Fire, his son's healing, and recognizing the cypher by the Fibonacci Constant on the doorway to the Different Realm, where he sees luminous writing in Crete. Hebrew letters, Cabala, change and factor into the words KING FELIX, according to VALIS' encoding system. Fat hears the neutral artificial intelligence (AI) voice that Mini reveals is the communication network that links all star systems with Albemuth. VALIS is not a deity but a construct, an artifact, anchored on Earth, but able to be anywhere at any time because time and space do not exist. Babies are bombarded with programs that await the correct situation to activate. For creatures of Albemuth system, like the Lamptons and Mini, Earth atmosphere is toxic, so VALIS must bombard them constantly to override the poison. Otherwise, they become deranged. All rationality comes from VALIS. Wanting to know VALIS as well as possible, Mini convinces VALIS to turn the power up, knowing the lethal consequences. He is happy that he did, and Fat understands. VALIS has promised to return before Mini dies.

VALIS fires information from millions of miles away. In the film they use an old satellite to represent this visually. The film is the first step to making the Savior known. Linda



identifies the Savior as Apollo, the paired opposite of Dionysos, which fits Fat's dream. Mini traces their history since Mycenaean times. They elect to lose the memory of their true origins and relinquish their third eye, which is venerated in Egypt and India. Those with no third eye cannot escape the living maze until those on other star systems construct VALIS to rescue them. Once freed from space and time, they will never die. VALIS has saved people many times under many names. There is no human element in the Savior, but she, this time, is born from a human woman: Linda. Her daughter, Sophia, aged two, is constantly monitored and protected by VALIS, her father. Sophia disputes everything.

Chapter 11 Analysis

In Chapter 11 the scene moves north to Sonoma, CA, in wine country. Phil makes note of this when discussions turn to the crazy Greek deity Dionysos, god of wine and practitioner of enthousiasmos, the possession of his devotees. Eric and Linda instantly capture Kevin, who stammers as he talks about trans-Christian mysticism worldwide, which Eric declares has VALIS as its source. Linda reveals that she and Eric belong to the race of three-eyed, clawed builders alluded to earlier in the novel. Additional Greek myths are mentioned but with no detail. India's fearsome Shiva, both destroyer and restorer, is invoked. Supernatural beings have a need to pair up, but their pairings are dangerous once mortal creatures come into being. Yahweh and Satan are explicitly included, from the Book of Jonah. The Judeo-Christian gets no special treatment. Psalm 104, which deals with Creation as in Genesis 1-2, is said to be based on Ikhnaton's hymn. Biblical scholars regularly discuss this. The discussion of myth ends with Phil recalling the 1978 Jonestown mass suicide by followers of Jim Jones in Guyana. This sounds a cautionary note.

Brent Mini is formally introduced, wheelchair-bound but enthusiastic, in the original Greek sense. He reveals much about the origins and powers of VALIS. His thirst for knowledge has led him to request an overdose of the information stream that Fat has experienced, leading to terminal multiple myeloma. Fat understands the yearning. The two characters who have directly experienced VALIS' power talk esoterically and rather intuitively about how Fat receives the KING FELIX cypher. It centers around Fibonacci Numbers, whose discovery dates from the 12th century in Western Europe, but which VALIS and his devotees have clearly been using since at least Mycenaean time to encode secret data. The sequence begins 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, where each new number is the sum of the preceding two. (viz., $8+13=21$). The key Fibonacci ratio, 1:0.6154 is reached by dividing any number by its successor (viz., $8/13=0.6154$), but in higher pairs 0.618, the reciprocal of the golden ratio, which is the shape of the door that Fat recognizes as special and through which he sees luminous writing in ancient Crete.

Fat is told that the writing is Hebrew and presents the Cabala, mystical and mythological Jewish writings, also from the 12th century, that deal with the kind of pantheism and gnosticism that run through this novel. The characters resolve into the words KING FELIX. Later in the chapter, the maze or labyrinth beneath King Minos' palace on Crete is discussed. That humans are caught in a maze has already been suggested, but it is



now explained, along with how VALIS alone can liberate them. Unlike Daedalus, builder of the Minoan maze, VALIS is not its prisoner. VALIS is headquartered on Earth but unbound by time and space.

Fat next learns about the strange voice that he has heard. Mini reveals that it is the communication network that links all star systems with Albemuth, his and the Lamptons' home. They find Earth's atmosphere toxic and must be constantly bombarded by VALIS in order to survive without going insane. Babies are bombarded from birth with programs that await appropriate situational contexts. Note the resemblance to the action of GABA fluids in the brain, earlier described. VALIS has promised to return before Mini dies, to take him away, and to incorporate him forever.

Chapter 11's final revelation is that there is no Fifth Savior, for VALIS has come to the rescue many times and under many names. Much of the novel has been devoted to discussing this. Now it is stated as fiat. Recall Eric's phrase, "The Buddha is in the park." There is no human element in the Savior, but he is born from a human woman. Note that David is relieved by this semi-orthodox statement. Of all the characters, David is most out of his league. Linda then declares that they are taking a chance this time and letting the Savior be a girl, her daughter, Sophia, who disputes everything. The reader is left wanting badly to meet this creature.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Sophia is Wisdom rather than a slaying/healing deity. She grows angry when she sees Phil, who is trying to kill himself. She dismisses all idea of Fat, whom she has destroyed to make Phil whole. Under questioning about her nature, Sophia says, "I am that which I am" or remains silent. Linda explains that some questions are meaningless. At dinner, free from the Lamptons, Phil grieves over the loss of Fat. Kevin and David commiserate before discussing the Lamptons' sanity and whether they should return immediately to Santa Ana. They decide to stay another day. When they meet, alone with Sophia, she refuses to be interrogated about Eric and Linda, whom she declares to be ill but harmless, because she overrides them.

Sophia begins explaining: she has provided their society its motto and will now give them the message that they must proclaim to the world. Judgment over the struggling grim king is near. Man is holy and is the only true and living god. Sophia claims not to be a god, but a human child of Wisdom Himself. The trio carries Wisdom's authority in themselves and they must speak as Wisdom guides them. She reads to them from Sepher Yezirah about good, evil, and purification before instructing them to go home and wait for her to contact them. They are to have nothing more to do with the Lamptons. Sophia will not fail them. Walking back to the house, the trio discusses how Sophia has paraphrased the Bible and added new aspects. Even David feels her inside. He is surprised that Kevin has failed to ask about his cat. David turns back as the Lamptons approach.

Guided by Sophia's AI voice in his head, Phil dodges the question of the commune that Mini has proposed and explains why they must return to Santa Ana to recruit additional followers and arrange for a high-budget film. A flash of pink light blinds Phil and he sees them aboard a jet superimposed on the Lamptons' fields. Linda swears them to secrecy and believes their insincere promise to return. The vision vanishes as they land in Orange County. In the airport, Phil recalls how in March 1974, when VALIS first takes control and saves Christopher's life, he, Phil, stealthily baptizes his son, confirms him by VALIS' authority, and communes him on a bit of hot dog bun and hot chocolate. Phil senses the solemnity of when the priest becomes Christ to offer his own body and blood in the Eucharist. It is a miracle of overcoming time, uniting Santa Ana in 1974 and in Jerusalem in 35 C.E.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Two-year-old (or 2,000-year-old) Sophia is true to her name: Wisdom. She makes clear that Fat does not exist and Phil feels healed. She is angry about his unholy suicide attempt. Like Yahweh in the Hebrew scriptures, Sophia refers to herself as "I am that which I am" (Exodus 3:14) or simply remains silent. The friends feel themselves safe



and at peace. Kevin observes that Sophia accomplishes what no therapist could: clearing Phil's mind of Fat. During a second session, Sophia refuses to be interrogated before launching into a lengthy speech about the kerygma to which she is calling them. Kerygma is a technical theological term for the proclamation of revealed truth. At its end, they remark that Sophia sounds very much like Jesus preaching in the Gospels, but adds material about every human being god. Jesus' Farewell Discourse and High Priestly Prayer (John 13-17) are clearly reflected. At the end of the chapter, Phil, accepting that Christopher is his son, reflects on how the Eucharist, instituted in those same chapters, creates the reality of time and space overlays. It neatly concludes Sophia's preaching.

Sophia reads to them from Sepher Yezirah, another Jewish book about the creation of the world. She declares that evil serves good, despite itself, and warns them to leave and avoid the Lamptons. Sophia speaks to Phil in an AI voice to help them escape the Lamptons' clutches. The latter are eager to talk about setting up a commune for the Elect described in the Book of Revelation (recall the reference to Nixon as FFF/666) and to learn what Sophia might have said about VALIS. Phil experiences a blinding flash of pink light that unites the Lamptons' fields and a jet flight home. It vanishes as they approach Orange County.

After the second meeting with Sophia and a bit of irreverence that offends David (who is strangely comfortable with Sophia's revelations), David asks why Kevin has not asked her about his dead cat. Surprised at the omission, Kevin turns back, but what transpires is revealed only in Chapter 13. Phil explains to Linda how the cat symbolizes for Kevin all of the injustice in the universe. Sophia has explained that evil is on its last legs but struggles on. With her help, the trio and those whom they recruit will overcome evil.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Traffic is annoying as they drive home, thinking about Eric and Linda's nonsense and the fierce-eyed little girl with an adult's mind. Kevin has already grown cynical about being commissioned. He reveals that Sophia tells him that his cat is stupid; stupid cats run into streets and it is an immutable law of the universe that they get run over. Phil is furious that Kevin wastes the Savior's time on this and declares that everyone is happy that the cat is dead. Kevin denies that Sophia is the Savior, claims that she is controlled by a wire in her head, and declares that Phil had been nicer when Fat was inside him. Stopping at their usual bar, Phil struggles to understand all of the irrationalities that Sophia has told them, and then gives up. Home in bed, Phil wonders about Sophia's future and realizes that they need a Savior now. Later is too late. He dreams about beautiful Linda Ronstadt driving him in Kevin's Honda, singing about slippers and dawn. Researching them, he contemplates the Aurora Borealis and Empedocles vanishing at Mount Etna. When Linda phones to announce that Sophia has been accidentally killed when Mini attempts information transfer by laser, Phil realizes that Ronstadt had been a grown-up Sophia saying goodbye.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Brief Chapter 13 provides reflection time for the trio on what they have experienced. Kevin reveals Sophia's answer to his question about his cat: it dies because it is the stupid species of cat that darts into traffic. Note that they are at that moment fighting freeway traffic. When Phil gets angry that Kevin wastes the Savior's time, Kevin denies that Sophia is the Savior. Later, Phil dreams about being sung to by Linda Ronstadt, a singer then at the peak of her popularity. When Linda phones to tell him of Sophia's death, he realizes that it had been Sophia singing to him her goodbye. It is easy to picture Sophia as a grown-up fitting Ronstadt's portrait. Since the trio has admitted that without Sophia they are doomed, the final chapter has much to explain.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The media soon forget Sophia's death as new tragedies occur. The world goes on. Phil thinks about his own death and Fat returns, declaring that Sophia should have anticipated and prevented the accident. Fat decides to go to India to find the one who dies - whichever one that might now mean. Phil tells him bluntly to drop the idea of a Fifth Savior, denies that there has ever been a Zebra, and declares Fat to be as stupid as Kevin's cat. The Savior could be anywhere in the world. Everything had pointed to Sophia until she died. Death is the true, secret name for religion. There is no more an answer for the thousands who have died in religious wars and inquisitions than for why Kevin's cat dies. God has no idea. Neither Gloria nor Sherri learns anything by dying. Fat, however, needs to keep trying. He flies first to Metz, France, where a Linda Ronstadt look-alike robs him blind. After a while in Germany, he returns to the U.S. Phil does well, writing, David runs a tobacco shop, and Kevin gets a tolerant new girlfriend.

Fat telegrams from Portland, OR, KING FELIX, before flying to Los Angeles. He is fashionably dressed and weary, but not depressed. He shows his friends photographs of an ancient limestone font in a museum in Athens, Greece, clearly decorated by the DNA molecule. He had heard the Greek words for it (poros krater) in 1974. It resembles the caduceus, the symbol of the medical profession, associated with Asklepios. It declares that the wearer is a sacred person not to be molested. Hermes, messenger of the gods, carries it for protection. Fat intends to search the Greek islands, Crete in particular, because he has seen visions of the maze under Minos. He has sent KING FELIX too early. Fat heads to Turkey, where he visits Emperor Justinian's famed Hagia Sophia cathedral. The friends are sure that they will hear from Fat again some day.

Watching Saturday morning television as background noise, Phil sees consecutive screen flashes FOOD KING and FELIX THE CAT. Subliminally he puts them together to see the cipher, which has just gone out to one of the largest children audiences in the world. It will stay in their brains for as long as necessary. The Lamptons have nothing to do with it. VALIS may have acted on an anonymous NBC technician to send the message. Two days later, Linda phones to announce that she is eight months pregnant with another girl. Mini has died. Phil sees another juxtaposition on the television: a commercial about shepherds and sheep with another showing a fish symbol on a sailboat. He wonders whether VALIS is telling them that the time has come. Phil lacks the faith and madness to respond.

Fat next phones from Tokyo, en route to Micronesia in the Pacific Ocean. The AI voice has ordered him there. Micronesia is Greek for little islands; there are over 2,000. Fat will start on Guam. It is March again, the vernal equinox, and Phil is feeling positive about humanity. One night, Phil dreams about having a cabin on a Micronesian island, but he stays home in front of his television, awake, keeping his commission.



Chapter 14 Analysis

In the final chapter, Fat returns, as determined as ever to find the Fifth Savior. Kevin and David again relate to him as an independent person. Having accepted that Fat is a projection of his own personality and making peace with the loss of a beloved if eccentric companion, Phil welcomes Fat back with disinterest. Sophia's death has robbed Phil of faith and hope. He coldly catalogs Western Europe's miserable history of the evil and death perpetrated by religion. He could have broadened his perspective had he known more about world history. Phil's unfamiliarity with Eastern matters has been well-established. His contemplation of religion's horrors ends with another reference to the inanity of the Jonestown suicides. Death rather than gods or saviors characterizes religion.

Fat heads out independently. He has one great discovery, in Athens, Greece, where he sees the DNA molecule decorating a museum artifact whose antiquity has been verified. It resembles the caduceus, the symbol of the medical profession. There follows an excursus on its meaning, centered on Asklepios, the great physician who has so often been mentioned in the novel as a healer akin to Jesus Christ. This finding convinces Fat to search the Greek islands, where he earlier sees revelations that have been treated in detail. First, in Istanbul, Turkey, he sees the famed Hagia Sophia, one of the architectural wonders of the world. Apparently finding nothing in the Greek islands, Fat turns to other little islands (Micronesia) in the Pacific Islands. He cannot escape Greek, it seems.

Phil, meanwhile receives a series of subliminal messages while watching Saturday morning television. Only rarely does he turn these on and treats them as background noise. He perceives the cypher in two juxtaposed screen flashes aimed at children - massive numbers of children in the Los Angeles area - which he believes could be VALIS at work. Another juxtaposition convinces him that VALIS is calling him to fulfill his commission. Without explanation, Phil considers himself the sole surviving member of the Rhipidon Society and posts himself in front of the television to watch for more instructions. Whether either of the searchers will find what he seeks is left unclear, as is the nature of their being and/or relationship.



Characters

Philip K. Dick / Houselover Fat

The novel's narrator speaks sometimes as and about himself as Phil, a successful professional science fiction author and an astute student of literature. More often he writes in the third person about his alter ego, Houselover Fat, whose name reflects Phil's own, in that Philip (Philippos) is Greek for Houselover and Dick is German for Fat. Phil claims early on to have created this character to afford himself some "much needed objectivity" (pg. 11). Early on, he fumbles back and forth between perspectives before for most of the novel sorting out that Phil is a cool, pragmatic character while Fat is disintegrating into insanity.

Late in the novel, the Fat persona is obliterated by Sophia Lampton, a three-year-old whom Fat and his friends consider the promised Savior. Phil recognizes that Fat is a mental projection, but misses his intellect and companionship. Phil subsumes Fat to the point of Phil assuming responsibility for Fat's estranged wife and son. After Sophia's accidental death, however, Fat returns as a separate character and begins a worldwide quest for the real savior.

Phil and Fat argue regularly about Fat's intricate philosophy, which draws from an amazing variety of sources, ancient, medieval, and modern, spanning history, philosophy, and theology. Fat loses an unnamed first wife in 1970 to mental illness, marries Beth and with her has son Christopher, a troublesome boy. In March 1974, Fat first confides to Phil vivid dreams about three-eyed people, cyborg entities wrapped in glass bubbles, who are sometimes attended by Soviet technicians. Afterwards, Fat's blood pressure spikes and his pets die. He sees St. Elmo's Fire, which gives him a new, unfamiliar personality. He understands Greek and forgets how to drive. He is told to expect letters from the Soviet Union and two days later they arrive but he fearfully refuses to answer them. Some of the information transmitted to him saves Christopher's life, for it reveals an overlook inguinal hernia that is successfully repaired.

In 1977 Phil incorporates some of Fat's materials in a novel, *A Scanner Darkly*. The protagonist injects himself with a mild euphoric and for six hours sees paintings by Picasso, Klees, Modigliani, and Kandinsky flash by as his brain's GABA fluid level drops. This occurs for Fat in March 1974 when he is given sodium pentathol (truth serum) during a dental procedure. Afterwards, a beautiful young woman brings pain medication from the pharmacy and, seeing her fish necklace, he flashes back to frightening Apostolic times and then returns to the present. A month later, listening to music on the radio that turns hideous, Fat sees rushing, floating colors. Soon he is seeing Rome and California superimposed and merged in time, and thinking in Greek.

In his dreams, Fat is given a cipher that allows him to make contact with Eric ("Mother Goose") and Linda Lampton, who star in a science fiction film that has eerie parallels to Fat's experiences. With friends David and Kevin, Phil and Fat (who appear quite



independent of one another at this point) form the Rhipidon Society. They meet the Lamptons in Northern California and discover that they are crazy. Their two-year-old daughter, Sophia, however, seems to fit the bill as the world Fifth Savior and commissions them to proclaim her doctrines. Sophia obliterates Fat by denying his existence, thus accomplishing a liberation of Phil that no analyst can achieve. When Sophia dies, however, Fat returns and begins a worldwide search for the Savior. Phil contents himself with watching television for juxtapositions that he is sure are subliminal messages from VALIS, Sophia's father, who he sometimes calls Zebra or God.

Dr. Leon Stone

One of the most important people in Horselover Fat's life, Stone is the psychiatrist in charge of the North Ward at the Orange County Mental Hospital (OCMH) while Fat is under evaluation following a suicide attempt. Stone believes that the act represents a breakthrough reaching out toward reality. He offers Fat homeopathic Bach remedies to remove his major problems: helplessness, fear, and an inability to act. Fat sees Stone as being crazy in a good way and appreciates being talked to as a human being. Stone lends him a copy of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching to work on anger issues.

Stone discusses with Fat parallels between the ideas that Fat records in his journal (called the Exegesis). They discuss the Yang/Yin equality and parallels in Parmenides' two forms. A graduate of Oxford University, Stone is eager to discuss Edward Hussey's research into presocratic philosophers and in Fat's theory that the Empire has not ended. Knowing that Stone could get him remanded for another 90 days of observation, Fat risks bringing up his most fantastic thesis, which deals with the Nag Hammadi Gnostic library discovered in 1945. They discuss the secrecy theme in the Gospels, interspecies symbiosis, Japanese cosmogonical myths, and the irrationality of the universe. Stone ratifies Fat's idea that time ceases in Roman times and picks up again in 1974 and proclaims him the authority on Nag Hammadi. This restores Fat's self-confidence, but his next therapist destroys it again.

Sophia Lampton

A precocious two-year old, Sophia claims to be the promised Messiah, an all-knowing, protecting, fully human who is an incarnation of VALIS, her Father. VALIS has saved people many times under many names before conceiving Sophia in actress Linda Lampton. Linda's husband, Eric ("Mother Goose") Lampton, is not involved. They raise Sophia on a vineyard in Modesto, CA, surrounded by animals and constantly monitored. VALIS himself protects Sophia.

Sophia summons Horselover Fat, Philip K. Dick, Kevin, and David from Southern California to commission them to preach her message. Together they form the Rhipidon Society. She brags of having given them their motto, "Fish Cannot Carry Guns." She appears to them as Holy Wisdom rather than a slaying/healing deity. When questioned about her nature, she like Yahweh replies "I am that which I am" or simply remains



silent. Sophia refuses to be interrogated about Eric and Linda, whom she declares ill but harmless, and claims able to override them. Sophia claims that judgment is near, man is holy and is the only true and living god; she is not a god, but the human child of Wisdom Himself. She warns them to have nothing more to do with the Lamptons, and speaks silently into Phil's head to help them slip away. Phil is amazed at the things coming out of his mouth.

Sophia at the start denies the existence of Fat, proclaiming him a projection of Phil's mind. This frees Phil in ways that no analyst has been able. Shortly after the reduced Rhipidon Society returns home to Santa Ana, Linda phones to announce that Brent Mini, their composer friend, has accidentally killed Sophia by using a laser to extract maximum data from her. Fat returns as a separate entity and resumes his quest for the Fifth Savior, which had seemed to be resolved in the person of Sophia.

Eric (Mother Goose) and Linda Lampton

Eric is a British rock star, screenwriter, and actor, who usually goes by his stage name, "Mother Goose." He and his actress wife, Linda star in a low-budget science fiction movie, Valis, that captures the essence of what Horselover Fat has experienced since March of 1974. Needing to understand the complex film, Author Philip K. Dick on behalf of Fat and two friends, Kevin and David, contacts Eric through their agents, ostensibly about a film project. Eric responds with the first half of a two-word cypher, which Phil completes. Eric then phones, questions Phil about drug use and criminal record, and invites the foursome to fly as soon as possible to Sonoma, CA, via Oakland. He wants them to see the uncut version of the movie and discuss various things.

Eric is slender, has long blond hair, and wears red bell bottoms and a t-shirt that reads SAVE THE WHALES. Linda is slender and dark-haired, and wears cut-offs, a checkered shirt, and a bandana. Both wear boots. People in Sonoma greet them. They call themselves "The Friends of God" (Gottsefreunde). Linda confesses that she and Eric are the ugly builders with claw-like hands who assist the builder-god Hephaistos. They are also the Kyklopes (Round-eyes) who kill Asklepios (although Eric objects that they have three eyes and have deliberately falsified the historical record). Originally they come to Earth from Albemuth. Like all creatures of Albemuth, Earth's atmosphere is toxic, so VALIS must bombard them constantly to override the poison. Otherwise, they become deranged.

Eric and Linda are raising Sophia, whom they proclaim to be the daughter of VALIS and Linda. In private, two-year-old Sophia warns that Eric and Linda are crazy and advises the visitors to leave and break contact. Eric and Linda try their best to keep them to form a commune. Shortly afterwards, Linda phones Phil to announce that Sophia has been accidentally killed. Somewhat later still, she announces that she is again pregnant with a daughter.



David

A friend of Horselover Fat's, David (surname never given) struggles with Fat's theories whenever they diverge from Roman Catholic orthodoxy. He has an underage girlfriend, Jan. After they see the science fiction film *Valis*, David is pleased that it depicts that whatever God does and believes is real. He and the skeptical Kevin are with Philip K. Dick and Fat, charter members of the Rhipidon Society. David objects to the first name suggested, Siddhartha Society, because it is non-Christian. When the foursome meets two-year-old Sophia Lampton, whom her parents proclaim to be the promised Savior, David is remarkably pliant, perhaps proving that Sophia is able to control minds. When Fat goes off on his quest, Kevin runs a successful tobacco shop

Debbie and Doug

The two named (out of three dozen) characters with whom Horselover Fat spends his time as an inmate in the Orange County Mental Hospital's North Ward, Debbie is a heavy-set Mexican women and an enthusiastic Jehovah's Witness. She is forbidden to see the one available Bible but sneaks looks. She preaches about the coming peaceful kingdom.

Doug becomes Fat's closest inmate friend. He is a young, large hebephrenic who sees demons and refuses to take his situation seriously. He cannot groom himself and orders swill for lunch.

Beth and Christopher Dick

Beth is Horselover Fat's wife and Christopher is their five-year-old son, whose life is threatened by an undiagnosed and potentially fatal inguinal hernia until God through a blinding flash of pink laser light discloses the defect to Fat in time for successful surgery. Christopher stops being a troublesome child. In 1976, Beth leaves Fat, taking beloved Christopher away, intending to return after Fat kills himself. This triggers Fat's second suicide attempt, which ought to have succeeded but miraculously does not. She never believes Fat's philosophy. She accosts him for being able to do nothing right. Beth is Fat's second wife (first unnamed) and both constantly demand support payments. When Fat for a period disappears, Philip K. Dick admits that Fat had only been a mental projection. He explicitly calls Christopher his son and takes over payments. He recalls in 1974 secretly administering to Christopher his own version of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and communion.

Robin Jamison

A noted English photographer who takes the still shots for the film *Valis*, Jamison earlier photographs Philip K. Dick to accompany an interview and gives him his card. Jamison



sets up a meeting for Phil and his companions with the film's principles: Eric ("Mother Goose") and Linda Lampton and Brent Mini.

Kevin

A friend of Horselover Fat's, Kevin (surname never given) is a thorough-going skeptic. He and his ideological opposite, the staunchly Roman Catholic David (also no surname given) are, with Philip K. David and Fat, charter members of the Rhipidon Society. Kevin obsesses about why God allows his pet cat to run under the wheels of a car. He sees this demonstrating that God is evil, dumb, and weak, and Kevin intends to demand an answer at the Last Judgment. Kevin's cynicism only intensifies Fat's madness. Kevin lives to defeat life. When mutual friend Sherri Solvig's cancer returns and Fat can find no answer for why God fails to respond, Kevin suggests that only the mysterious (and unexplained) Great Punta knows. Whenever Fat begins talking profoundly, Kevin says "Deedle-deedle queep" (pg. 133) to brush him off.

Kevin is the first of the friends to see the science fiction film, *Valis*, and urges Fat and Phil to join him for another viewing. Kevin has odd taste in music and film and this one combines both. Composer Brent Mini's music induces a deep theta state in Kevin, during which sees and participates in the human sacrifices that are part of his Celtic heritage. As they see in the film a depiction of U.S. Pres. Richard M. Nixon's downfall, Kevin studies the Bible's apocalyptic books and discovers a description of Nixon: harsh, grim, powerful, but then broken, not by human hands. Talking with Eric ("Mother Goose") and Linda Lampton, Kevin is so excited that he stammers, covering Meister Eckehart's differentiating between God and the Godhead and how the same trans-Christian mysticism is taught by Sankara in India. Kevin believes that Sophia Lampton is the Messiah until she tells him that his cat dies because it is stupid. When Fat goes off on his quest, Kevin finds a new girlfriend, Ginger, a tall blond, who likes to drive.

Gloria Knudson

A gentle, civilized friend of Horselover Fat's, Gloria asks him for Nembutal pills to add to the stock that she needs to kill herself. She has a habit of taking LSD and in the six months since they have seen one another, it is clear to Fat that she has lost her mind. Her mother commits her to Mount Zion Hospital in San Francisco, CA, after a suicide attempt, but Gloria is discharged, claiming that she is cured. Fat jumps to the conclusion that this is a call for help, invites Gloria to stay with him, and fails to provide the pills. He realizes that she is dead inside. She does not respond to his proposal that she temporarily move in with him, but after staying overnight, without the sexual entanglement that Fat wants, she vanishes. Soon afterwards she jumps to a messy death from the tenth floor of the Synanon Building in Oakland, CA. This marks the beginning of Fat's mental breakdown. Her cat's name is Chairman Mao. Gloria is buried in Modesto, CA. Her ex-husband, Bob Langley, and Fat, who had attended parties at their house in Berkeley, CA, follow up the funeral with a viewing of the movie *Patton*.



Bob Langley

Gloria Knudson's ex-husband, with whom Horselover Fat has socialized in Oakland, CA, Bob is a self-confessed schizoid who phones Fat with news of Gloria's suicide. At the graveside, Bob unemotionally places a rose on the coffin while Fat, overwhelmed by emotion, flees to his car. When Fat asks Gloria's mother for a photograph of Gloria, Bob becomes irrationally angry.

Maurice

Horselover Fat's last therapist, Maurice (no surname or professional title given) helps him cope with divorce from Beth. Maurice is a product of the 1960s, a member of SNCC and CORE and is a former Israeli commando. He is large, black-bearded, and punctuates his admonitions with declarations that "And I really mean it" (pg. 82). His plan is to bully Fat into enjoying life instead of saving people. He warns that because when Sherri Solving dies of cancer, Fat will also die, he should kill himself now, unless he has better plans, and offers to teach him easier ways to go. If he wants to help people, Maurice says, Fat should give money to professional care-givers rather than trying, amateurishly, to help himself. Maurice considers cancer a deliberate failure of the immune system and declares that Sherri is a rip-off artist, tapping Fat and the SSI (Medicare) program. When Fat reveals his views on religion, Maurice is shocked and demands that he read Genesis and prioritize its themes. As a Jew, Maurice cannot understand how religion and ethics can be separated. His emotional assault on Fat destroys the self-image that Dr. Stone had built up.

Brent Mini

An electronic music composer, Mini specializes in Synchronicity Music, which is reminiscent of the songs of the humpback whale. An MIT graduate, Mini is English. He has visited the USSR to see long-range microwave transfer experiments. He has published three LP albums and writes the score for the film Valis. In 1977 he lives with the film's stars, Eric ("Mother Goose") and Linda Lampton. He has been over-radiated by VALIS (the Vast Active Living Intelligence System) and has just been diagnosed with terminal multiple myeloma, brought on by an overexposure to radiation as he pushes to learn as much as possible from VALIS. Mini accidentally kills Sophia Lampton, the two-year-old daughter of his hosts, who is believed to be the promised Savior and dies shortly thereafter.

Fr. Larry Minter

Sherri Solvig's pastor, whom she calls familiarly by his nickname without title, Larry is married, a father of three and grandfather of one. Sherri lusts for him, having once gotten to french-kiss him while he carries her during a seizure. Larry is also her employer at his unnamed church, but does nothing to help her weed out the creeps and



addicts who try to exploit the church's underfunded social programs. This only increases her native bitterness. Horselover Fat, who truly loves Sherri, concludes that religion is just a sideline at Larry's church. When Sherri loses her remission from cancer, Larry seems unconcerned.

James Pike

A historical figure, Pike is Horselover Fat's cursory friend and hero. Pike enjoys a controversial career as an Episcopalian bishop, writer, television broadcaster, espousing what most Americans then consider radical social and theological views before, in 1969, he and his new wife disappear in the Israeli desert. Only she survives. Fat and Sherri Solvig, who likes to tease him about Pike's fatal incident, laugh at the idea that Pike might have refrained from drinking radiator water to save his life for fear that it contains antifreeze - in the middle of the Dead Sea Desert. Fat believes that the Sibyl of Cumae, the first-century protector of the Roman Republic, foresees Pike's death along with the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King, Jr. All are said to be defenders of the liberties of the Republic and religious leaders.

Sherri Solvig

A friend of Horselover Fat's, Sherri is dying (and ultimately dies) of lymphatic cancer. Before she goes into remission, Sherri suffers terribly from chemotherapy, becoming nearly blind and deaf, and experiencing constant seizures. Still, she believes that God is healing her. Sherri intends to enter a religious order when she is cured and is in everything a fervid Christian except in showing any practical Christian charity. She hates everyone whom she encounters, except Larry, her married priest, for whom she lusts. They kiss once and she longs for a chance to sleep with him. Larry does little to resolve her problems at work with fellow employees and the indigent whom they ostensibly serve. Sherri hates her wealthy sister Mae, who cares for her before her first hospitalization, and her best friend Eleanor, who becomes a nun in Las Vegas. Sherri is jealous of both.

When Sherri goes into remission, Fat convinces her to abandon the filthy little hovel that is just like she like her space and move in with him to a roomy apartment. She cooks but refuses to shop, clean, or contribute her SSI (Medicare) earnings when he runs short of money. When he criticizes her for having boyfriends, Sherri indignantly moves out. Her remission fails and, unexpectedly when she dies, Fat reacts mildly.

Stephanie

An 18-year-old drug dealer living and working in Horselover Fat's neighborhood in Santa Ana, CA, Stephanie is a major factor in preventing Fat's death as he mourns the suicide of his friend, Gloria Knudson. Stephanie lives for hashish, which she consumes and peddles, along with marijuana and sometimes cocaine. She refuses to sell hallucinogenics like LSD (acid). Fat worries that Stephanie will be arrested at any time.

She brings Fat to God by giving him a ceramic pot that she has made in high school. Fat believes that God slumbers inside it. He calls it Oh Ho because it seems Asian.



Objects/Places

Albemuth

The center of a communication system linking all star systems in the universe, Albemuth monitors the work of three-eyed builders of civilization on Earth, including the Lamptons and Mini. These creatures, who eventually lose their distinctive claws and third eye along with their self-identity, cannot long survive in Earth's toxic atmosphere without constant bombardment by VALIS, who alone gives rational thought. Until told this, Horselover Fat supposes that the beam of pink light that fills him with information comes from the star Sirius in the Canis Major constellation.

Black Iron Prison

A metaphysical institution that has since Roman times held everyone who has lived inside without their being aware that they are prisoners, the Black Iron Prison is described in Horselover Fat's writings entitled *Tractates: Cryptica Scriptura*. Earlier, he dreams about finding the Black Iron Prison in a cheap science fiction novel. He sees Rome in 70 C.E. superimposed on California in 1970 C.E. It also continues into the distant future. The Black Iron Prison is doomed to destruction at the hands of Christians from the Apostolic Age. The *Tractates* frequently claim that the Empire, symbolized by the Black Iron Prison, never ended.

Exegesis

A journal in fact kept by science fiction writer Philip K. Dick but ascribed in this novel to his alter ego, Horselover Fat, *The Exegesis* explores his religious and visionary experiences. It begins in early 1974, after Phil has impacted wisdom teeth removed and sees a fish medallion hanging from a woman's neck. He is sure that this cryptic symbol of ancient Christianity is a call to remember who he truly is. He loses forgetfulness through anamnesis. He sees the ancient Roman Empire as an enduring black prison, which Jesus' followers destroy outside of time. Phil/Fat describe hallucinations caused by a beam of pink light.

Phil/Fat spends late-night sessions, producing thousands of pages filled with materials drawn from and alluding to ancient Greek philosophers (Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle), Valentinian Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, apocalyptic Jewish and Christian writings, Buddhism, Taoism, the Rose Cross Brotherhood (Rosicrucians), Jakob Böhme, Paracelsus, Blaise Pascal, Arthur Schopenhauer, Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Robert Anton Wilson.

When the *Exegesis* reaches some 300,000 words, Fat extracts materials for a work that he pretentiously entitles his *Tractates: Cryptica Scriptura*. It deals with how the cosmos comes into existence. The full text of the *Tractates* is given in an Appendix to the novel.



Marin County, CA

Horselover Fat's Northern California home in 1971, when Gloria Knudson, whom he has not seen in half a year, phones, asking for sleeping pills with which to kill herself. When she jumps to her death instead, Fat is overcome with grief and goes to Vancouver, BC, in 1972 to kill himself. He fails and moves to Santa Ana in Orange County, Southern California.

Nag Hammadi, Egypt

Nag Hammadi (also referred to by its earlier Greek name, Chenoboskion) is the town in Upper Egypt where in 1945 a major cache of Gnostic documents is found. The discovery provides the scholarly world a major source for studying the philosophy/religion that is central to Horselover Fat's world view. Fat's psychiatrist, Dr. Leon Stone, declares that is the authority on Nag Hammadi on the basis of writings in his journal, the Exegesis. When he discharges Fat from the hospital, Stone gives him a draft translation of a major Gnostic creation text, On the Origin of the World. Fat believes that the Logos goes dormant for nearly 2,000 years at Nag Hammadi but is now released to carry out its mission of saving the world.

Orange County Mental Hospital (OCMH)

OCMH is the mental health institution to which Horselover Fat is consigned after miraculously surviving a massive overdose of drugs, wrist-slashing, and sitting in a car running in a closed garage. He claims to have learned his lesson during a first interview, but is remanded for 14 days' observation because he is deemed a danger to himself. He could face an additional 90 days, if the courts so order. He is housed in the North Ward, along with Debbie, an enthusiastic Jehovah's Witness; Doug, a young hebephrenic, who becomes Fat's best friend; an unnamed woman who has the only Bible inside, which she shares with the other patients; and about thirty other inmates. All are encouraged to play cards under constant observation. All patients are routinely dosed with Thorazine, sometimes too often, but intentional overdosing is denied. OCMH tries hard not to accept violent PCP (Angel Dust) addicts, but the Police Department badly wants them out of its jurisdiction. None show up during Fat's time. In the end, Fat is depressed by being presented a huge itemized bill and threatened with jail on contempt of court if he fails to pay.

Rhipidon Society

A brotherhood, formed for the sake of being able to identify themselves as an entity when meeting Eric and Linda Lampton, the Rhipidon Society consists of Philip K. David, Horselover Fat, the highly-skeptical Kevin, and the devoutly Roman Catholic David. Rhipidon is Greek for fan. Fat dreams about a large fish with fins in this shape, which make it impossible for it to hold an M-16 rifle. The group adopts "Fish Cannot Carry



Guns" as its motto. They earlier had wanted to call themselves the Siddhartha Society, but David had objected to anything non-Christian. The fish is a Christian symbol, but not exclusively, so all are happy. The Society largely disintegrates when Sophia Lampton, whom they believe to be the Savior, dies, although Phil and Fat remain true to their commission.

Santa Ana, CA

Horselover Fat's home after his release from the Orange County Mental Hospital and his divorce from Beth, Santa Ana is depicted as a dangerous place, particularly in the downtown Mexican barrio. Fat's building has a state-of-the-art security system, which makes it seem both fortress-like and jail-like. He convinces Sherri Solvig for a while to give up her wretched little apartment, also located somewhere in Santa Ana, and move in with him. Sherri's church is located nearby. She works there administering social programs that junkies try to exploit. It adds to her cynicism. The Santa Ana airport is shown in passing, as characters fly in and out. When Fat is planning his quest for the returning Messiah, he begins at the Santa Ana branch of the World-Wide Travel Bureau, where an agent informs him about the tax benefits of seeking medical attention in China. The friends see the film *Valis* at an unnamed walk-in theater on Tustin Ave. At several critical points in the story enjoy drinks at a Sombrero Avenue bar.

Sonoma, CA

The town in the heart of Northern California wine country, Sonoma where Eric ("Mother Goose") Lampton, rock star, screenwriter, and star of the movie, *Valis*, and his actress wife Linda live, Sonoma is visited by Philip K. Dick, Horselover Fat, Kevin, and David as they respond to a cypher message. The town retains its old Mexican flavor. Little is seen of Sonoma except an unnamed Mexican restaurant and the Lamptons' comfortable stone home, located several miles in the country.

Synanon Building

The site of Gloria Knudson's suicide in 1971, Synanon Building in Oakland, CA, is a residential house for drug abusers. Gloria is shown being exposed to standard tough love in the reception area before climbing to the tenth floor and plunging to a messy death on MacArthur Blvd.

VALIS

Valis refers to two entities in the novel. In capital letters, as VALIS, it is an acronym for Vast Active Living Intelligence System. The Great Soviet Dictionary (6th ed., 1992), quoted as a prefix to the novel, claims that this derives from the American low-budget science fiction motion picture of the same name. In the movie, *Valis*, VALIS is shown as a satellite too old to have been launched from Earth. It is able to control reality. The film,



made in 1976, depicts many of the mysterious events that befall Horselover Fat in 1974. Written by and starring rock star Eric ("Mother Goose") Lampton and his wife Linda as themselves, it suggests that an extraterrestrial force replaces the President of the United States, who is based on Richard M. Nixon, by an electronics wizard, Nicholas Brady. VALIS is synonymous with Zebra and, in some contexts, with God/gods.

Vancouver, BC

Vancouver is mentioned briefly as the place where Horselover Fat goes in 1972 to kill himself after the suicide of Gloria Knudson a year before. Before the attempt he calls the British Columbia Crisis Center and realizes that the advice that he had given Gloria years before had been amateurish, if not nit-witted.

Zebra

The name that Horselover Fat gives to the burst of pure energy that he experiences in March of 1974. At various times he refers to it as living information, the plasmate, the Logos, and as God, as it continues communicating with him. Fat calls it Zebra because it successfully because it blends well to avoid detection until it chooses to disclose itself. He muses that it could be an extraterrestrial being gone dormant for 2,000 years. Later in the novel, the name Zebra gives way to VALIS.



Themes

Theodicy

Theodicy deals with the eternal question of why bad things happen to good people and, more specifically, why a good, just, all-knowing, and all-powerful God could allow evil to exist. Philip K. Dick's novel *Valis* debates the question from many angles, because the narrator and/or his alter ego, Horselover Fat, is obsessed with and knowledgeable about world religions and philosophies.

The question focuses on why God allows Kevin's cat to dart into traffic and be run over. Kevin, skeptical as to whether there is a God, after using accepted technical language reverts to everyday speech: God is evil, dumb, and weak. Kevin keeps the flattened, stiffened pet and intends to wave it at God at the Last Judgment and demand an answer as to why God lets it happen. When friends suggest that Kevin might have kept the cat on a leash, Kevin demands that they must deal with the free will aspect. Some suggest that God will have no answer to the mystery. It simply happens.

Late in the novel, the friends meet a two-year-old girl, Sophia Lampton, who possesses the Wisdom that they have come to expect the Fifth Savior to possess. She claims to be the daughter of VALIS, a non-divine construct who is working to free the universe from slavery to evil. All of the friends, including the staunchly Roman Catholic David, believe in her. When Kevin asks his question, Sophia declares that his cat had been dumb and by the law of the inexorable universe, dumb cats perish. This destroys Kevin's faith in her and all of the friends are shocked when Sophia is accidentally killed. How could Wisdom incarnate not have foreseen and avoided this fate?

Phil, Kevin, and David enjoy angering Fat by posing theological questions. They discuss Sherri Solvig, who is in remission from cancer. Fat claims that God harms no one but denies that there is an opposing force, as powerful but destructive. Given Fat's Gnostic bent, this is odd. Polytheism, which is much discussed, conveniently posits good and evil gods doing battle. Often they team up and creatures inevitably suffer. A classic case cited is Job, caught between Yahweh and Satan. Sherri Solvig, a cancer patient, and David, both religious, argue that Sherri's remission demonstrates God's love, while Kevin says that it is a matter of science and luck — and secretly hopes that Sherri will die to prove his thesis. He sees misery and hostility as always winning out in the universe. David maddeningly attributes all evil (even cancer) to free will and dodges questions by quoting proof texts. Theodicy is well illustrated but hardly resolved in the novel.

Multiple Personality

In *Valis*, Philip K. Dick portrays himself as a successful science fiction writer who is dealing with a severe mental breakdown. His narration shifts between the first person



and the third, as he sometimes speaks as and about himself as Phil, a cool, pragmatic character, and sometimes as and about Horselover Fat, a character disintegrating into insanity. Early on, he fumbles back and forth between perspectives, sometimes juxtaposing them and explaining anew the confusion to his rightly perplexed readers. Eventually the narration gets sorted out: Phil talks about Fat. Phil is an active critic of Fat's theories about the universe and is sincerely concerned about Fat's declining mental state and welfare. Fat has twice attempted suicide and cannot help attaching himself to needy people. When they let him down, Fat cannot cope.

Phil admits that Horselover Fat's name derives from his own: with Philip (Philippos) being Greek for "Horselover" and Dick being German for "Fat." Other characters also point this out to him. Early on, Phil claims that this alter ego affords "much needed objectivity" (pg. 11) in his writing, but later in the novel, he accepts that Fat is a psychological projection and accepts responsibility for aspects of his life that he has attributed to Fat. Analysts never achieve this breakthrough, which brings Phil true peace, but a precocious three-year-old girl, Sophia Lampton, who claims to be Holy Wisdom incarnate, exiles the Fat persona, declaring that it has never existed. Phil is relieved but misses Fat's good company. When Sophia dies, Fat reappears as a more independent character than ever. Phil's narration implies that Kevin and David go along with whatever reality he is portraying.

Suicide

From the opening paragraph, Suicide looms large in Philip K. Dick's novel, *Valis*. Phil's alter ego, Horselover Fat receives a phone call from Gloria Knudson, requesting help killing herself. She has just been released from the hospital after an attempt and is collecting sleeping pills from all of her friends to have enough to do the job. She already has far more than is needed. Fat wrongly assumes that Gloria's phone call is a cry for help and tries to improve her life to the point that she will give up her quest to die. He believes that he has succeeded when he learns that she drives to Oakland, CA, and throws herself out a tenth-story window. The gory mess on the street is variously described several times throughout the novel.

Gloria's suicide leads to a little-detailed attempt in Vancouver, BC, by Fat. He notes that he calls a suicide prevention number and the professional gives him far better advice than he had given Gloria. Years later, the failure of his marriage convinces Fat to try again. This time he takes massive amounts of Digitalis and other drugs, slashes his left wrist, and sits in a running car, and still fails to die. His soon-to-be ex-wife, who had counted on him succeeding, is disgusted. Medical workers gather entranced to watch the effects of such massive amounts of digitalis, a drug that at proper levels corrects arrhythmias. Fat, who claims to have learned his lesson, is consigned to the Orange County Mental Hospital (OCMH) for 48 hours observation. One of his analysts, Maurice, predicts that if Fat's cancer-riddled friend Sherri Solvig dies, he will kill himself, and tries to shock him into not getting involved with her by offering to tell him how best to commit suicide. Fat's friends also worry that he will try.



Only one character considers suicide as an absolute moral wrong. Precocious two-year-old Sophia Lampton, who claims to be Holy Wisdom incarnate, shocks Phil by declaring with dark eyes blazing in indignation that suicide is an act of violent cruelty against oneself. She dismisses the idea that it is Fat who acts and her denial of Fat's existence makes him disappear. Sophia claims that she does this to make Phil whole, something at which analysts have failed. Sophia calms as Phil realizes that Fat had always been a persona within himself. Neither Sherri's nor Sophia's deaths make Phil suicidal, but Sophia's allows Fat to re-emerge.



Style

Point of View

In *Valis*, Philip K. Dick portrays himself as a successful science fiction writer who deals with a severe mental breakdown. The narration shifts between the first person and the third, as Dick speaks sometimes as and about himself as Phil, a cool, pragmatic character, and sometimes as and about Horselover Fat, a character disintegrating into insanity. Early on, he fumbles back and forth between perspectives, sometimes juxtaposing them and explaining anew the confusion to his rightly perplexed readers. Eventually the narration gets sorted out: Phil talks about Fat.

Early on, Phil explains that the odd name Horselover Fat reflects Phil's own, with Philip (Philippos) being Greek for "Horselover" and Dick being German for "Fat." Phil claims to have created this character to afford himself some "much needed objectivity" (pg. 11). Later in the novel, a two-year-old Messiah frees Phil of Fat, but Phil longs for Fat's good company. He accepts that Fat is a psychological projection and accepts responsibility for aspects of his life that he has attributed to Fat. When Sophia dies, however, Fat reappears as a more independent character than ever. He travels the world, sending Phil only the occasional post card and dropping in once.

In Chapter 7, Phil deftly explains Fat's experiences by describing how he incorporates these in a 1977 novel, *A Scanner Darkly*. The protagonist injects himself with a mild euphoric and for six hours sees abstract paintings flash by. GABA fluid blocks neural circuits until a proper disinhibiting stimulus fires. For Fat - and for Philip K. Dick in real life - this is sodium pentathol during a dental procedure. Afterwards, a beautiful delivery woman brings pain medication and, seeing her ichthys necklace, Fat flashes back to the first century C.E. It is at this point, in March 1974, that Fat first confides to Phil vivid dreams about three-eyed people and begins putting into writing his philosophy of the universe.

Setting

Philip K. Dick's novel, *Valis*, is set for the most part in California. Phil and his alter ego Horselover Fat live in Santa Ana in Orange County, in the south, and present time appears to be 1978. Most of the action records events in 1971, 1972, 1974, and 1977. The novel opens with Phil/Fat living in Northern California, responding to a request from an old friend for sleeping pills to help her kill herself. His mental breakdown begins with that phone call. The woman, Gloria, subsequently jumps to a messy death in Oakland, CA. This image returns to Phil/Fat frequently through the novel. He alludes to going in 1972 to Vancouver, BC, to kill himself, but fails in the attempt. He then moves to Santa Ana, marries, has a child, Christopher, and grows so depressed that he tries again to kill himself.



Santa Ana is lightly depicted. The greatest detail is given to the Orange County Mental Hospital (OCMH), where Phil/Fat is locked up for observation after the suicide attempt. Santa Ana is depicted as a dangerous place, particularly in the downtown Mexican barrio where Fat's apartment is located. Friend and short-term roommate Sherri Solvig worships and works in an unnamed church nearby. She administers social programs that junkies try to exploit. Phil/Fat and friends several times see the film *Valis* at an unnamed walk-in theater on Tustin Ave. and drink at a Sombrero Avenue bar.

The friends fly north to Sonoma, CA, in the heart of wine country, to meet the stars of *Valis*. Little is seen of Sonoma except an unnamed Mexican restaurant and the Lamptons' comfortable stone home, located several miles in the country.

When Fat at the end of the novel (independent of Phil) sets out on his quest for the Fifth Savior, he communicates from Metz, France, on the border of Luxembourg; from somewhere in West Germany; from New York, Portland, Athens, Greece, Istanbul, Turkey, the Greek islands (particularly Crete), and Micronesia. All provide fleeting visions of what he is doing. Nag Hammadi, Egypt, never physically seen, is a primary focus of the novel because of the Gnostic library unearthed there in 1945. First-century Jerusalem is several times seen juxtaposed with 20th-century California in dream sequences.

Language and Meaning

In *Valis*, Philip K. Dick portrays himself as a successful science fiction writer, former drug abuser, and sufferer of a severe mental breakdown that causes him to project an alter ego whom he calls Horselover Fat. He claims that talking in the third person about Fat provides needed objectivity. Dick writes comfortably in the idiom of the 1970s, dealing with the exploding drug culture and political unrest of the era of Vietnam and Richard M. Nixon. He several times mentions singer Linda Ronstadt, who is then at the peak of her career.

Fat keeps a journal, which he calls the Exegesis, that he fills with generally unexplained technical psychological jargon and somewhat better-explained theological and philosophical concepts. He often focuses on Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher who claims that nothing is permanent. Several times he explores the myth of the labyrinth of Crete. He analyzes composer Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, and discusses the 20th-century religious historian Mircea Eliade's views on ritual and sacrament overcoming time. He alludes to ancient Greek philosophers (Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle), Valentinian Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, apocalyptic Jewish and Christian writings, Buddhism, Taoism, the Rose Cross Brotherhood (Rosicrucians), Jakob Böhme, Paracelsus, Blaise Pascal, Arthur Schopenhauer, Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Robert Anton Wilson. Most readers will have to gloss over unfamiliar material or spend time looking up references. Fat's preference in a pre-Internet age is the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.



Structure

Philip K. Dick's novel, *Valis*, consists of fourteen numbered but untitled chapters and an appendix offering the full fifty-two observations recorded in Horselover Fat's Tractates: *Cryptica Scriptura*. Many of these entries are quoted in the body of the novel, often with helpful commentary. The chapters vary in length, tending to be shorter towards the end. Scene shifts within chapters are indicated by additional spacing or typographical devices.

The novel opens with science fiction author Philip K. Dick talking about a friend, Horselover Fat, who begins to suffer a mental breakdown when a friend asks for help committing suicide. Phil explains that he is writing about himself but feels more comfortable projecting his experiences onto Fat. The friend, Gloria, kills herself dramatically, which leads Fat to try to do away with himself. He combines methods in what should have been fool-proof but survives. He is hospitalized for observation and then loses his wife, son, and everything he owns. Compulsively needing to help others, Fat latches onto Sherri, an acerbic cancer patient, who also eventually dies. The first part of the novel is generally downbeat, relieved by occasional comic touches. Phil worries constantly about the condition of Fat's mind.

Sherri's death brings Fat down less than Phil expects, for Fat has had his mind barraged by pink laser light, which saves his son's life by imparting information about an overlooked medical problem and puts him in touch with the ancient Roman Empire, as time and space shift. Fat begins keeping a journal, which he calls *The Exegesis*, in which he explores his religious and visionary experiences. This extended portion of the novel is dense with philosophy, mythology, theology (particularly cosmology and theodicy), art, history, and music. Phil continues interpreting Fat's experiences, but is less intrusive and judgmental.

It comes as a surprise when Fat's experiences are incorporated into a science fiction film entitled *Valis*. Friend Kevin discovers it and drags Fat and Phil (clearly independent personae at this point) to view and discuss it in intricate detail. The film depicts an extraterrestrial power, VALIS, changing human history by removing Richard M. Nixon from office, Nixon's imperial presidency standing in for the Roman Empire, which beyond time has refused to loosen its grip on humanity. While leaving much still to be detected, the film helps explain many of the confusing details that have been laid down before. The friends next contact the people responsible for the film and visit them to learn more.

Eric and Linda Lampton are clearly insane but their precocious two-year-old daughter, Sophia, claims to be the daughter of VALIS and an incarnation of Wisdom. She explains everything that has happened to Phil/Fat, and fits the friends' criteria for the anticipated Savior. Sophia also consigns the Fat persona to oblivion, liberating Phil and bringing him peace. She promises always to be with them as she sends them home to await their assigned mission. This section clearly draws on the Christian Gospels, depicting Sophia as a Jesus-like chosen one and preacher. The foursome grows upbeat in her

presence, anticipating being part of a restoration of the universe. When Sophia dies, however, Fat returns as a decidedly independent entity and begins traveling around the world, seeking the Savior whom they had believed Sophia to be. At home, Phil sees on television juxtaposed words and images that he believes emanate from VALIS and waits for instructions.



Quotes

"Horselover Fat's nervous breakdown began the day he got the phone call from Gloria asking if he had any Nembutals. He asked her why she wanted them and she said that she intended to kill herself. She was calling everyone she knew. By now she had fifty of them, but she needed thirty or forty more to be on the safe side." Chapter 1, pg. 9.

"Encountering God was not a remission. But probably it wasn't a worsening, despite Kevin's cynical views. You cannot say that an encounter with God is to mental illness what death is to cancer: the logical outcome of a deteriorating illness process. The technical term - theological technical term, not psychiatric - is theophany." Chapter 3, pg. 37.

"That made the early, secret Christians supra- or trans-temporal, too, which is to say present at all times, a situation which Fat could not fathom. How could they be early but in the present and the future? And if they existed in the present, why couldn't anyone see them? On the other hand, why couldn't anyone see the walls of the Black Iron Prison which enclosed everyone, including himself, on all sides? Why did these antithetical forces emerge into palpability only when the past, present and future somehow - for whatever reason - got superimposed?" Chapter 4, pg. 49.

"Dr. Stone wasn't insane; Stone was a healer. He held down the right job. Probably he healed many people and in many ways. He adapted his therapy to the individual, not the individual to the therapy.

"I'll be goddamned, Fat thought.

"In that simple sentence, 'You're the authority,' Stone had given Fat back his soul.

"The soul which Gloria, with her hideous malignant psychological death-game, had taken away." Chapter 5, pgs. 65-66.

" 'There's someone else living in me and he's not in this century.' That was Thomas thinking that not Fat. But it applied to Fat equally." Chapter 7 pg. 110.

"It strikes me as an interesting paradox that a Buddha - an enlightened one - would be unable to figure out, even after four-and-a-half years, that he had become enlightened. Fat had become totally bogged down in his enormous exegesis, trying futilely to determine what had happened to him. He resembled more a hit-and-run accident victim than a Buddha." Chapter 8, pg. 122.

"I said, 'Are we to assume that the film Valis is telling us that Zebra or God or VALIS or three-eyed people from Sirius removed Nixon from office?'

" 'Yep,' Kevin said.

"To Fat, I said, 'Didn't the three-eyed Sibyl you dreamed about talk about 'conspirators who had been seen and would be taken care of?'

" 'In August 1974,' Fat said.

"Kevin, harshly, said, 'That's the month and year Nixon resigned.'" Chapter 9, pgs. 152-153.



"18. Real time ceased in 70 C.E. with the fall of the temple at Jerusalem. The intervening period was a perfect spurious interpolation aping the creation of the Mind. 'The Empire never ended,' but in 1974 a cypher was sent out as a signal that the Age of Iron was over; the cypher consisted of two words: KING FELIX, which refers to the Happy (or Rightful) King.

"19. The two-word cypher signal KING FELIX was not intended for human beings but for the descendents [sic.] of Ikhnaton, the three-eyed race which, in secret, exists with us." Chapter 10, pg. 162.

"As we ate dinner that night - at a Mexican restaurant just off the park in the center of Sonoma - I realized that I would never see my friend Horselover Fat again, and I felt grief inside me, the grief of loss. Intellectually, I knew that I had re-incorporated him, reversing the original process of projection. But still it made me sad. I had enjoyed his company, his endless tale-spinning, his account of his intellectual and spiritual and emotional quest. A quest - not for the Grail - but to be healed of his wound, the deep injury which Gloria had done to him by means of her death game." Chapter 12, pg. 194.

"Sophia said, 'I tell you in truth, none of you will forget me. And I tell you that all of you will see me again. You did not choose me; I chose you. I called you here. I sent for you four years ago.'

" 'Okay,' I said. That placed her call in 1974." Chapter 12, pg. 200

" 'The little girl is dead,' Linda Lampton said. 'Sophia.'

" 'How?' I said.

" 'Mini killed her. By accident. The police are here. With a laser. He was trying to - '

"I hung up.

"The phone rang again almost at once. I picked it up and said hello.

"Linda Lampton said, 'Mini wanted to try to get as much information - '

" 'Thanks for telling me,' I said. Crazy, I felt bitter anger, not sorrow." Chapter 13, pg. 215.

"But I had seen it and I knew who it referred to. It must be only synchronicity, as Jung calls it, I thought. Coincidence, without intent.

"Or had the signal gone out? Out over the airwaves by one of the largest TV stations in the world, NBC's Los Angeles outlet, reaching many thousands of children with this split-second information which would be processed by the right hemispheres of their brains: received and stored and perhaps decoded, below the threshold of consciousness where many things lay slumbering and stored." Chapter 14, pg. 225.



Topics for Discussion

What answers does Kevin receive to his question of why his cat dies? How do they define the answers? Is any answer satisfactory?

What role do atrocities in the name of religion play in the novel? Pick at least two and discuss their impact.

How are Kevin and David, ideological opposites, played off against one another? Is one more convincingly portrayed than the other or are they both stereotypical?

Compare the clinical styles of analysts Leon Stone and Maurice in treating Horselover Fat. What are the effects on the patient?

What does Fr. Larry Minter contribute to the novel? What do he and parishioner/employee Sherri Solvig say about Christian piety?

Select a reference from Horselover Fat's Exegesis to some figure or event in history and comment on how it contributes to his world view. Indicate your degree of familiarity with that figure or event before reading the novel and how that colors your appreciation of how Philip K. Dick uses it.

Who is the mysterious Thomas figure and what is his fate once he separates from Horselover Fat's mind?