

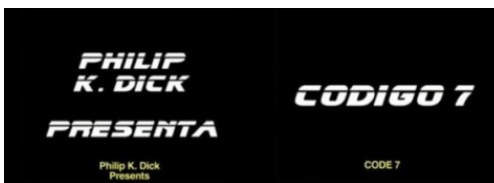
DO ADAPTATIONS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SCRIPTS

Timecrimes Director Brings You Cinema's Finest Take On Philip K. Dick

We've all seen our share of movies adapting Philip K. Dick stories, but how many of them claim to be presented by Dick himself? And how many are set in Madrid (presenting itself as Uranus, in turn presenting itself as Madrid) - with Palmer Eldrich as the hero? From the opening title sequence of *Codigo 7*, a trilogy of movies "presented" by Dick and directed by *Timecrimes'* Nacho Vigalondo, you know you're in for something special.

What is real? What is human? And what does it take to make a good adaptation of a Philip K. Dick story, anyway?

Episode One: "Palmer Eldrich is the bravest, most powerful adventurer in the Galaxy."



BY JEFF LESTER SEP 28, 2008 2:00 PM
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As long as you disregard the issue of budget, Episode 1 is, *A Scanner Darkly* excepted, just about everything we've come to expect from a Hollywood adaptation of PKD: not only does Episode 1 take the villain from one Dick book and make him best friends with the hero from another, both of their names are spelled wrong in the subtitles (Let's pretend that it's a very nice little tweak on the misspelling of Phil Dick's name in the *Blade Runner* credits, instead of a mistake). Computer viruses, commando squads, ventilation ducts, a MacGuffin that can magically set everything aright, a self-sacrificing hero made of pure ego fantasy... there may be **no motorbike chase in a steam tunnel**, but just about everything Hollywood else puts in a movie to make Dick's work palatable to a mass audience is right here. Only the idea of the planet Uranus being made into a replica of Madrid in 2002, and someone trapped there in a virtual reality of mundane boredom, suggests a familiarity with the work of Philip K. Dick.

Episode 2: "Drink me, and I'll possess your body."

By contrast, episode two features the high insanity overdrive of classic books like *Ubik*, *Valis*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* and *Divine Invasion*—occluded identities; the seemingly divine lurking within the seemingly mundane; plot reversals and reversals on the reversals that, while bordering on the absurd, are nevertheless delivered with such conviction they can't be entirely dismissed. Don't let the fact that this chapter features exactly the same footage fool as Episode One fool you: it's the real deal.

Episode Three: "I'm going to turn thirty, and my life is a disaster."

Philip K. Dick once wrote that the only two questions worth answering were 'What is real?' and 'What is human?' In Episode Three, Vigalondo appears to answer those questions with a pretension-deflating literalness: What's real is this film he's making with his friend Alejandro Tejeria, and what's human is Alejandro's mundane fate, his buried passion to change his life, and his ultimate resignation to his friend's narrative joke.

But while such cheekiness is also true to Dick's work—not just in the mordant mainstream novels (of which only *Confession of a Crap Artist* was published in his lifetime), but the absurd conversations and sad lives of the drug addicts in *A Scanner Darkly*—Vigalondo imbues the final episode with an PKD-ish ambiguousness. At the end, Tejeria thinks, "If only my life was science fiction and not this load of shit," even though, according to the narrative, he is nothing less than the dimension-drifting immortal spirit of Joe Chip come from the Pluto of the far future.

It's like something out of *The Man In The High Castle*, where neither the milieu of the novel, a

version of the United States where the Axis won World War II, nor the world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, the novel within the novel, wherein the Axis lost but not in the manner they did in our reality, are actually believed by some of the inhabitants to be real. Both realities may in fact be false. Or, despite being proven to be untrue, they both persist, anyway, contradicting each other and themselves.

Similarly, Nacho Vigalondo's *Codigo 7*, can be both brickbat and valentine, cinematic goof and serious treatise. Just because it's clearly the former doesn't mean you can rule out the latter..and there's every indication Vigalondo, the director of *Timecrimes*, wouldn't want you to.

Contact Jeff Lester:

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uglyMood

29 Sep 2008 10:28 AM

At one time I owned every book and short story PKD published, and I can't help thinking that somewhere right now Phil's laughing his ass off. All the film was missing was a reference to a telepathic slime mold from Ganymede living next door named Chief Running Clam. Great stuff. By the way, you should read the book "Confessions of a Crap Artist," and NOT watch the French badaptation "Barjo" that puked all over it twelve ways from Sunday. They truly didn't get Dick.



ElijahDProphet @uglyMood

@uglyMood: Barjo was far to, literal, I guess, in the adaptation of the material. It has been 10 years or more since I saw it, but that is what I remember feeling when I did.



uglyMood @ElijahDProphet

@ElijahDProphet: My problem with "Barjo" was that it wasn't literal enough. The novel perfectly captures a specific time and place: Marin County, California in the mid-1950s. The flying saucer craze, the sexual repression, all of it. It was also a deeply, deeply tragic novel, and quite groundbreaking in that Dick told the stories of the three main characters using different narrative points of view: first-person narrative for the main character, third-person limited for the brother-in-law, and third person omniscient for the sister. (It's been some years since I read the book, so I may have transposed the last two.)

None of the subtleties in the novel translate to the French version, and the entire thing is treated as a comic depiction of an eccentric character bumbling around in modern France. The film even goes so far as to have an annoying trio singing "Barjo! Barjo! Barjo!" on the soundtrack every time he does something "zany."

Since we're now enduring the appalling dystopian future that Dick described so well, this abominable piece of excrement was probably made specifically to convince future generations of readers that PKD novels are irredeemable garbage.

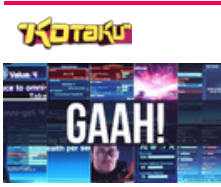
I have an open mind when it comes to adaptations, but when one rapes the source material this badly, there's something fishy going on. Hell, I even was able to deal with Ah-nold as the schlub hero of "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale." (It should have been somebody looking tired and defeated, like William H. Macy, Bruce Willis or Lance Henricksen.)



uglyMood @uglyMood

@uglyMood: Or maybe even Gary Sinise.





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