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Literate Discourse of Literary Works

Philip K Dick, A Critical Appreciation, Part Two

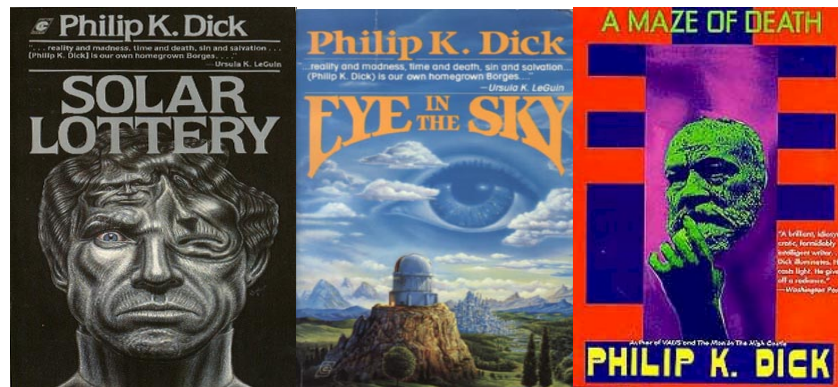
What Hath Man Wrought

Sci-fi conventions are merely tools Dick uses to externalise the trauma of his rancid thoughts to his readers; to allow them to pseudo-understand. Sci-fi merely lends the canvas to Dick's artistic spattering.

Mike Philbin

Mike Philbin, publisher of [Chimericanabooks](#), as well as writer and artist, continues his essay on the definitive author, [Philip K Dick](#). Not always comforting, not always easy to read, but provocative none-the-less, the books point us towards our own humanity in ways we may not always wish were the case.

In *A Critical Appreciation, Part Two* the motivations and man behind the books are further parsed.



[Solar Lottery](#), Philip K. Dick

The year is 2203 and the Earth is governed by a bizarre system of leadership whereby public officeholders and the targets of political assassinations alike are chosen by a random twitch of The Bottle. In this maniacal world, Ted Benteley becomes the saviour in a mad struggle for supremacy on the psychic plane.

Book Review by Mike Philbin

[Solar Lottery](#) was Philip K. Dick's first novel, published back in the mid-1950s before the psychedelic drugs he became addicted to plagued his work. He has used similar threads in several works, the dehumanisation of

contests and lotteries. Were it not for the futuristic setting, this could so easily have seen Dick writing riveting novels of social horrors - if only he hadn't sided with Donald A. Wollheim at Ace Books. [Philip K Dick](#) could have been one of the greats - a true mass-market writer of contemporary literature showing horrors that none of us thought possible. Unfortunately, this wonderfully gifted writer ended up in the sci-fi ghetto ready to be forgotten, were it not for Hollywood.

[Solar Lottery](#), [Philip K Dick](#), **The Open Critic Verdict**

I don't remember [Solar Lottery](#), being this action packed, this heart thumping alive or this trippy when I first read it nearly 10 years ago. I am lying here in my bed, my frantically scrolling eyes riveted to the mad rush of words - the script, the mood, the broken-linear-extrapolative future is so truly contemporary - how on earth could the average reader of 1950s' sci-fi have coped with this crazy dash through the lives and minds of those with such an overpowering political persuasion? It must have seemed like some berserker had taken a break from the battle to jot down a few hundred emotionally poisoned pages.

Definitely a five star book!

[A Maze of Death](#), [Philip K Dick](#)

Book Review by Mike Philbin

Yeah, I know it's an old book - from the 1970s in fact. I've had this book for 20 years (a Pan paperback, 60 pence when new, I bought it secondhand, or did I discover it in a newly rented apartment?) and never read it. The basic bog-standard science fiction story is this: Seth Morley and his wife arrive at the small scientific colony on Delmak-O. Supposedly an orbiting satellite station will beam down the mission objectives to the group when the 14th member of the colony arrives.

Suffice to say, when it comes time to broadcast the message, the satellite breaks and no message is delivered, stranding the colony in both space and function. Soon, people start to die, or are killed, in suspicious circumstances - what is this a barrel shot? Questions need answers and Morley is our man. But I lied, or rather the publisher lied... it's not science fiction, I don't care what any editor adds to this comment. Saying Philip K. Dick writes science fiction is like saying George W. Bush's primary goal is a below-par round of golf. No, wait a minute... I digress.

Philip K. Dick writes the fiction of insanity; the fiction of reality denial; the fiction of (takes deep breath) the topographical lies of the psyche drug abuse can sponsor. But you don't have that sorta category on the bookshelves, at least you didn't last time I looked.

Sci-fi conventions are merely tools Dick uses to externalise the trauma of his rancid thoughts to his readers; to allow them to pseudo-understand. Sci-fi merely lends the canvas to Dick's artistic spattering.

This is the creativity of a 'psyche', a mind in book form. A snapshot of Dick's hidden life, his meandering, disbelieving, questioning, self-interrogation. His "Why am I here?" His "Why are we here?" ... "What is [here](#)?" Dick isn't anally exploring the world of his dreams either, don't misinterpret what I'm saying; he is writing

imaginary alternate worlds, theoretical worlds formulised in over-active thyroid panic; he is writing the nightmare landscapes of philosophically hyper-stimulated thesis angst.

Is Dick the eternal college student forever searching for the truth of (his own) existence? Does Dick even believe he is alive, at the time of his writings?

Dick writes, and writes so eloquently, the fiction of the ‘what is?’ the evil interrogator of the haunting mechanism behind theories, the seemingly random neuron activity that underpins thought itself. Dick should be offered a posthumous Nobel prize in philosophy for his vivid (self) exploration of what it means to be a thinking, scared, paranoid, schizophrenic and ultimately lost human being adrift in a sea of socio-religious apathy.

Hey, is this a PKD thesis? No, it’s a review of a book. But only after having read maybe a dozen PKD books are his true motivations (IMHO) seeping through the multi-dimensional chaos of the quaternion vector of his narratives.

On a more comical note, I love the swearing bit, let me find it and quote from it. Remember, up until now, it’s been a fairly tame and conventional sci-fi book totally dumbed down for the mass market, but this searing and personal outburst totally breaks the novel open to its true motivation and humanistic exorcism (as earlier expunged) and I’m gonna quote it here in full as a final admonition of Dick’s literary greatness:

Seth Morley stared at him with violence flaring in his eyes, “You fool,” he said, “You stupid bastard fool.”

[A Maze of Death, Philip K Dick, The Open Critic Verdict](#)

At the time of writing, I’m still 40 pages from the end, but that’s not what’s important to me as a reviewer. Dick could do or say anything at the end of a book that is so well constructed, so brave, so ultimately non sci-fi. Simply another five out of five book from the master of head fuckery - this is the author you all forgot to hail as a star.

[Eye in the Sky, Philip K Dick](#)

While sightseeing at the Belmont Bevatron, Jack Hamilton, along with seven others, is caught in a lab accident.

Book Review by Mike Philbin

It’s a real easy set-up. You visit a science institute and fall into the particle accelerator. Or is it?

Remember, this is a [Philip K Dick](#) novel and a simple accident at a science institute can turn into one sick and twisted nightmare. Jack Hamilton, his wife and six other tourists fall into this particle accelerator, right. They fall right in. Who is maintaining this institution, we may want to ask. Are the eight people killed in the fall? Are they burned to death in the electric fire? These are questions that Philip K. Dick initially sidesteps completely.

The eight hapless individuals end up in another world. Dick loves this device; it's something he used in his novel *A Crack In Space* (aka: [Cantata-140](#)) to great effect. But here, instead of merely regurgitating the same narrative conclusions, Dick takes himself for a ride.

Dick was above all a great thinker and philosopher, why the hell his work is called science fiction, I don't really understand. Yeah, I know, there's usually some scientific angle associated with his work but this is a backdrop to the mind of the book. It is this psychological element that truly rules the PKD product. Plus, I'll say this again and again; PKD was a very funny writer. Just take this central premise: don't go to science institutes, you could fall into another universe. I mean; if that's not funny, I just lost my smile.

Anyway, back to the book - what happens in this parallel world? How do these eight victims escape their dilemma? That, you'll soon understand, is where the very simple premise of the book unfolds its complex sheathes of narrative possibility to the full. It's not just a simple case of one parallel world. There is an encounter with God at the centre of a pre-Galilean 'Solar system', a house that devours people to survive and a world where sex (in fact all things considered 'dirty or unhygienic') are slowly being eradicated. But this isn't about space travel, aliens and oppressive forces from off-world. Nope, the origin of this parallel world's horror lies much closer to home.

The characters in [Eye in the Sky](#) are distinctive. While they all appear very normal on the surface, dark secrets lurk in the recesses of their minds. And these personal secrets are the key to the power of the narrative twists and turns. It's really a book about character winning over narrative, the way it should always be in my opinion.

[Eye in the Sky](#), [Philip K Dick](#), **The Open Critic Verdict**

I am so sick of books (or movies) that are just narrative with peaks and troughs of action, merely a tightly written beginning, middle and end. [Philip K Dick](#) says to hell with that: reader, you will live the world of my characters, and I will analyse and figurise them and embed you in the consequences.

[Eye in the Sky](#) presents a masterful novelist at the peak of his creative art.

External Links

- [Philip K Dick](#), Wikipedia
- [Philip K Dick](#), Fansite
- [Mike Philbin](#), Writer and Reviewer

Tags

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Discussion

- [ubikchip](#): Thanks Mike - will look further into the abandoned Android reference in the novel. I agree that some of his themes need life experience...
- [Mike Philbin](#): Jordan, have you read FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID or THE COSMIC PUPPETS? Those two I'd always recommend as worthy of the...
- [Mike Philbin](#): I'm happy that this review is still generating worthy and fruitful comment. Remember, I'm of the opinion that PKD is a...
- [ubikchip](#): I first read philip k dicks novels in the 9170's - i had them all - Do Androids Dream. (great title), Penultimate Truth, Man in...
- [Jordan](#): Hey Mike, Good review of the book. Like one critic suggested, I went through the book in one sitting. What a ride! Can't even begin...

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