



One of the most frequently asked Philip K. Dick questions is: What does the ending of *The Man in the High Castle* mean? This is one set of interpretations.

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### The Shorter Answer:

The TMITHC is an alternate history in which the Axis has won WWII. Dick gives some grim pictures of the "history" since the war. Yet the book is ultimately more positive than negative. As Pete Chvany (on [rec.books.phil-k-dick](http://rec.books.phil-k-dick)) has pointed out: It has "strong characters with basic moral centers. Tagomi's decision to free Frank in the face of Nazi intimidation and after recently being forced to kill against his deepest religious principles, is powerful stuff. So is Juliana's realization that she has to warn Abendsen about the plot to kill him. Bob Childan's decision not to turn American jewelry into cheap trinkets is a big moment, as he realizes the choices Paul Kasoura offers him and finds a way to take pride in himself, rather than in a lost past."

Dick has said that he wrote TMITHC with the help of the *I Ching* (see quotes below), forming hexagrams as he came to junctures in the book. He then put the hexagram in the book text and had the character involved interpret the hexagram (sometimes in different ways) in light of his or her own view of the "moment."

The final two hexagrams the *I Ching* gives characters are the same: **Inner Truth**. Tagomi forms the hexagram first--after killing the SD men. At first he finds no solace in the answer. He tries meditating on a pin that contains Wu, a source of truth in itself, and traverses universes. Juliana seems to "understand" the hexagram immediately.

THE SUMMATION: Only after Tagomi has his heart attack--one he presumably will survive--does he realize he will ultimately understand, in his own way, the answer given by the *I Ching*. This gives him a sense of peace and hope. Juliana gets the same hexagram and to her it means that the world in Abendsen's book, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* (also supposedly written with [by] the *I Ching*), is true. This also gratifies her as the

*Grasshopper* is a book from which she (and several other TMITHC characters) draws hope and strength.

## THE CATCHES:

"Historicity"--a key element in the TMITHC--turns out to be deceptive. Frank, for instance, has been making fake "antique" guns. Wyndam-Matson's lecture to his girlfriend shows that the "authenticity" [of historicity] lies in a piece of paper, not in the thing itself. By extension from this theme, we therefore can ask 'Is the universe depicted in *Grasshopper* any more true than the universe Juliana is currently in?'

It is clear that the universe pictured in *Grasshopper* is not our universe, as Tugwell is President after Roosevelt, etc. Tagomi visits one reality in which the Japanese are not in power and in which he sees the Embarcadero Freeway (a real place in our universe when TMITHC was written, although the past big earthquake has necessitated that San Francisco remove this structure). The easiest assumption is that the universe he visits is indeed ours. We can therefore see that there are at least three realities described in TMITHC: the novel's, *Grasshopper*'s, and the one Tagomi visits. Which is "true?" Are all true? It is difficult to answer these questions.

In sum, the book is basically positive because of the moral decisions made by a number of characters, because Tagomi finds enlightenment {although it is not clear to him or us what this will ultimately mean to him), because Frank is released to go on making real, contemporary American art, and because Juliana discovers that there is at least one "better" universe.

## The Big Answer:

TMITHC is an alternate history in which the Axis won WWII. Dick uses much of the early exposition in the book to show what a nasty world this is indeed. While the people under Japanese rule (mainly, for the basis of this story--the western US) seem to have okay lives, the Nazis have pretty much destroyed all of Africa, have persecuted Jews wherever they rule, and, we find out, have a plot going to wipe out their allies, the Japanese.

The main characters exist in two areas, the Pacific States of America (PSA), and the Buffer zone (the Rocky mountain states). The main characters, barring Childan, consult the *I Ching* at major moments. According to Dick, he consulted the *I Ching* for each character at these important junctures, and then placed the hexagrams he formed into the story. (See quotes and the note on the *I Ching* below.) Did Dick really use the *I Ching*?

Although Dick says in the Rickman biography that he wrote the book without notes, but with the help of the *I Ching*, he also said he formulated the novel when talking to a man about his firsthand experience living under the Nazis and contrasting them with the Japanese (see bibliography below). In addition, the novel evidently underwent extensive changes ("almost a complete rewriting of the book") at the request of Peter Israel, his editor. Yet, there is enough circumstantial evidence to show that Dick was using the *I Ching* himself at the time he wrote TMITHC and probably did make use of the *I Ching* at storyline junctures for his characters. Hexagram texts, however, are somewhat ambiguous, so the characters could be quite free to interpret their hexagrams in ways that work for any part of the plot. Dick certainly could have incorporated relevant minutiae from the *I Ching* into a storyline without destroying the overall form.

What are the chances that two characters, Tagomi and Juliana [in other words, Dick] would get the same hexagram in two separate, but contiguous, moments of crisis? Well, there are only 64 of them.

TMITHC contains two types of time: The linear time of the plot (A happens, B happens, C happens. . .), and the *I Ching* mediated synchronistic (the sum of *everything*) moments. It is not so apparent, however, that there are several \*timelines\* within the plot. (See [plotlines](#)). The PSA timeline and the Buffer State timeline are tied together by news of Borman's death. The PSA timeline then goes on for approximately 21 more days, the Buffer Zone timeline only for a couple more days. This structure is not noticeable, however, as Dick begins almost every new section of the book with a description of the time and place ["At one-forty that afternoon, Robert Childan with enormous reluctance locked the front door of American Artistic Handcrafts Inc."), so the reader \*thinks\* he knows when and where the action is. But this information is sometimes misleading because of previous or subsequent books sections or it is incomplete. [Dick used the same device in *The Simulacra*. See "The novels of..." in the bibliography below.)

TMITHC contains all kinds of other "fakes," as well. There are the items which supposedly contain "historicity." We know that Frank Frink used to make these "imitations of antique guns" and Wyndam-Matson gives a mini-lecture on the fact that historicity lies not in the object itself but in a piece of paper that "authenticates" the item.

Several people in the novel are fakes. Baynes is really Wegener. Frink is really Fink (a Jew hiding out in the PSA). Mr. Shinjiro Yatabe is really General Tedeki. Joe is not an Italian truck driver, but a Swiss assassin (and probably SD). Even Abendsen who is supposed to live in a fortified castle is an ordinary man in an ordinary house.

And reality is questionable. *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* (also supposedly written by the *I Ching*) shows a reality in which the Allies won WWII. However, we know that it is not our reality in that Tugwell was president after Roosevelt and Hitler stood trial after the war. In addition, Tagomi, a devout Buddhist, seeks solace after killing two men (to save a man). He tries the *I Ching*, then meditates on a pin that contains Wu, another source of truth. He winds up, as he puts it, "Out of my world, my space and time," and finds himself in a reality in which the Japanese are not in power (he cannot command a seat in the diner and he is insulted with the term "Tojo,"). Additionally, he is overwhelmed by the "hideous misshapen thing on skyline," the Embarcadero Freeway, a structure which did exist in San Francisco when Dick wrote the book. We assume, because of these references to known things, that he has entered *our* reality. Which, if either, is real: a world depicted by a millennium old book or a world found by a man contemplating a special endowment of truth?

Brian W. Aldiss, in *\*Trillion Year Spree\** offers another twist on reality in TMITHC. He questions the source of wisdom so many depend upon in the book and asks: "Does the *I Ching*, the *Book of Changes* used by several characters in the novel, present a real choice or an imitation?" To question this undermines what sense of reality we may have still clung to in TMITHC. Aldiss seems to find this okay: "We can never be certain what is ground-level reality and yet we never tire of these webs of maya--of illusion." Yet Dick appears to have gone to great lengths in TMITHC to give the *I Ching* a real sense of truth and true existence, indeed going so far as to endow the book with a "life" of its own. Ultimately, of course, the question of reality is complicated beyond believing in one, or some, of the three most obvious realities in TMITHC.

How do these things tie together to make sense at the end of TMITHC? There is no answer that satisfies every condition. Alan Flesch (on [rec.books.phil-k-dick](http://rec.books.phil-k-dick)) has suggested that "It seems artificial to arbitrarily draw the line at one point and say, the story ends here. Frank Frink goes back and begins making jewelry again. Operation Dandelion is not dead, really; the Japanese know about the Nazi plots against them but that won't stop any further assaults on them by the Nazis. Juliana meets Abendsen, warns him, and then leaves. There is nothing more for her to do here. The ending of the book is like life; nothing really ended."

We *can* say that many people have made moral choices we can consider to be correct. Childan decides not to trivialize American craftsmanship by refusing to make trinkets of authentic, contemporary American jewelry, some of which contains Wu. Juliana kills an assassin to save Abendsen--who has, with his writing, given a number of people a sense of hope. Wegener passes on vital information to the Japanese about the threat of extermination from the Nazis. Tagomi kills two hit men to save Wegener. And, probably least ambiguously, Tagomi refuses to sign a paper for the extradition of Frank to Nazi territory, and further orders that he be released. These positive actions tie up many of the story lines in the book.

Juliana's discovery that the *I Ching* says Abendsen's book is true, though the last "revelation" in the book, is probably the most iffy. Sure, it's nice that there is a reality in which the Nazis did not win WWII and the post-war atrocities did not happen, but that knowledge doesn't actually improve anyone's life. (It could be argued that Juliana's knowledge of the book allowed her to kill Joe and thus save Abendsen's life, but Abendsen had already written *Grasshopper*, therefore his work essentially had been done.) In addition, we know that there are at least **three** realities (by inference from *Grasshopper* and through Tagomi's experience), not just the one other Juliana discovers.

Furthermore, Juliana's story ends almost two weeks before the real end of the story. She says she might call Frank with the news of the validity of *Grasshopper*'s reality, but in those two weeks Frank never hears from her. It seems she is not out spreading the good news, as one would expect with authentically "good news." (My personal theory is that Juliana's story ends because she finds that another reality is true. Therefore her reality may not, and she cannot, continue to exist. Her section has to go near the end of the book because there is nothing to say about her reality anymore. However, her actions may ripple down the line, as a result of synchronicity--and cause a number of the other actions.)

The upshot? With all the falsities in TMITHC, the possible validity of *Grasshopper*'s reality, or ours, or High Castle's is questionable. Yet, positive things happen in TMITHC, and Dick obviously is espousing the belief that taking a moral stance, even at the cost of personal pain, is good. I also feel that is he saying that you can know and function in the local reality (in which people make moral decisions), but that there is no way to assess the existence of or beneficence of any larger reality (or realities). You just have to keep on trucking.

### Dick quotes on TMITHC:

. . . during a 1961 visit, Iskander Guy heard Phil complain that the oracle could speak with forked tongue. Guy recalls: "I told him, It goes back to at least 1165 B.C. Who are we to question an entity functioning at that level all this time? He said, "Fuck it. I'll fix it--I'll write a novel based on it." ' Sutin, *Divine Invasions*, p. 109.

In an Interview published in *Vertex* in 1974, Dick says he used the *I Ching* as a plotting device for *High Castle*. Indicating he personally had been using the *I Ching* since 1961, "to show me a way of conduct in a puzzling or unclear situations." He concludes:" If you use the *I Ching* long enough and continually enough, it will begin to change and shape you as a person." Warrick, *Philip K. Dick*, p. 28.

In a letter to "Dan," dated January 18, 1977: "But with THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE I was unable to end it the way I wanted, which was another matter entirely. But perhaps you have

put a finger on it when you point out that there is no evident way in which all the strings could be tied together in the end. In that novel I was trying to write as the Japanese students in the French Department of Tokyo University were doing their books after World War Two, since, I reasoned, that would be how Abendsen would go, and that is how novels would be handled in an alternate world in which the Japanese had won." *Selected Letters, 1975-1979*, p. 8.

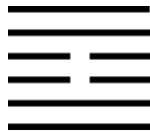
In later years Dick criticized the *I Ching* for the ending it provided him. "When it came to close down the novel, the *I Ching* had no more to say. So there's no real ending on it. I like to regard it as an open ending." *To the High Castle*, p. 374.

"I wrote and rewrote the final scene between Juliana and Abendsen." *To the High Castle*, p. 379.

\*\*\* The title of the book within the book, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, is a line from Ecclesiastes (12:5), generally interpreted to refer to the infirmities of age. *To the High Castle*, p. 377.

### Brief Notes on the *I Ching*:

This ancient text has been used in China for centuries. The user forms a 6 line hexagram by manipulating yarrow stalks or throwing coins in prescribed ways. It is only possible to get the numbers, 6,7,8,9 by either method. Each line may be solid (positive [7,9]) or broken (negative [6,8]):



The line may be a moving line (if the number gotten was a 6 or a 9) or a static line (if the number was a 7 or 8). When there are movable lines, after one reads the information for the first hexagram, one then changes the movable line(s) to the opposite form (positive to negative and vice versa) and then reads the resulting hexagram as well. There are a total of 64 hexagrams.

The *I Ching* is not considered a fortune telling device (despite being referred to as The Oracle), but rather a means to sample the tenor of the moment in the universe. One asks it a question before one uses the coins or stalks, so that the tenor of the moment has focus. The text helps one to assess this moment so that one can perform the "correct action".

The sampling of the moment comes from the concept of synchronicity--all events in the universe are tied together. In contrast, western thought thinks linearly--that is, one event *follows* another.

The text accompanying each hexagram consists of: a) a description of the hexagram and a brief discussion of the meaning of its parts; b) The Judgement, which "make it possible for a man to make a decision to desist from a course of action indicated by the situation of the moment, but harmful in the long run. In this way he makes himself independent of the tyranny of events"; c) The Image, an often allegorical view of the images that make up the hexagram (water, clouds, thunder, etc.); and d) The Lines, more concrete information when certain of the lines are a certain number ("Nine at the beginning"). [As Dick frequently did not tell us which numbers the character got in making his or her hexagram, this part of the text is frequently not useful in analysis of the



situation within TMITHC.)

中孚

*Chung Fu / Inner Truth*



above SUN THE GENTLE, WIND  
below TUI THE JOYOUS, LAKE

### **Text from the *I Ching* on hexagram 61.**

### **Chung Fu / Inner Truth (the final hexagram in TMITHC)**

The wind blows over the lake and stirs the surface of the water. Thus visible effects of the invisible manifest themselves. The hexagram consists of firm lines above and below, while it is open in the center. This indicates a heart free of prejudices and therefore open to the truth. On the other hand, each of the two trigrams has a firm line in the middle; this indicates the force of inner truth in the influences they represent.

The attributes of the two trigrams are: above, gentleness, forbearance toward inferiors; below, joyousness in obeying superiors. Such conditions create the basis of a mutual confidence that makes achievements possible.

The character *fu* ("truth") is actually the picture of a bird's foot over a fledgling. It suggests the idea of brooding. An egg is hollow. The light-giving power must work to quicken it from outside, but there must be a germ of life within, if life is to be awakened. Far-reaching speculations can be linked with these ideas.

### **The Judgement**

INNER TRUTH. Pigs and fishes. Good fortune. It furthers one to cross the great water.  
Perseverance furthers.

Pigs and fishes are the least intelligent of all animals and therefore the most difficult to influence. The force of inner truth must grow great indeed before its influence can extend to such creatures. In dealing with persons as intractable and as difficult to influence as a pig or a fish, the whole secret of success depends on finding the right way to approach. One must first rid oneself of all prejudice and, so to speak, let the psyche of the other person act on one without restraint. Then one will establish contact with him, understand and gain power over him. When a door has thus been opened, the force of one's personality will influence him. If in this way one finds no obstacles insurmountable, one can undertake even the most dangerous things, such as crossing the great water, and succeed.

But it is important to understand upon what the force of inner truth depends. This force is not identical with simple intimacy or a secret bond. Close ties may exist also among thieves; it is true that such a bond acts as a force but, since, it is not invincible, it does not bring good fortune. All association on the basis of common interests holds only up to a certain point. Where the community of interest ceases, the holding together ceases

also, and the closest friendship often changes into hate. Only when the bond is based on what is right, on steadfastness, will it remain so firm that it triumphs over everything.

## The image

Wind over lake; the image of INNER TRUTH. Thus the superior man discusses criminal cases In order to delay executions.

Wind stirs water by penetrating it. Thus the superior man, when obliged to judge the mistakes of man, tries to penetrate their minds with understanding, in order to gain a sympathetic appreciation of the circumstances. In ancient China, the entire administration of justice is guided by this principle. A deep understanding that knows how to pardon was considered the highest form of justice. This system was not without success, for its aim was to make so strong a moral impression that there was no reason to fear abuse of such mildness. For it sprang not from weakness but from a superior clarity.

(We are skipping 'The Lines' section, as Dick usually doesn't say which individual lines a character forms in making his/her hexagram.)

from *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, The Richard Wilhelm Translation rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes. Forward by C.G. Jung. Preface to the Third Edition by Hellmut Wilhelm, Bollingen Series XIX, Princeton University Press, 1950.

## Other PKD information:

- The original paper: ["Dickian Time in The Man in the High Castle"](#) .
- The [plotlines](#) for *The Man in the High Castle*.

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