

## BOOK REVIEWS FROM THE SF PRESS

### ***Solar Lottery***

**Anthony Boucher: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* August 1955, p. 94**

Philip K. Dick's SOLAR LOTTERY (Ace, 35 cents) is kept from a Grade A rating only by a tendency, in both its nicely contrasted plots, to dwindle away at the end. This first novel by one of the most interesting new magazine writers (one of F&SF's discoveries, I may add proudly) creates a strange and highly convincing and self-consistent future society, peculiarly governed by Games Theory and the principle of randomness; against this background, built up with the detail of a Heinlein and the satire of a Kornbluth, it relates a taunt melodrama of political conflict and a stirring space-quest to rediscover a lost tenth planet.

**P. Schuyler Miller: *Astounding Science Fiction* November 1955, p. 151**

Here's another demonstration that you get a whale of a lot for your money from Ace. "Solar Lottery" is in the van Vogt tradition, taking a man with a mission, involving him hopelessly in a society built on a novel concept of science or philosophy, and allowing all sorts of unseen forces to prowl and putter behind the scenes. This time the gimmick is not non-Aristotelian semantics but von Neumann's Theory of Games, which the author has built up as the mainspring of a Twenty-third Century planetary lottery whose one winner, the Quizmaster, is dictator of mankind until an assassin cuts him down or the "bottle" – never quite explained – twitches someone else in his place. Outside the Game, those who have special skills useful to the manufacturing combines may sell themselves into absolute serfdom, while those who have only manual skills are "unclassified" and hopeless.

Ted Benteley, freed from his classified serfdom by a quirk which is never explained, sells himself in fealty to the Quizmaster, Reese Verick, only to learn too late that Verick has been deposed by the bottle. The new Quizmaster is the leader of a strange cult, and Verick promptly hatches a bizarre plot to drive an unhuman assassin past Cartwright's telepathic corps of guards and regain mastery. But Cartwright, too, has his schemes – and in the background is the mystery of the Flaming Disc at the edge of Space. There's everything in it but the Lensmen, and it tends to grow confusing in spots, but worse is being published for ten times the price

**Floyd C. Gale: *Galaxy* November 1955, p. 105**

*Solar Lottery* is something else again. It's a longer story and has ten times as much plot, so I guess it should be ten times better than its companion story [Leigh Brackett's *The Big Jump*] but...

Anyhow, it concerns a society that is founded on the monstrous descendents of our present industrial giants; a governmental setup that uses "teeps" – telepathic agents; rule-by chance succession that is determined by lottery and lots, lots more. Too much is you ask me. There's a limit to how many ideas a writer can compress into a story. After that, it's profitless squandering.

**R.G. Meadley & M. John Harrison: *New Worlds* #187 February 1969, p. 61**

*Solar Lottery* (Ace, 50 cents), Philip K. Dick's first novel, recently re-released, purports to be based on Heisenberg's theory of random-selection and Von Neuman's games-theory; but in a welter of banal floridity and inept voyeurism it degenerates into a turgid and tensionless space opera. The action of the story centres round a Besterian game of beat-the-telepath and a race to locate the illusive tenth planet of the solar system. There are moments of second-hand ingenuity, but the supposed theoretic base of the novel is treated only as an importunate detail, and the overall effect is of an author as dreary and despondent as the universe he describes. It ends with an uplifting if unoriginal dissertation on the as yet unfulfilled but soon otherwise promise of Man. The whole imitative chipboard drama fades out to the strains of The Star Spangled Banner... The

book is a useful indication of just how far Dick has progressed in the thirteen years since its first publication, and little else.

**Robert Silverberg: *Cosmos* September 1977. Pp. 33-34**

From Gregg Press's series of handsome and sturdy hardbound photo-offset reprints of old s-f comes Dick's first novel, *Solar Lottery* of 1955 - a kind of van Vogt novel, as Thomas Disch makes clear in his exemplary preface, but a van Vogt that makes some sense, and with a dollop of Kornbluth-Pohl extrapolation. It is written in neat, clean, functional prose, with no trace of the post-1965 mannerisms that at once irritate and define, and that weirdly over-explicit prose by which in a welter of gratuitous dependent clauses, he tells his readers (and his characters tell each other) information which is already in their possession or which is not at all necessary to the comprehension of the situation.

*Lottery* is a straightforward, suspenseful and very 1950ish s-f tale -- the characters move against a background of one-note extrapolation: "Suppose the head of the government were chosen by random process instead of election" -- yet Dick's hand is already evident. Perhaps the ironic reversal by which the president is chosen at random while his official assassin-designate is duly elected by a formal convention, is second-hand Kornbluth-Pohl, but the climactic revelation that the dice are stacked even in this randomized society looks forward to the cynicism of the radicalized Dick of the late 1960s. And in chapter eight Dick offers an actual scene of love, loneliness and frustrated yearning (very real -- amazingly real for 1955 s-f) that would not have come from Kornbluth, Pohl, van Vogt, or anyone else writing at the time. (well, perhaps from Kornbluth.) Dick's miserably lonely nineteen-year-old Eleanor is a forerunner of all the girl-women of his mature books.

*Solar Lottery* is, by the way, a book so old that "hopefully" is used correctly.

## ***A Handful of Darkness***

**Anthony Boucher: *Fantasy and Science Fiction* April 1956, p. 79.**

In short stories, I discover belatedly that one of 1955's best science-fantasy volumes by an American appeared only in England: Philip K. Dick's *A HANDFUL OF DARKNESS* (Rich & Cowan, 10s. 6d.). Readers of F&SF, which enjoyed the honor of discovering Dick, know the freshness of his concepts, his sharp sense of unfamiliar terrors, the easy naturalism of his everyday people against strange and imaginative backgrounds. Here are 15 of his stories (3 from these pages), almost all of them ranging from good to excellent and only one previously reprinted. (I don't understand why Dick has been so neglected by anthologists...including, I must confess, me.) I urge readers to order the volume through book-importers -- and urge American publishers to correct the local absence of a Dick collection.

## ***The World Jones Made***

**Anthony Boucher: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* August 1956, p. 108**

...The Dick novel is about a) a genetic scheme for colonizing Venus, much like James Blish's *panropy*; b) the paradoxes of precognition; c) a wholly new kind of Alien Invader of earth; d) lives gone awry in a bitterly Liberish decadent society; e) the growth of a world-dominating religio-fascist hate-movement -- all in 62,000 words. It's too much material (and too many influences) for the best of novelists assimilate into one coherent story; but here and there Dick verges on brilliance in both thinking and writing.

**P. Schuyler Miller: *Astounding Science Fiction* September 1956, p. 158**

Here's another Ace bargain. Since Ace now ignores the little matter of magazine credits, I can't be sure, but I believe the Dick novel is an original and the [Margaret] St. Clair yarn a reprint, probably from one of the Standard magazines.

Jones is a man who can look just one year into the future, and who with that power builds up a highly disturbing society. He is a mutant of a seemingly mild kind, in a post-atomic-war in which mutants of more overt kinds are no rarity – but his effects on the world of his time are far from mild. And in true van Vogtian manner, the author – can he *be* van Vogt in disguise? -- mixes in a colony of utterly strange mutants and an amoebic invasion from the depths of space. It is fascinating, tumultuous, and a bit disorganized, but fun from start to finish.

**James Cawthorn: “Next Year in Jonesville” *New Worlds* February 1969**

Jones, to quote from Philip K. Dick’s **The World Jones Made** (Sidgwick & Jackson, 18s), is “...a man with eyes in the present and his body in the past.” In the post-World War Three America of some decades hence, Jones alone knows what the future holds and knows it with absolute certainty – for twelve months ahead. Relativism is the doctrine of the day, a reaction against the absolutist rulers supposedly responsible for the death’s of millions in past war; Relativism does not tolerate the imposition of one person’s ideas and standards upon others. The society bred of war (and functioning remarkably well after being blasted with hydrogen bombs and assorted biological weapons) encourages such a doctrine, for a vast increase in genetic freaks has made the terms “normal” and “abnormal” largely meaningless. For Jones, however, there are no choices and no illusion of free will. His strange gift of foresight also includes the knowledge that his future cannot be altered. He sees the arrival of the drifters, titanic spores floating through space, and knows their implications long before the government broadcasts the news. It seems the universe takes no account of doctrines, however idealistic...

**The World Jones Made** is an uneven book, perhaps weakest where Dick gives specific examples of Jones’s minute-by-minute experiences of the future, for it is extremely difficult to imagine how anyone can cope with two complete and *different* sets of sensory data simultaneously. At one point it appears that he sees only a partial vision of future events, while at another it is asserted that his experience is total; his memory of things to come is unsparingly complete, so that the act of living through them becomes a wearisome recapitulation – and yet, he does not always remember details. Oddly enough, the novel survives such inconsistencies.

***The Man Who Japed***

**Larry T. Shaw & Irwin Stein: *Infinity* April 1957, pp. 96-97**

*The Man Who Japed* by Philip K. Dick and *The Space Born* by E. C. Tubb appear back to back in an Ace Double book. If we were slightly more ignorant about the editorial method, we might attribute this to a deliberate effort to produce a paradigm of the current status of the science-fiction novel. Briefly characterized: the novels are: Dick -- an interesting, almost spectacular failure; Tubb -- a competent, thoroughly readable, and thoroughly unexciting success.

As is required of the spectacular, *The Man Who Japed* generates great excitement, throwing off sparks in the form of new (or new-looking) concepts in all directions. A genuine act of creation takes place, with the reader's co-operation. The humorless world of Morec, well-articulated, believable, deadly, comes into being and the protagonist is set into motion, dancing to the culture's tune.

And here, probably, is where the failure lies. The culture itself is so well made, that the cross currents working against the dominant personality fail to convince. They seem like rational constructs as opposed to emotional experiences. As is so often the case, Alan Lindsey works within the culture, yet in opposition to it. How he alone, of all Morec citizens develops an aberrant personality is not sufficiently explained to be convincing. Dick was undoubtedly aware of this failing, and tries, through several scenes involving disaffected teen-agers, to make amends. But these are never more than patches on the surface of the fabric.

The climax too, seems manufactured by the plot necessities, rather than by the fabric of the narrative. It is, in its own way, exciting, even dazzling -- and totally lacking in conviction, either to the reader or, one suspects, writer. One must blame the exigencies of the time and space.

As a whole, however, the book is well worth reading.

**Villiers Gerson: *Fantastic* May 1957 p. 122**

In "The Man Who Japed," Philip Dick attempts to delineate a future, post-war world in which the leading force is Morec -- for *Moral Reclamation*, the all-encompassing censor, tutor, and law-giver of the warless future world. In this milieu, Allen Purcell, a creative young propagandist, finds himself offered the post of Director of Entertainment and Propaganda, a powerful position whose present job it is to counter the japery of a mysterious scofflaw who has not only cut off the head of the statue of Morec's founder, Major Streiter, but had placed it in an attitude which may do serious damage to the humorless efforts of Morec.

The Purcell discovers three disturbing facts: first, that he is a sleep-walker; second, that it was he who destroyed the statue; and third, the reason for his japery.

Mr. Dick has a positive talent for fully depicting the physical status of a future world; his extrapolation of psychic and moral components is, however, sketchy. In an effort to enliven a story whose static qualities tend to make interest falter, he has added extraneous action which never quite proves convincing. But "The Man Who Japed" is an interesting effort even though it falls short of the author's previous novels.

### **Anthony Boucher: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* April 1957, p. 83**

Philip K. Dick has published 3 paperback-original novels in 19 months. The first (SOLAR LOTTERY) was more than satisfactory; but the others show too many signs of haste in derivative notions and inadequately developed themes. THE MAN WHO JAPES (Ace 35 cents) studies a society of 2114 in which Morec -- Moral Reclamation, not unsuggestive of today's Moral Rearmament -- has Taken Over after atomic devastation; and though the details are largely excellent, the story-line is good old Pohl-Kornbluth Taking Over plot, complete with rebel hero who sees the Shallowness of It All. The rebel himself is unusual in concept -- a man with a sportive (in two meanings) sense of humor in a grimly sobersided world; but aside from one wonderful climactic scene, Mr. Dick keeps telling us about humor rather than showing us any examples.

### **P. Schuyler Miller: *Astounding Science Fiction* August 1957, p. 141-2**

Ace is rather uneven in the quality of its original science-fiction novels, with or without accompanying reprints but this is one of their best. It adds one more bit of evidence that Philip K. Dick is coming along fast as a master of the sociological twist....

"The Man Who Japed" is a bit less shocking in its picture of a future than the author's "Solar Lottery," but for my money it is better developed and more believable. Allen Purcell, director of a small agency that is selling packaged productions to the Entertainment and Propaganda wing of Morec -- Moral Reclamation -- government, is also the man whose jape consisted of beheading the statue of Major Streiter, father of the whole distorted mess. He is, of course, promptly in trouble not only with Morec but with the bosomy front for the Mental Health Report, and the vicious Cohorts who consider themselves Streiter's elect heirs. Purcell's final, devastating jape is beautifully logical.

## ***Eye in the Sky***

### **Anthony Boucher: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* July 1957, p. 93**

Philip K. Dick's first novel SOLAR LOTTERY (Ace, 1955; still in print 35 cents) was a very good one -- I might take this opportunity to remind librarians that a hardcover edition, retitled WORLD OF CHANCE, is available from England (Rich & Cowan, 9s 6d). Now, after two hasty and disappointing efforts, Dick easily tops it with his fourth book, EYE IN THE SKY (Ace, 35 cents). This is so nicely calculated and adroitly revealed a work that I prefer to say little about its plot or even its concepts; you should read it, and its assumptions and implications should hit you unexpectedly exactly as they are planned. I hope it is enough to say that it deals with the alternate universe theme; that I have never seen that theme handled with greater technical dexterity or given more psychological meaning; that Dick has emphatically come of age as a novelist, as well as a

technician; and that this may very well be the best s.f. novel even of a year which has so far produced outstanding books by Asimov, Bester and Heinlein.

**Theodore Sturgeon: *Venture Science Fiction* September 1957, pp. 50-51**

Sturgeon says it has, and cites *EYE IN THE SKY*, by Philip K. Dick (Ace no. 211, 255 pp, 35 cents) saying here is a heady jest, the first book since Fredric Brown's *WHAT MAD UNIVERSE* in which, within the plot's stated and legitimate framework, anything -- but *anything* -- can happen. IT is a book harmonious to this discussion of revelation because it is full of revelations -- just how many, and of what kind, being a function of the eye of the beholder and dependent upon its depth of function.

This glorious jape is, briefly, the story of an accident to a bevatron, in which eight people, in falling a considerable distance, pass through the highly energized beam. They recover and return home, sharing the feeling that something is vaguely amiss; but when an irreverence gets you a mysterious nip in the leg, and a lie brings a plague of locust, the feeling gets less vague. From there it takes off madly, in wild hyperbolic sweeps of unabashed imagination. Two guys ride to heaven on an umbrella, and there is a house hat eats people. Characters are killed, and restored for the next go-around to try it over. The earth comes to an end more than once. How this happens is Mr. Dick's business -- and he makes it yours. And what happens to you is worth eleven times the price and all your rereading time. Oh yes, you have to read it over again.

The thinking, the thinking -- that's what's so special about this book. It's great fun, mind you, a donnybrook, a brawl. But it's the deft fun of a shrewd observer, a good man with a telescope, microscope, scalpel. Here's a man who knows what he thinks about the witch-hunting aspects of national security, about marriage and religion and paranoia and beer, about whether or not cows should wear trousers in public, and the machine age, and race and Communism. If you want to see the workings of the lay mind that guards and defends Science from us, read as a fable the guardianship and defense of the particular Deity herein.

And if it appears to you, as it did to Sturgeon, that Dick presents some of these things in extreme terms, think it over the next day. You may find yourself, too, granting the author the extremities, the occasional black-and-white characterizations, and even the incredible unmasking of the unbelievably villainous villain at the end; he has a story to tell and a point to make, and like the man who was asked why he never peeled them, he can answer, "When I eats a banana I eats it, I don't mess with it."

And so, *phil k dixi*, which means, I like it and that's all I have to say.

**Robert McCary: *San Francisco Chronicle* September 22, 1957 p. 25**

There is, somewhere in the Bay Area, a writer named Philip K. Dick. I do not know him, but I visualize an intense young man hunched over a typewriter, typing at transgalactic speed. It's the only way he could produce books at the rate he does. "Solar Lottery" was good. "The World that Jones Made" was bad. "The Man Who Japed" was erratic.

But his **Eye in the Sky** is excellent. It is another story of alternative universes, but much better than most. If Dick had Heinlein's command of technique, "Eye in the Sky" might be a better book than "The Door Into Summer." As it is it rates a good second.

**Damon Knight: *Infinity* November 1957. Pp. 99-100**

Dick's fourth novel is an *Unknown*-style fantasy. What appears to be a science-fictional situation in the opening chapter -- eight people fall from an observation platform when an atom-smashing bevatron goes out of control -- turns out to have nothing to do with the case. The eight wake up in a cockeyed world, but have not been translated to another plane of reality, as you might expect, by the bevatron: they are images of themselves, wandering around in a dream world belonging to one of their number, something like Alice in the Red King's dream. ("If that there King was to wake," added Tweeeldum, 'you'd go out --bang! -- just like a candle.") Meanwhile, their bodies are lying unconscious on the floor of the bevatron chamber.

This section of the story takes the form of a satire on Jehovism, exemplified for safety's sake by a crackpot Islamic cult called Second Babiism. (The courageous editor can afford to thumb his nose at any Moslems who may chance to pick up the book.) For blaspheming, the hero gets stung by a bee; for lying he is deluged by

locusts. Applying for a job in a research electronics firm, he finds that "communications" now means a direct line to the deity; his qualifications are determined by reading a passage from the holy book, *Bayan of the Second Bab*; and by turning the spiritual tables on a group of hostile young believers, the hero gets them damned on the spot -- i.e., turned into ape-like dwarves while everything around them is withered and blackened.

This kind of thing is good fun for infidels, and Dick lays it on with a trowel (e.g., God Almighty delivers his own pulpit-thumping Sunday morning sermons on TV).

On p. 121, the proprietor of this fantasy-world, an old soldier named Silvester, gets cracked on the scone by an imaginary bedpost, and the scene immediately changes -- the rest of the characters don't go like candles, but they do find themselves in a second and equally askew world of phantasm. This one turns out to be that of a feather-brained matron named Mrs. Pritchett, who keeps deleting from it anything she feels is not quite nice -- beginning, of course, with sex; auto horns, rude traffic cops, and so on down to clouds, water and air. Having abolished everything, Mrs. Pritchett winks out and fantasy-world #3 is born.

The book is divided in this way into four dream sections, with a prologue and an epilogue in the real world. At their best, the dream episodes almost achieve the chilling balance between reality and horror of Hubbard's *Fear*; but the pace is too rapid, the story thread too slight. Once the unreality of the action has been established, there is no real urgency in it; Dick has to keep on leaping agilely from one set of assumptions to the next, in order to sustain the reader's interest at all. The characters, who in any other Dick novel would have acquired substance from their background, are here like empty Jello molds.

In the mundane section, Dick has something to say, but all too little time to say it, about the Negro in America, about security systems, Communists and liberals. Perhaps the deepest fault of the book is that, in the dream sections, it dodges such living issues to tilt at straw men: back-street cults, 19<sup>th</sup>-century prudery, paranoid maiden ladies, 1930 parlor pinkery.

#### **P. Schuyler-Miller: *Astounding Science Fiction* January 1958 pp. 143-44**

If you want a frolic in the style of the old *Unknown*, one of the most fertile imaginations and nimbly fingered typewriters in the business has done it again. More far-fetched gimmicks have been presented as sober science fiction, but Mr. Dick makes no claims.

Something goes wrong during the testing of a giant new bevatron, and a group of on-lookers suddenly find themselves in a most peculiar world. They are, as might be expected, a highly assorted lot: Jack Hamilton, fired because his wife is accused of communist leanings; McFeyffe, the security agent who has dug up the "evidence" used against her; A Negro guide who can't use his degree in physics because "we" just don't have good jobs for his kind; a clubwoman and her little boy; a retired general; a career woman.

The first -- and best -- part of the book deals with the group's misadventures in the utterly illogical world in which they find themselves run by the vaguely Moslem disciples of the Second Bab, with the Eye of the highly personal, highly capricious One True God peering vengefully down out of a heaven which Hamilton and McFeyffe presently visit via umbrella. Little by little they work out the logic behind the illogic: they are living in the distorted, psychotic mental world of the first of them to become conscious. They finally corner him and knock him out...to find themselves in still another, ultra-neat, ultra-puritanical dream world. And so it goes.

The fun gets a little thin after a while, but it's fun if you can take an element of unreason in your reason.

### ***The Cosmic Puppets***

#### **Anthony Boucher: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* January 1958, p. 33**

Philip K. Dick's THE COSMIC PUPPETS (Ace 35 cents) is from *Satellite* (1956) but gratifyingly in the *Unknown* manner. When you return to the small town of your birth and find the streets and people completely changed and an 18-year-old obit of yourself in the files of the local paper -- well, it is, to say the least, an eerie situation, and Mr. Dick develops it with agreeable grue and chilling hints of the cosmic battle between Good and Evil.

#### **Calvin M. Knox: *Science Fiction Adventure* March 1958, pp. 100-101.**

This seems to be the month for infusing new life into old clichés. Duncan re-examining multiple universes, Heinlein and his Lorenzo, and Philip K. Dick, in his fifth Ace novel, looking at the hoary concept of the alien beings who take over a small and ordinary American town.

This one is really a long novelette, not a novel, and its' actually fantasy and not science fiction. It lacks the complexity and rich intellectual ferment of Dick's four earlier novels. Briefly, it's the story of Ted Barton, who returns to his hometown after a long absence only to find the whole town altered beyond recognition.

The characteristic Dick virtues are present: the tight, nervous, compelling prose style, the sharp characterization, the startling real dialogue, the meticulous development of the unsettling situation. It's a fantasy in the *Unknown* tradition, unfolded with the rigorous logic of the best of that magazine's lead novels, and it makes exciting reading for those who enjoy an occasional pure fantasy.

Incidentally, the version of the book that appeared last year in *Satellite Science Fiction* underwent considerable editorial alteration; this appears to be Dick's original untailed draft.

**P. Schuyler Miller: *Astounding Science Fiction* June 1958, p. 145-46**

I'm giving the reprint of Andre Norton's good adventure yarn [*Sargasso of Space*] top billing in this Ace Double, because it's science fiction, and of the best kind, whereas Philip K. Dick's story has gone all the way over into fantasy this time – even if it did appear in *Satellite* in 1956.

Dick follows his hero, Ted Barton, into the little Virginia hill-town of Millgate, where he was born and brought up. But Millgate has completely changed. Landmarks are gone – people are different – the town's history, as revealed in the files of the local paper, is unlike the events he remembers. Ghostly figures walk in and out of the walls and furniture, and there are two exceedingly peculiar children who are carrying on a nasty war of their own which somehow stands for a more important conflict behind the scenes. Ted finds he can't get out again – he is shown two god-things looming over the valley – and he begins to spy traces of *his* Millgate hidden in and under the mirage. "Eye in the Sky" I'd let in as SF; this I won't.

***The Variable Man and Other Stories***

**Anthony Boucher: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* February 1958, p. 109.**

Shorter s.f. includes collections by two writers familiar to F&SF readers: Robert's Sheckley's PILGRIMAGE TO EARTH (Bantam 35 cents) and Philip K. Dick's THE VARIABLE MAN (Ace 35 cents). "Variable" is the word for both volumes.... The Dick book contains the title novella and 5 novelettes (one previously anthologized). It seems probable that the medium length is least suited to Dick's talents: both his short stories (which have been collected in England, but not here) and his full-length novels are more individual and impressive. But through there are awkwardnesses and confusions in these fairly-long stories, you'll also find fertile ingenuity and a striking power in the use of evocative symbols.

**Theodore Sturgeon: *Venture Science Fiction* May 1958, p. 58**

[*The Variable Man and Other Stories*] BUY IT - for *Second Variety*, a marvelous concept handled with vividness and economy. The others, excellent to good. The title story, killed dead by clumsiness.

**P. Schuyler-Miller: *Astounding Science Fiction* September 1958, pp. 154-55**

You can take it as axiomatic -- unless you object to a strong element of fantasy -- that the name Philip K. Dick on a PB makes it worth every one of the thirty-five cents you spend on it. In fact, the book is likely to be worth more -- now, and as an investment -- than \$3.00 hard-back volumes by better known writers.

This is Dick's first American collection of short fiction. England recognized him first, with "A Handful of Darkness," two years ago. It contains four novelettes and/or short stories and the title story, a "novel" by

present magazine standards, but only eighty-six pages long. Most memorable of the lot is the grisly picture of the end of the long war of East and West when "our" vicious, deadly, self-perpetuating killer-robots turn on all living things. This is "Second Variety." Almost the same theme becomes a completely different story in "Autofac," in which men are struggling to shut down the automatic factories that are stripping the planet of every last resource to supply unneeded commodities for a war-riven race.

The two other shorter stories are also variants of one theme: the hold that psi powers can gain over a civilization. In "Minority Report" precognitives are used by a crime prevention police to detect would-be criminals before they can act. But what if the head of the police finds himself marked down by his own machinery? "A World of Talent," the fourth story, could have stood further development. We're taken to a colonial world run by an utterly weird collection of psi-powerful mutants, jealous of each other and of the normal people back on Earth who would stamp out their variant kind. There is a little boy who hunts strangeness in dark corners -- a monster who can span space between the worlds -- a malignant telepath -- a jealously precognitive wife. Any or all of them could have been a full length book.

The title story is more conservative and more formally SF in theme and treatment. Two hundred years from now a dictatorially united Mankind is trying to break out of the solar system through the encircling space navy of the Centaurian empire. Monster computers cast up the odds for and against every proposed move -- and a clumsy experiment brings up a "variable" man from 913. He is an odd-jobs man who can do "anything" -- the ultimate in non-specialization, with an intuitive knowledge of how things go together and what they should do. And the machines can't figure him into the matrix with regimented humanity, so that makes the predictions run wild. It's a Van Vogtian theme, better handled than Van Vogt has done in a long time. And it's pure Dick. That's good.

## ***Time Out of Joint***

**Frederick Pohl: *Worlds of If* November 1959, p. 98**

Philip K. Dick is an adventurous sort of byline for the science fiction reader, because he never knows what he will get. In Dick's first novel, *Solar Lottery*, which Ace has just reissued, he gave us a complicated and quite unsatisfying picture of an Earth governed by some sort of quiz-show device for selecting a ruler. It was perhaps even more complex than van Vogt. His newest book is *Time Out of Joint* (Lippincott) -- "oh cursed spite," says Hamlet, finishing the quotation, "that ever I was born to set it right." But Dick's hero does not set it right. He gets less use out of more power than any science fiction hero of recent years. This is a most uneven book. There is a masterful opening in which Dick supplies the reader, with skill and economy, just the right hints as to what the surprises will be. Then there is some adroit weaving of the threads, and then... The book doesn't exactly end. It disintegrates. Lippincott, for reasons best known to Lippincott, has chosen to hide the fact this is science fiction by labeling it "A Novel of Menace." Well, so was *Moby Dick*. But *Time Out of Joint* is science fiction, all right, and fine of its kind in the first hundred-odd pages.

**P. Schuyler Miller: *Astounding Science Fiction* January 1960, p. 174**

I shouldn't have to tell any "faithful reader" of today's science fiction that Philip K. Dick is developing into one of the most original talents in our field. He may not be in it long: this first hard-cover book is jacketed as "a novel of menace" -- witch it is. It also happens to be good, hard-shell science fiction, handled with consummate skill, so that an unsuspecting mystery reader may just find himself trapped before he realizes he is reading "that stuff."

You are introduced to Ragle Gumm, living with his sister and brother-in-law in a smallish town, and living off his winnings in an interminable newspaper contest, in which he is the invariable winner. This odd pattern of life grows a little odder; the reader begins to spot small contradictions and discrepancies that the characters seem to miss; and finally Ragle develops the growing conviction that he is somehow the center and *raison d'être* of a colossal piece of play-acting -- as though the entire cast of De Mille's "Ten Commandments" has been rehearsed to convince one insignificant extra that he *is* an Egyptian laborer.



Now Ragle Gumm tries to break out of his barless cage, only to be deftly turned back again and again. Of course he does get out, and he does find out what is happening, but not until the beginning of the last chapter, when he sits down to read his own biography in *Time*.

It's a grand job of writing.

## ***Dr. Futurity***

**Frederik Pohl: *Worlds of If July 1960*, pp. 104-05**

John Brunner's *Slavers of Space* and Philip K. Dick's *Dr. Futurity* combine in an Ace Double volume of not quite total merit.... After some satisfactory adventures, though, Brunner's invention deserts him and the story takes a "surprise" twist which we cannot approve (as flimsy) and may not discuss (as giving away the payoff).

An analogous fault mars Philip K. Dick's equally inventive *Dr. Futurity*. A 21<sup>st</sup> century doctor is snatched by a time machine into a still farther future, the death-loving world of the year 2405, where his healing skill is considered a foul perversion, and he is at once trapped into a complicated net of underground activities.

The death-lovers have been constructed with attention to those corroborative details which give artistic verisimilitude, and thus Dick's narrative is neither bald nor unconvincing. It is quite convincing. It is even hairy. What flaws the story is a really excessive troweling-on of time paradoxes, so that most everybody turns out to be almost anybody else.... In mediocre stories neither of these endings would do great harm; but the bulk of these works is very far above mediocre.

**Damon Knight: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction June 1960*, p. 86**

DR. FUTURITY (Ace, 35 cents) is another of Philip K. Dick's curiously intense and murky nightmares. This one uses the familiar gambit of the modern man transported to a future world, and makes him a medical doctor, charged with saving a man's life, in a eugenic society which views life-saving not only as criminal but as a moral offense.

The story is even less plausible than usual; for instance, Dr. Parsons has barely had time to identify the language of the future as a synthetic blend of English, German and Latin, before we find him speaking and understanding such sentences as, "The only complexion of your type, in my experience, is the result of a highly contagious plague." Ignoring such lapses, and Dick's frequent stylistic howlers, is worth your while; Dick's plots may be jerry-built, but his visions of horror are authentic. He has a gift for making his stock backgrounds look lived-in (as when Parsons finds a cigarette butt smoldering on the control panel of a deserted spaceship); he also has the ability, almost alone among s.f. writers, to make the politics of his future world sound like more than perfunctory pieties. Banal though it is at times ("Good God, he thought, I'm lost in space and I'm lost in time. In both dimensions'), this novel has moments of unexpected vividness and power. As usual (Mr. Amis please note) Dick has a needle sharpened for our own society: "'By denying such a powerful reality [as death], you undermined the rational basis of your world. You had no way to cope with war and famine and overpopulation because you couldn't bring yourself to discuss then.'"

**P. Schuyler-Miller: *Analog October 1960*, p. 170.**

"Dr. Futurity" provides us with a duly unpleasant future society, in which immortality is government administered, teen-age gangs serve as a scavenging squad for malcontents, suicide is routine, and it is a crime to heal. Dr. Jim Parsons, snatched into this environment by a time dredge -- out of a time rather far in our own future -- naturally has to fight his way out. He gets unexpected help, then finds that accepting it has involved him in an effort to change history and made him a murderer instead of a healer. Some details of the future culture are brilliantly drawn; others, like the hybrid Latin-German whatsit language, just don't convince. By the end, it's a little hard to work out the score or even tell who's up.

## ***Vulcan's Hammer***

**[unsigned] *Amazing February 1961*, p. 133**

*Vulcan's Hammer* is another of Philip Dick's steady stream of action filled stories, and if it does not generate as much excitement as some of its predecessors, still it has enough to keep the reader's interest. Put the lag down to the fact that the subject matter isn't quite so unusual as it might be. The novel does boast a shocker of an opening, however, on a chaotic note, with no real hint who are the "good" guys and who, the "bad."

After the First Atomic War, the nations gathered at Lisbon and formally agreed that the computer machines developed by the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and Great Britain would be given absolute power over national governments in determining top-level policy. Men felt this was the only way to free a supranational body from hate, bias and suspicion that had divided men for so long. The conflict comes when disagreement arises between the computer, Vulcan 3, the Directors who are supposed to administer Vulcan's policies, and a grass roots movement opposed to both called the Healers. The struggle is made readable through Mr. Dick's competence, but one cannot get too enthusiastic about any of the alternatives offered. They weaken the ending and pose grave doubts about the stability of the future as it is described.

**P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog November 1961*, p. 164**

Philip K. Dick has done so much better than this tired-formula story, that "Vulcan's Hammer" is more of a let down, than, perhaps, it should be. Earth of the future is a sectioned-up oligarchy dominated by a hidden super-computer, Vulcan III. Vulcan II is still functioning, under a canopy of dust and cobwebs. Vulcan I we never meet. But things are going wrong with the smooth operation of the government. The usual underground is functioning in the usual efficient way. Various venal varlets in high places are plotting among and against each other. And – it eventually appears – Vulcan III has grown impatient and started building himself a law-enforcement squad of flying hammers.

It turns out just as you'd suppose.

## ***The Man in the High Castle***

**S.E. Cotts: *Amazing February 1963*, pp. 119-120**

In *The Man in the High Castle*, science fiction writer Philip Dick shows us a much broader canvas than the ones he has worked on previously. This book is bound to interest many, many people and will, just as surely, be a source of lively discussion among them. Though it can be viewed in many different ways, there can be no argument about its persuasiveness. At first description it may not seem original (it is one of the "What if..." plots which are a mainstay of science fiction), but the handling of the story, the wealth of psychological detail and the rightness of his characterizations all prove Mr. Dick is very much his own man. In an area where the mediocre reigns far too often, the fresh touch shines like a veritable jewel.

World War II has ended, but not in the way we know. The Allies have gone down to defeat, and the USA is mainly under enemy control. The Pacific States are ruled by the Japanese while the eastern portion of the country is under German domination. Once their victory is established, the real differences in aims, goals and methods between them which had been hidden under the surface of their common desire for America's downfall, bobbed to the surface again and reasserted themselves. The Germans brought to their eastern states the same efficient ruthlessness that they had used in their war efforts. The Japanese became tolerant, paternalistic and fascinated by our culture. This in itself would have been enough for a solid story, as Mr. Dick steadily develops, detail by detail, these two different ways of life, their subtle conflicts with each other, mutual attempts adjust between conquerors and conquered.

But there is still a further plot. An infamous novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, by Hawthorne Abendsen, is the sensation of this postwar world. Abendsen, who is the man in the high castle from the title, has written a book about a mythical world – one in which Italy betrayed the Axis powers, in which Franklin D. Roosevelt wasn't assassinated and the Allies won the war. Naturally the Germans have banned the book in their sector, not being able, even in fictionalized form, to entertain the idea of defeat. The Japanese, however, fascinated as they are, hypnotized almost by many aspects of the people they rule, do tolerate the novel.

After allowing time for building up a clear picture of the setting and the main characters, Mr. Dick changes his focus slightly and starts to show how the idea of Abendsen's existence and his novel start to work in the thoughts and actions of some of the main characters, involving them in a course of action that adds an additional dimension of suspense to an already solid achievement.

**P. Schuyler-Miller: *Analog* April 1963, p. 83**

This is a fascinating realistic story laid in a world in which President Roosevelt was assassinated in Florida, there was no pre-Pearl Harbor defense program and no lend-lease, Russia was crushed, and Europe and America were defeated. The Pacific Coast states, by 1960, have become a Japanese-dominated puppet much like the East Germany of our world. There is a similar Nazi-occupied satellite in the eastern United States, and a semi-independent buffer between the two, in the Rocky Mountain states. There also seems to be a southern satellite, though we hear little of it. Canada has maintained its independence; Bob Hope is up there, broadcasting imprudent TV programs into the Nazi and Japanese satellites. The extermination of the Jews in Europe and German-occupied America has been followed by the extermination or enslavement of the Negro race in Africa and throughout the world. In Japanese America, however, society has been rebuilt on a more civilized basis.

The author has constructed this Japanese-based western society with loving care and minute attention to detail. To appreciate just how well he has done this, I am very much afraid one would have to be as thoroughly steeped in Zen and in minutiae of real Japanese society as he seems to be. With a glimpse here and a vignette there, he manages to contrast life under the two regimes and suggest the Japanese-German tensions that amount to a counterpart of our own Cold War, with the difference that the United States is filling the role that Eastern Europe is in our own continuum.

In a well-guarded castle near Cheyenne, in the nominally independent Rocky Mountain States, a writer named Hawthorne Abendsen has written an underground bestseller, "The Grasshopper Lies Heavy," in which Germany and Japan have lost the war – and a Nazi killer is on his trail. In the Pacific States of America, a Jewish craftsman, and American dealer in fake antiques, and a Japanese bureaucrat become ever more intricately entangled in a plot that centers on a visiting Swede and an old gentleman from Tokyo. And in and out of it all weaves the cryptic prophecies of the *I Ching*, the ancient Chinese Book of Changes that dominates the lives of Japanese and conquered Americans alike.

I have a strong feeling that – like "The Grasshopper Lies Heavy" – this is a book that is going to have a kind of underground success and end up a classic without ever having been read by very many people. It is one that is going to bear rereading, too – not for what happens, though that is subtly and believably worked out – but for the way in which this alternate world has been created down to the last nuance. With no serialization or paperback edition in 1962, a book that deserves a crack at the Hugo for best novel may never be widely enough known to get into the finals. And the prohibition against hardback books as winners – Tucker's Law of Hugos, which was broken in 1962 by Heinlein's "Stranger in a Strange Land" – will go back in force.

**Poul Anderson: *Niekas* ; no, 7 January.[?] 1964, pp. 12-1**

...Still, [Murray Constantine's *Swastika Night*] is not as good as Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*. This may be the ultimate story of the world in which the Axis won. Unlike the other two, it is not projected into the future, but takes place right now, in that alternate timeline where the lunatic's bullet did not miss Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 and, as a consequence, the United States defense effort was too little and too late. Now the Germans have Europe, Africa, and the eastern part of America; the Japanese have Asia, the Pacific, and western America; between the two zones of occupation lies a feeble Rocky Mountain Federation, nominally independent, actually a buffer state under both thumbs.

The story, or rather the several loosely interwoven stories are laid in California and the Rockies. We meet just a few Germans, and hear only indirectly of what they have been doing: of their gruesomely clean sweep in Africa, for instance, or their intricate maneuvers against Japan. This mutes the horror, even when we see how the Japanese covertly hate and fear them, but adds to the realism. How many Russians have you met?

Like Constantine, Dick is not interested in putting marionettes through the motions of pulp heroism, but in examining how people act in situations as complex and poorly understood as those of life itself. His Japanese

are not rapacious tyrants; they are men like touching little Mr. Tagomi, trying to get along in a world they never made. Nor are his Americans gallant freedom fighters; they are shopkeepers, artisans, minor intellectuals, also trying to do no more than get along. The many faceted interplay between the individuals of the two cultures, tensions, strained politeness, mutual fascination, is beautifully handled. The Germans themselves are shown to have a relatively sane faction desperately intriguing against the nihilistic schemes of the really far-out Nazis.

Well, there is one figure who might be called heroic: Hawthorne, the author of the banned and widely read novel The Grasshopper Lies Heavy, which treat of a world in which the Allies won the war. The quotations from this book are among Dick's most dazzling tours de force. Hawthorne's extrapolations are sometimes right, in terms of our own history -- and sometimes so widely wrong! Just by themselves they form a nearly complete commentary on the potentialities and the limitations of science fiction.

Yet Hawthorne's sole act of physical derring-do has been to dismantle the defenses of his home and take his chances on Nazi assassins. And it must be on purpose that Dick only introduces us to him briefly, in the last chapter. He is a symbol, and Dick is writing about ordinary people.

Perhaps they are too ordinary, too sympathetic. In the light of what actually happened elsewhere, I have trouble believing that a Japanese occupation of American soil would go quite so smoothly, that personal friendships could develop quite so soon. Having known a number of Japanese, I can readily accept Mr. Tagomi as a decent person. But would not to much tyranny, murder, rape, plundering, enslavement, and starvation separate him from us? The average Philipino still has small use for Japanese... any Japanese.

There are some annoying minor flaws in the book. For instance, it's possible that a Swede could be named Baynes; his father might have immigrated from England or something. But is it possible that a German posing as a Swede would call himself Bayne? One could pick some other nits.

However, I don't want to. I am only praising with faint damns. Philip K. Dick has written here an outstanding work of disciplined imagination: one which, besides having high narrative interest, casts some light on the madness buried in us all.

#### **James Cowrhorn: *New Worlds* July 1967, pp. 63-64**

If the prose style of the above writers [Samuel R. Delany and Roger Zelazny] verges upon the florescent, *The Man in the High Castle* (Penguin SF 5s) by Philip K. Dick offers by contrast a clear, cold daylight. For many who lived through the years from 1939 to 1945, the prospect of a Nazi victory is still and undead nightmare, and Dick depicts it in chilling detail. Tracing the interlocking fortunes of a handful of people in the Japanese-occupied sector of North America, the narrative builds up an alternate future/pas as convincing as the world we know. Europe and Africa are testing grounds for the perverted science of the Third Reich; the outer planets are destined to be Aryan colonies; in the USA, Japanese rule has been recognized as the lesser of two evils. Among the items of the conqueror's culture which filter down to the conquered is the *I Ching*. The millennia-old text which the Japanese themselves adopted from China, and which will, when correctly consulted (and interpreted) predict the future. How the *I Ching* affects the destinies of Dick's characters, and how it is connected with the subversive best seller, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, which describes a world where the Allies were victorious, makes a story of fascinating complexity. For anyone seeking further examples of the Work of Philip K. Dick, John Brunner's highly informative article in NEW WORLDS 166 will be an invaluable guide.

#### **Robert Silverberg: *Amazing* June 1969, pp. 123-24**

This one hardly needs much endorsement at this late date. Last year the World Science Fiction Convention at Washington D.C. gave it the "Hugo" award as the best s-f novel of 1962, and the richly deserved honor was roundly applauded, for this brilliant book is one of the finest works in our field in a long time. The new paperback reprint makes it available to those who didn't snap up the hardcover edition, published by Putnam in 1962.

It's a story of a world in which German and Japan triumphed in the war; the turning point of Dick's World-of-If seems to be the attempted assassination of President-elect Roosevelt in 1933. (Curiously, Dick seems to think Roosevelt was already in office when the attempt was made; it's one of the few historical slips in this otherwise

meticulous book.) The novel takes place in the year 1962, in this other world. The United States has been partitioned between Japan and the Reich, and is under occupation. Most of the action takes place in California, under Japanese control, and the book's fascination derives in large measure from Dick's artful depiction of the relationships between conqueror and conquered.

The theme has been handled before, by British novelist Sarban and by the late Cyril Kornbluth. But it has never been handled so well. Dick's prose crackles with excitement, his characters are vividly real, his plotting is stunning.

Interestingly, Popular Library has chosen to conceal the fact that the book is science fiction. It's been packaged as a political novel, bracketed with such recent thrillers as *Fail Safe* and *Seven Days in May*. The strategy backfires a little, since it forces the publisher to leave out a blurb to the effect that this was voted "Best Science Fiction Novel of the Year." And I wonder what mundane readers will think when they pick up the book, believing they're about to get a simple-minded job like those two best sellers, and find themselves enmeshed in a subtle and uncompromising parallel-word novel. Let's hope they're not too bewildered. This book (which mysteriously didn't get serialized in any science fiction magazine) deserves a wide public.

## ***The Game Players of Titan***

**Robert Silverberg: *Amazing* May 1964, pp. 125-26**

Philip K. Dick is a Californian who erupted into science fiction about a dozen years ago with what seemed like fifty short stories at once. Before long, he had turned to the paperback novel, producing such memorable Ace items as *Solar Lottery*, *Eye In the Sky*, and *The World Jones Made*. His outstanding characteristics were a knack for creating convincing future histories and equally convincing characters.

After a few dazzlingly prolific years, Dick vanished from science fiction almost entirely, returning last year with a burst of activity reminiscent of his debut years. Once again there are short stories by Philip K. Dick in every magazine on the newsstand; his 1963 novel, *The Man In the High Castle*, won a "Hugo" award for excellence at the Washington Science Fiction Convention; and now, full circle again, he is producing original paperbacks for Ace.

*The Game-Players of Titan* doesn't match the high level of his Hugo-winner of last year -- or even of some of this Ace titles of six and seven years ago. It starts off in proper Dick fashion, dumping the reader head long into a complex future world and letting him figure out the background as he goes along. One soon learns that a ray broadcast by the Chinese Communists has made the world sterile and cut its population to a few million; that, contrariwise, an operation to remove something called the Hynes Gland has conferred eternal youth on the survivors; that non-humanoid aliens from Titan have invaded the Earth and seem to be in possession of it. It develops that a small aristocracy of Earthmen, who have won their eminence by chance and not by birth, own all the real estate (by intolerance of the Titanians) and swap it back and forth among themselves in a game that seems like a combination of poker and Monopoly.

So far, so good. Dick's first five chapters or so work within A.E. van Vogt's tradition of tossing a new plot gimmick at the reader every few hundred words, a technique Dick had handled to perfection in the past. (Unlike van Vogt, who calmly threw fifty plot elements into the air and, instead of juggling them, let them hang there, Dick believes in resolving his plots.) Where the book goes astray is when Dick introduces one plot element too many, a fatal one -- psionics.

For his book is about gambling and conspiracies and murders and other suspenseful things, and the suspense is killed stone dead once a bunch of telepaths and precognitives are brought in. The hero, conveniently, is not psionic himself, so he alone remains in bewilderment while the other characters make the plot spin around him. A host of pulp clichés suddenly appear; there is a murder and all the suspects develop amnesia; a secret conspiracy of psionic characters is afoot, directed against the Titanians; the Titanians themselves seem to take on human form from time to time; characters change sides in the conflict almost at random. The book is woefully overplotted, and there are long stretches of dreary gray prose in the middle.

Too bad. The background society is fascinating, and the book would have been a memorable one if Dick had sidestepped psionics and cut out about 10,000 words of conspiracies and the hero's hallucinations. It's good to seem him back at the typewriter, at any rate.

**P. Schuyler-Miller: *Analog* August 1964, pp. 85-86**

It's by no means another "Man in the High Tower," [sic] and it has almost as many wheels within wheels as van Vogt at his most complicated, but it hangs together better than most of that gentleman's "classics."

Red China and the United States have clobbered each other, and the sluglike vugs of Titan have moved in to take over the shreds of human civilization. Most of the survivors are sterile, and there are very few of them in any case, so the conquering vugs have introduced the Game -- their own high passion, and apparently that of the surviving United States.

Never fully described, the Game seems to be something like Monopoly-for-real, with elements of poker with a marked deck. By the whims of the Game or the failure of a bluff, men and women are married and unmarried, cities and states change hands. "Luck" means the ability to conceive children as a result of these pairings.

Telepaths, precognates and other psi-potent men and women add to the complications -- and so, it develops, does the fact that some of them are disguised vugs. Pete Garden, a most unheroic hero with suicidal tendencies turns out to be the pivot around whom all this starts to spin until the centrifugal forces pull it apart.

I had fun, but I'm not nominating it for a "Best of 1964."

## ***Martian Time-Slip***

**P. Schuyler-Miller: *Analog* November 1964, pp. 87-88**

You may have read a condensed serial version of this in *Worlds of Tomorrow*, where it was called "All We Marsmen." But you should know by now that Philip K. Dick is not a writer to condense; half the fun of reading him is the detail he slathers on over the bare boards of his plots.

The detail in this case is extremely confusing, for it includes glimpses inside the minds of a series of schizoids whose time sense has gone sadly adrift. Indeed, we are warned that this mental disruption is becoming endemic in human society -- presumably as a form of retreat from the unbearable pressures of overpopulated Earth. It breaks out on Mars, where the pressures build up differently but sooner.

The Martian society depicted is deceptively simple, as are most frontier societies. The most thoroughly developed are the community of the all-powerful Water Workers' union, headed by the invincible Arnie Kott, and the far more sophisticated New Israel with its Camp Ben-Gurion for aberrant children. Texas has a colony, so has California, and so has Russia but we see little of them. We do visit a suburbia which has found itself on the fringe of the desert, and where repairman Joe Bohlen leads a dissatisfied life next door to Norbert Steiner. We get glimpses of the Bleekmen, the native Martians who have adjusted themselves to a level of life like that of the Australian aborigines of the South African Bushmen.

As to be expected in a Dick novel, all these disparate elements are intimately woven together in a complex pattern. If it is not as beautifully developed as the Nipponized American society of "*The Man in the High Castle*," what is? Unfortunately the true nature of young Manfred Steiner's distorted time sense, its relationship to the weird visions Joe Bohlen sees, and the reason the Bleekmen can stabilize it, are implied but never really clear. It may be that the author is saying, less subtly than "Last Year at Marienbad," that reality is what the thinker believes it to be and what he can convince others it is...or it may be that he is hinting at a structure of time and place that we only occasionally sense, that breaks through in the schizoid condition, and that will one day burst on us all.

**Ron Goulart: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* December 1964, pp. 70-71**

Philip K. Dick has put together many excellent science fiction novels. He is particularly good at satire and at subtly unsettling scenes. This book has the usual Philip K. Dick cross-cutting plot. It combines the everyday problems of settlers on Mars, the dreams of glory of a Martian labor union and the teetering on the edge of a schizophrenic. There is also a fine sympathetic presentation of disturbed children. There is some fuzziness

around the conclusion. But Dick is sure to disturb you with the increasingly out of kilter world he has set up on Mars.

**J. G. Ballard: *New Statesman* 17 December 1976 p. 879.**

New English Library's so-called Master Series, edited by Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison, is a good example of recent repackaging. The first two novels, Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip* and Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*, have been dressed up in bizarre metallic jackets - useful, no doubt, to stack around you during a nuclear alert - but each stands firmly on its own originality. *Martian Time-Slip* (published originally in 1964, though now for the first time in Britain) describes a desolate, end-of-the-century Mars inhabited by doomed clairvoyants, an obsessed tycoon and an autistic child-hero who together move through a landscape that uncannily resembles southern California perceived through the glaze of some deep psychosis. 'Better to succumb to the schizophrenic process, join the rest of the world,' a character murmurs cheerfully on waking. Of the young hero's mental illness, Dick writes, 'Once the person becomes psychotic, nothing ever happens to him again,' but in fact the novel is full of incident, fusing terror and comedy in a unique way. More than any other SF writer, Dick is able to convey the sense of everyday reality as totally threatening

### ***The Penultimate Truth***

**Robert Silverberg: *Amazing* April 1965, pp. 125-126**

Philip K. Dick is a burly, bearded man who seems to operate on an all-or-nothing basis: either stories pour from him in torrents or he doesn't write at all. A couple of years ago he broke a silence of many years with his Hugo-winning *The Man in the High Castle*, and since then he's continued his triumphant return to science fiction with book after book in amazing profusion. This is, I think, his fourth novel in the past twelve months -- or perhaps it's his fifth. And it's a good one, well up to Dick's usual high standards of performance.

The year, despite the jacket copy, is 2025. Most of the world's population lives in "ant tanks" below the surface, having been shepherded there fifteen years before as atomic war threatened. A skeleton government remains on the surface, conducting the war with robot soldiers manufactured in the ant tanks and periodically sending bulletins via television to the hordes below.

What the dwellers in the ant tanks do not know is that the war has been over for thirteen years. Two years of fierce atomic combat had left much of the world a wasteland, but the radiation has died down in most places, and the elite few who live above ground have carved out fiefs for themselves covering enormous areas. They live in lonely majesty, surrounded by robot retainues, tormented by guilt even as they continue the deception being practiced on the people in the tanks. In short, a nightmarish situation, which Dick exploits to the fullest.

Defly shuttling from character to character, he builds up an elaborate webwork of plot that generates its tension not only from the background situation but from the rivalry among the members of the surface elite. As in any Dick novel, the characters are vivid and real, the pace is headlong, and the fine detail-work is executed with astonishing and unflagging inventiveness. The book shows signs of having been written at white heat, and this is both good and bad; the prose style is often clotted and lumpy, with fragmented sentences tumbling helter-skelter over one another, but there is a breathlessness about the writing that carries the reader along awesomely and irresistibly.

Recommended. This man is in the very top rank of today's science-fiction writers.

### ***THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRICH***

**Theodore Sturgeon: *National Review* March 9, 1965, pp. 200-01.**

It is interesting indeed to see how many of Mr. Sullivan's [Walter Sullivan, *We Are Not Alone*] fresh new far-out speculations appear in a science fiction novel of the "first contact" variety - and come out looking sort of old hat. Mr. Dick, a skilled practitioner, gives us (again) the feeling of overall menace, the unexpected invasion

method (this time through trade channels, plus the psyche), the commercially required seasoning of sex, and the triumph of the Good Guy.

If we sound querulous, it is because there is so much in the book to like, tainted by there being so much in the book. One of the most basic of all fictional rules is that the 'single assumption' - what Fletcher Pratt meant when he used to say, "The reader is always ready and willing to believe one impossible thing." One feels assaulted when a man with precognitive ability is involved with interplanetary big business, the United Nations, the drug traffic, the aforesaid alien invasion, a smashed marriage, two new romances, and Kosmos knows what other full-fledged book-length assumptions, all at once and without enough of any, really, to allow the reader to help the protagonist through his difficulties. One is reminded of a remark in the Encyclopedia Britannica's 11th Edition article on the U.S. Constitution: "Had the framers of this document attempted to do more, they should have done far less." Mr. Dick, who has written wonderfully structured novels, and has there by documented that he knows better, has here done more - and now look. We do proclaim, however, that no one this year, or most years, is going to produce a better title.

### **Judith Merril: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* June 1965, pp. 74-75**

Philip K. Dick did it better three years ago in the *MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE*.

I don't mean, this time, that his new book is similar in theme or treatment. Rather, that I wish it were more so, at least in characterization and structure.

Phil Dick is, one might say, the best writer s-f has produced, on every third Tuesday. In between times, he ranges wildly from unforgivable carelessness to craftsmanlike high competence. In the case of *PALMER ELDRICH*, I would guess he did his thinking on those odd Tuesdays, or rather on *one* of them, and the actual writing in every possible minute before another Good Tuesday came on him.

Here is a riotous profusion of ideas, enough for a dozen novels, or one really good one; but the stuff is unsorted, frequently incompleting, seldom even clearly stated. The style is alternately dream-slow-surreal and fast-action pulp. Thematically, he at least approaches, and sometimes stops to consider, virtually every current crucial issue: drug addition, sexual mores, over-population, the economic structure of society, the nature of religious experience, parapsychology, the evolution of man -- you name it, you'll find it.

The book, with all this, is inevitably colorful, provocative and (frustratingly) readable. I wish I thought it possible that Dick might sometime go back to this one, publication notwithstanding, and finish writing it.

### **P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog* August 1965, pp. 152-53**

An author can't come up with a "Man In the High Castle" every time, but in this case Philip K. Dick certainly didn't try. This time he's standing in for A. E. Van Vogt, or maybe for a Pohl-Van Vogt collaboration. The result is wild, zany, and lively, but not very memorable.

Today's "Barbie" dolls are obviously the inspiration for Perky Pat Layouts, around which the story wheels and whirls. With a little aid from a nice habit-forming drug, peddled *sub rosa* by P.P.E. along with the minutely detailed Perky Pat layouts, the bored people of the overcrowded future live it up by imagining themselves into the surrogate world they have built up. As with model railroaders and their hobby, there is no limit to the details with which the sets can be constructed; a goodly chunk of the economy hangs on it, and on the planets, to which segments of the overpopulated Earth are shipped to molder after being "drafted," these installations are all the life worth living.

Then a wheeler-dealer comes back from Alpha Centauri with a more potent drug and layouts of a more perplexingly entrapping type, and the plot starts to get tangled. Is the mysterious Palmer Eldrich the villain of the piece or the hero. In fact, just what is going on from moment to moment? The only way you'll ever find out is by reading the book, and you may be confused then.

### **James Colvin: *New Worlds* no. 160 (March 1966): p. 157**

I believe that a long article on Philip K. Dick is in preparation, too, so I will only briefly recommend an sf author who has appeared far too infrequently in this country. Try *Dr. Bloodmoney (Or How We Got Along After*



*The Bomb* (Ace, 40c), which utilizes many of the standard devices of an sf story to make a number of satirical digs at current institutions and kinds of people. The 'Hugo' winning *The Man in the High Castle* (Popular Library, 50c) studies an America subjugated by Japan and Germany who are victors in a World War II that went their way. *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* (Doubleday, \$4.95) takes another dig at the American Way of Life but also questions the nature of reality. Satirical, philosophical, slightly cranky, this is an uneven book, but much, much better than most of the sf published recently.

**J. G Ballard: "What to do till the analyst comes" *The Guardian*: 31 March 1966, p. 6**

The social satire, in the past one of the strongest forms of science fiction, has withered away in recent years, perhaps reflecting the present mood of complacency about our manners and morals – or, just conceivably, a sense that the future holds a great deal worse in store. Certainly the future described in Philip K. Dick's **The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich** makes our own times seem Arcadian. The twenty-first century hero, Barney Mayerson, carries a computer psychiatrist around with him in a suitcase to provide instant harpy. However, the psychiatrist, Dr. Smile, who measures his patients' stressing Freuds, has the demoralizing habit of pronouncing their names wrongly.

Elsewhere notions of reality are equally confused. Even the cement in the vast housing blocks that stretch from coast to coast is synthetic. Intermittent failures of the cooling systems reduce entire record collections to fused lumps, and the population has given themselves over to chewing an hallucinogenic drug, Can-D. No one could blame them, nor expect them to put up much of a fight against the even more sinister drug, Chew-Z, that appears on the interstellar horizon. "No one made us chew Chew-Z," Barney repines at the end, but the point is never followed up. As with so many of these consumerised nightmares, "The Space Merchants" pre-eminent among them, the author and his characters implicitly accept the social and moral values ostensibly under attack.

...One guesses that the writers of these so-called satires, like the advertising agencies they envision in the future, already see us a passive robots barely able to distinguish one branded product from another.

### ***The Crack In Space / The Zap Gun / Counter-Clock World***

**James Colvin: *New Worlds* no. 163 (June 1966): p. 144**

Philip K. Dick's *The Crack In Space* (Ace, 40c) is very disappointing Dick indeed. It's hard to believe that this is the author of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* (Cape 21s). The world is overcrowded, large sections of the population are being put into suspended animation, a strange parallel Earth is discovered through a "crack in space", plans are afoot to shift the overflow there -- but the world is already populated by a "Peking man" civilization who decide they want to invade our earth.

**Judith Merril: *The Fantasy & Science Fiction* November 1967, pp. 32-35**

Philip K. Dick is admired, if anything, even more by Old Thing adherents than by TNT people. Yet he is virtually the only established American s-f writer who demonstrates a consistent awareness of the facts of life in this country today.

Perhaps because his work is so colorful -- and sometimes so garbled -- Dick does not seem to be as highly regarded for the acuteness of his political/sociological observations and projections as he deserves: this in spite of the fact that THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE is generally considered (on both sides of the THING fence) to be his best book, and it is the one with the least pyrotechnics and the most fully-developed socio-economic extrapolation. Since then, his work has been, in general, more flamboyant but also more complex in concepts; more ambitious in scope, but seldom as fully realized.

The three recent novels under discussion here -- THE CRACK IN SPACE, THE ZAP GUN, and COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD -- are all somewhat more restrained and less infuriatingly *disconnected* than most of the

interim work (notably last year's NOW WAIT FOR NEXT YEAR -- and the elusive quality of something-extra, a note quite graspable *plus*, which pervaded NEXT YEAR and PALMER ELDRICH, is (if somewhat modified) beginning to be more comprehensible.

That is to say, I think I have at last discovered what it is that at once delights and annoys me in the particular kind of *brightness* characteristic of Dick's works of the last five years or so -- and it has to do with appropriation of a very specialized and very contemporary aspect of pop art: an approach probably excellently well suited to his content -- and incidentally, but irrelevantly, extremely irritating to me.

Pause for story identification: ZAP GUN is the Romeo-and-Juliet story of Lars Powderly, weapons fashion designer for Westbloc, and Lilo Topchev, his opposite number in Peep East, set against a fascinatingly postulated near-future of intensely controlled economy, in which the two great powers maintain stability by the conduct of a false war, fought in mock-up on tabletops, while the "commodities" on the UN-W Natsec Board think up ways to adapt the weapon designs to practical civilian use. COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD contains one of the very few future-projections of the present Black Power movement in which there is any genuine comprehension of the issues, motivations, and directions of today's "insurrection," along with further comments on our anticulture, and some cogent asides on the character of contemporary matrimony -- all thrown into a really unbelievably banal plot set in an amusing, sometimes-satiric, lightly-scatological reverse time fantasy, whose burlesque-and-bathos effects almost neutralize the political concepts completely. CRACK IN SPACE uses abortions and human deep-freezing, a pleasure-satellite run by a two-headed mutant, and lots of fast action to veil a meaty account of economic and race issues in an election campaign.

In all three books, Dick makes use of every available color-and-motion effect -- as well as his innate magnificent sense of timing -- to create a spell-binding effect which carries the reader easily through the countless *non sequiturs* and logic-gaps of his plots. In every case, it takes aliens or supermen to get things resolved. The characters, going through a series of disconnected but (each time) briefly convincing motions and emotions, seem to be painted entirely in primary colors --

And it was that thought that the flash of insight came to me. Phil Dick is not writing novels, but comic-strip continuity -- and when you chew on that thought a bit (even if, like me, you have trouble swallowing it) you may recognize that it is *not* a Bad Thing, after all. Dick is writing what the British critics like to call a "novel of ideas" rather than a "novel of manners." It doesn't matter what sort of nonsense he makes use of, to carry his concepts -- as long as he can hold the reader, and as long as the idea-cargo itself comes through intact. He may offend my sense of fitness -- but I learned to read out of Victorian novels. My children learned mostly out of comic books, and the public school adaptation of comics known to the Ed Biz as Visual Aids.

## ***The Ganymede Takeover***

**James Cawthorn: *New Worlds* October 1967**

Very nearly anything can be looked for, and found, in *The Ganymede Takeover* (Ace Books, 50c) by Philip K. Dick and Ray Nelson, beginning with the notion of Tennessee as the last bastion of human freedom in the war against the wormlike conquerors from Ganymede. Add to this one Percy X, Negro telepath and leader of a band of coloured rebels who are the hard core of the resistance forces, and whose skin is a coveted prize among the Ganymedians; an illusion projector capable of "materializing" hordes of vampires, elephants, aardvarks and other fancies; action running from stark brutality to outright farce and several sharp prods in all direction at race prejudice. The end result is like James Thurber's well-known hat; indescribable. Judge it for yourself.

## ***Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?***

**Judith Merril: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* August 1968, pp. 22-23**

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? Does not suffer from any of the assortment of novelistic shortcomings which qualify my admiration for the other three books: Dick has apparently worked his way through to a methodology that gives him much more control, and makes his ideas much more accessible to the

reader. In a review of his some months ago, I compared his techniques to those of the comic strip, and I understand there were readers who took this as denigration. If it seemed so, it was probably because the comic strip itself is simply not a congenial form to me: I don't like the flat bright colors, and stylized images. But I recognize that in this particularity I am stranded almost alone on the far side of a generation gap (with people twice my age, since it is my own generation that first took the comic book to heart) -- and it has never stopped me from *reading* (well, some) comics, or from recognizing the value of the form as a message-medium.

In any case, I have read, I think, every one of Dick's books from cover to cover, even when he infuriated, or baffled me (as for a while he was doing regularly): at the least there was always the same sort of thing I found in the Aldiss novel -- flashes of awareness of a concept entirely outside my own bag, and not successfully communicated, to me, by the author -- but clearly worth reaching for, and coming back to.

Whether I have acquired skill at reading Dick, or he has, as it seems to me, begun to organize his material more successfully, this time I experienced none of the jump-frame confusion I have suffered from in the past. This is a rich book, which deals with aspects of the whole range of conflicts, dualities, dichotomies, and interchanges approached in all three of the others described here -- and is nothing like any of them. Some of the elements will be familiar to regular readers of Dick's; others are new. This is a world of falling population and sublethal fallout dust, of Wilbur Mercer and the black empathy box, of religious devotion to living animals and merciless extermination of androids, of "specials" and bounty hunters, mood consoles and the inescapable Buster Friendly. Every one of these things is meaningful in context, and the context is constructed to contain all the meanings and multiply them.

Perhaps the best thing I can say is that there were still some ideas I'm not sure I know whether I liked, or agreed with, or fully understood -- but I assume I will see them from some other angle the next time around.

*And I can say with some certainty that the Happy Ending is supposed to make you weep.*

#### **P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog* September 1968, p171**

"Ex Africa..." the Romans said. "Ex Dick," we should say. The rest is the same: "always something new." He simply does not repeat himself.

This time we are in a future in which the world is so nearly used up that mankind is escaping to the planets and stars. On Earth, those who can't escape are fighting against the threat of a real or fancied replacement by androids. Pets are status markers, even when they are mechanical. Occupied apartments are hovels, yet many buildings are abandoned to decay. It is a world of contrast and contradiction, in which we follow the fortunes of one Rick Decard bounty hunter.

Eight androids have escaped from Mars and taken refuge on Earth. Two have been hunted down and killed. Decard sets out to get the other six. He must kill or be killed; the androids are as ruthless as he. He is harassed by the need to replace his mechanical sheep with a live pet, if only a spider. He is tempted by an android woman who has offered to help him. And interwoven with the whole intricate web is the empathic cult of Mercerism, whose devotees can link themselves electronically with their martyred teacher and share his suffering.

It may take a couple of readings to make sure exactly what is happening to Decard, and why, and how the world got in the mess it's in by 1992. Try it.

#### **M. John Harrison: *New Worlds* Number 190 (May 1969), p. 59**

Philip K. Dicks' latest novel, **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?** (Rapp & Whiting, 21s), is a broth of ideas. Shortly after WW III, man becomes increasingly artificially stimulated while android robots become less distinguishable from the real thing; Earth is a dreary place, fallout impelling its remaining inhabitants to wear lead codpieces or to emigrate to the colony worlds; and as a counter-attraction, the colonies are nothing, so inimical that even the androids don't want to be there. Rick Decard's job is to hunt and eliminate renegade androids, and the book concerns his most difficult operation, against six new models with ultra-sophisticated brains.

Dick is preoccupied largely with the crumbling man/machine terminator: the androids have programmed emotions -- while Decard's wife sets her 'mood organ' for "a six hour self-accusatory depression"; the androids are fractionally less intelligent, but the human race has its radiation-induced rejects, the 'specials'. The

problem is symbolized in the test given to suspect androids, which is in itself becoming unreliable, and in the artificial animals (thus the title) that are replacing Earth's dying fauna.

The book is beautifully constructed, yet disappointing. Dick develops his thesis quietly – until a climax in which the reader can no longer avoid its implications – and without too much of the rationalization that dogs the genre. His satire is often very funny indeed, and his side details – the empathic religion, the robot lover that no bounty hunter could bear to kill, the delightful prospect of two androids pulling the legs off an electric spider to see how many it can do without – are engaging. But his plot is weak and a little trivial, his characters are standard constructions, and his style makes the book difficult to read.

**Gerald Bishop: *Vector* no. 53 Spring/Summer 1969 p. 19**

During World War Terminus an unspecified radioactive dust descends on Earth, and the animal population slowly dies off, one species at a time. By 1992 only a small number of species remain.

After the war, most of Earth's population emigrated to other planets. On emigrating they are given an android built to their own special requirements. The job of Rick Deckard, lead character, is to destroy androids that have escaped from the colonized planets and returned to Earth.

This has some interesting ideas, such as religion based on the life of Wilbur Mercer, a supposed immortal; and also the idea of the 'mood organ.'

**Richard E. Geis: *Science Fiction Review* no. 33 (October 1969), pp. 28-29**

This is at once a simple and a difficult book to review. Simple: it's about a future bounty hunter who is assigned to "retire" six renegade androids. Difficult: it is about identity, what makes a man human, entropy, reality, and the illusions we must have, the pathetic needs of the ego...on and on.

Philip K. Dick has mastered his tools. He is now verging on artistry in his novels. I think sometimes he plays with the reader. Dick pounces in the opening paragraphs, gets a hold on the reader's attention and interest, and leads him into scenes that demand thought, self-examination, analysis...then into confusion...then into reality that seems on one page to be solid, and on another page to be quicksand.

Rick Deckard and his wife Iran are not happily married. They live in a world of slow death from radioactive dust that hides the sun in a haze. A world war is past and mankind faces extinction. Most animal and insect life is gone, life is sacred, and the status of a man or a corporation is in the possession of an animal or animals...alive...and not fake-electric imitations that hopefully fool the neighbors.

Deckard and his wife live in an apartment in which the three most important items are a Penfield mood organ, a religious "empathy" device, and a television set.

The first three pages of the book are tragic, pathetic and frightening as Dick savagely and satirically shows the emptiness and despondency of Iran Deckard's life and how she copes -- with the settings of the mood organ: 481 -- Awareness of the manifold possibilities open to me in the future; 888 -- The desire to watch TV no matter what's on it; 594 -- Pleased acknowledgement of husband's superior wisdom in all matters....

They live in an apartment house only one-third occupied. The suburbs are falling into ruin, abandoned except for isolated mental defectives.

Rick must wear a lead codpiece to protect his genetic purity.

There are colonies on Mars which are marginal. People are urged to emigrate.

Near-perfect androids are manufactured to work on Mars but they often rebel and kill their human masters, steal a spaceship and come to earth to "pass" as human. They have to be hunted and killed...not killed, retired.

The androids have no feeling of empathy for each other, as humans do. The police scientists have a polygraph-type of test which can detect this lack of empathy. But the android manufacturers keep making improved models with better, smarter brains...

One of the new Nexus 6 androids has succeeded in killing the San Francisco Police Department's senior bounty hunter. Rick Deckard is next in line for the job. He must find and kill six androids...

This book is multi-leveled, fascinating, baffling, suspenseful, always absorbing.

Yet the loose ends bother me: it is not explained how the police know where all the androids are and what occupation the androids have adopted; how the empathy religion, Mercerism, works to create the illusion of

reality, and how a cut from a thrown stone in the Mercer trance is transformed into a real cut when the Mercerite releases the handles of the empathy box; how the dying culture and shrinking economy of the city can have so many small evidences of thriving "business-as-usual" life, including constructing new buildings when so many must be vacant; why spaceship theft is so easy for androids.

There is in this Dick book, as in others of his, a vague feeling that his worlds are stage set, thin papier-mâché, backdrops.

Why would anyone plant an electric toad in the middle of a dessert near the Oregon border?

Read the book and try to figure it out....

## **UBIK**

**P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog* October 1969, p. 174-75.**

Philip K. Dick seems to be the Van Vogt of the "new" cycle of major science fiction writers. Like Van Vogt, he has done a few extremely good books -- "The Man in the High Castle" is his "Slan" -- and many others that are less memorable but not at all forgettable. Like Van Vogt, he has adopted the pattern of extreme wheels-within-wheels ploy complexity, in which nobody knows from page to page what is going on and who is on whose side. He usually resolves the tangle better than Van Vogt does, or did, but not in this case.

In the beginning, we have a future industrial espionage yarn unfolding nicely but conventionally. Telepaths and other psi-talented people have an obvious value when it comes to reading trade secrets from people's minds, seeing through solid walls, and so on. Runciter Associates is a kind of counter-espionage organization whose employees can neutralize the psi fields of the spies. Several of the country's top telepaths have vanished, and Runciter is determined to find them. He thinks he has, when a team is hired for a neutralizing job on the Moon. They go there -- and are killed. But the story is just beginning.

You have to read this yourself to untangle it, and I'm not sure you will then. I'm not at all sure I have. At first sight, Runciter was killed and the team members are under some kind of attack that destroys them one by one. But things happen that suggest they are dead or in some sort of fantastic limbo, where a live Runciter is trying to reach and rescue them. Time keeps shifting strangely and unpredictable. And there is the patent medicine called "Ubik," which seems able to arrest the change but changes itself.

Maybe I'm just not with it anymore. Call this the most psychedelic of Dick's books...or one that got away from him.

**Richard E. Geis: *Science Fiction Review* #32 (August 1969): p. 30.**

This novel is one of THOSE...engrossing, unputdownable, fascinating, baffling. I haven't enjoyed a book so much in years

Here is Philip K. Dick manipulating reality again; this time in the world of half-life in the minds of people frozen soon after death. It is not a placid inner world, and not not placid for the reasons you might think.

There are psi elements, time regression elements, a psychotic entity which...

No, I won't give it away. The novel is a literary dance of the seven veils; as each puzzling veil falls more is understood, and then more; there are reversals, hints, and there is a brief sight of the golden truth, and deliberate teasing, and finally...finally...understanding is there naked --

-- and it goes poof in the last six paragraphs as Dick strikes again!

Ubik stands for ubiquitous, but that's no clue at all... or is it? The book defies plot encapsulation. Read it. Read it!

**Ron Goulart: *Venture Science Fiction* November 1969, p. 105**

Although he plots with a fairly rigid formula, most of Phil Dick's books are impossible to summarize or explain. They are enjoyable events, like Marx Bros. Movies and Lenny Bruce monologues, and this is one of the better ones. Dick does pretty well with short stories, too, and Ace has issued a fat collection of them titled *The Preserving Machine*.

## ***Galactic Pot-Healer***

**P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog* March 1970, p. 168**

No, Waldo... Mr. Dick is not urging a "pot" centered society upon us. The pots that Joe Fernwright "heals" are the things that grandma used to call "crocks" when she made pickle in them, and Aunt Sophie called "vahses" when she used them for bouquets, and archeologists use to support vast hypotheses of human and cultural flux. Joe just fixes pots – better than new – in a crazy future Welfare State. Then a vastly ancient shape-changing monster from far, far, far beyond anywhere hires him and a shipload of other specialists to raise a pagan temple out of the sea on a bizarre world.

The whole thing is fascinating in a surrealistic sort of way, but never as believable as – for instance – Samuel Delaney or Avram Davidson would make it. The pot healer and other technicians never get a chance to do their stuff, so there is never any logic to their having been selected. They do serve another purpose, but that seems to be pure luck. If there is deep significance anywhere, I missed it.

**Michael Kenward: *Vector* no. 55 Spring 1970 p. 15**

Peddling Pot

*Galactic Pot-healer*, by Philip K. Dick, (Berkley 60 cents) is not another story about the drug scene. It is about Joe Fernwright, an unemployed mender of ceramic pots. He gets involved with the Glimmung and ends up joining a project to raise a cathedral from the watery depths of Plowman's Planet.

But the adventure is not the most important event in the life of the pot healer. Far more important to Joe Fernwright is his search for a meaningful life, away from the overcrowding and the war vet's dole in Cleveland-no-longer-Ohio in the year 2046

## ***Our Friends from Frolix-8***

**Jan M. Evers: *Luna Monthly* #24/25 (May/June 1971), p. 46**

Dick has created a society based on new forms of men, Specials and Unusuals, who rule, or the Old Men. Unusuals are the next step in evolution so to speak, and have greater capacity for dealing with abstract concepts. Specials have special talents, such as telepathy. Old Men are plain ordinary humans, and are getting the short end of the stick. Alcohol is banned, with various tranquilizers taking its place. There are detention camps on Luna for malcontent Old Men who refuse to obey the superior New Men. Into this steps Provonii, intent on helping Old Men get their chance too, even if this means bringing help -- help from a far off planet.

This book has more logic and cohesion than most of Dick's work. The plot is well structured. He does a lot of scene and point-of-view shifting, as usual, but it's easier to follow. The sense of continuous reality is better. This is less trippy, more down to earth, yet with many far-out ideas. This is a readable and entertaining book.

## ***The Maze of Death***

**David C. Paskow: *Luna Monthly* #26/27 (July/August 1971), p. [?]**

Delmark-O is the location for a colony of Earth people but, after the assemblage is met, communications are terminated and, in much the same manner of the people in Agatha Christie's "Ten Little Indians," people begin to die, murdered by assailant or assailants unknown. A psychosis seems to have taken hold in the colony; not knowing why they have been selected or what purpose lies behind the colony itself, fear and distrust fills an already tense atmosphere.

Philip K. Dick has mixed weird personalities, sex, drugs and religion (once again) and produced an irritating, frustrating, highly entertaining, almost impossible to put down novel (once again). This won't be classed as an IMPORTANT Dick novel, but it should be read (and bought, in paperback).

## ***We Can Build You***

**Theodore Sturgeon: *Galaxy* January 1973, pp. 173-74**

...*We Can Build You* proves for all time that: 1) Philip K. Dick is overwhelmingly competent and capable and might -- probably will -- produce a major novel and that: 2) this isn't it. I base the first on his handling of his characters, who are consistently and warmly recognizable even in their stubborn irrationalities, on the boldness and provocation of his themes and his side remarks, on the richness of his auctorial background and the sparkles of laughter finger-flicked all over his work. I base the second on his willingness to pursue some collateral and fascinating line at the expense -- and even the abandonment -- of his central theme, which was (or so in the book he told me) the manufacture of exact simulacra of any human being and the impact of this development on humanity. The pursuit, in and out of the fringes of insanity, of an obsessive love affair had me laughing and crying, but Dick and I were both conned, weakwilled as dieter gobbling hot fudge sundaes, into this delight instead of going about our business.

## ***Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said***

**Paul Walker: *Luna Monthly* #51 (Spring 1974), p. 13**

I could not read Philip K. Dick's new novel, *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* either. I never thought I could say that about anything by Philip K. Dick, but I found the first sixty pages of the novel dated, pretentious, and boring. Of course, I should have seen it coming: since, I believe, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich*, it was evident Dick was losing his sense of humor; that unique and peculiar irony of his, that sense of cosmic comedy that made his dark visions so entertaining at the same time they were scaring the daylights out of me. The visions have become more psychotic, their consequences nastier, his sociology bitter and cynical, until now I find his books very ugly, ridden with despair and spiteful feelings. *Flow My Tears* is a sixties novel full of juvenile paranoia, of spite and hate against society, and a most unpleasant novel to read. It is the story of a famous TV personality who is equally famous as a lady's man. One night, on the verge of "getting away from it all" with his girlfriend, he is almost murdered by a former sweetheart, and wakes the next morning to find his 'identity' gone; that is, his ID cards, his show, any memory his friends or associates had of him; he cannot even verify the date of his birth. And in his near-future world in which blacks have almost been exterminated, and students live in underground colleges, and the 'pols' and the 'nats' patrol the surface, jailing anyone without the proper papers in forced labor camps, Dick's protagonist is completely at the mercy of his time. How he survives and attempts to re-establish his identity is the story as far as I could bear it.

Aside from the paranoid social background, the story moves at a snail's pace, with talk-talk-talk. If it got better halfway through, I could not care less. To me the most important part of a book is the first third: if a novel does not engage the reader's attention and sympathies by then, the writer does not deserve a second chance; and Dick so thoroughly alienated me I am not even curious how it all came out.

**Richard Geis: *The Alien Critic* #9 (May 1974), p. 40**

The new Philip K. Dick novel from Doubleday, FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID, is very good, in the usual Dick fractured, warped, out-of-phase reality mode.

But this time, at the end, he lets the reader and the hero stay on real, solid ground. Also, I detect a new (or at least obvious) element of political advocacy/viewing --with-alarm...which is probably a result of his experiences with the secret police of America in the past few years. (See his long letter in TAC #6.) (\$6.95)

**E.H.: *Psychology Today* June 1974, p. 112**

One day in 1988, the nation's top TV star wakes up to find himself unknown. No one has heard of him, there is no record of birth, he has no identification to show the omnipresent police. In *Flow My tears, the Policeman Said*. (Doubleday, \$6.95), Philip K. Dick has written a proficient tale of an America taken over by data banks and bureaucrats. College students and professors have been ruthlessly separated from society, as a former advocate of law-and-order once proposed. In this dark future, all blacks are sterilized after the birth of their first child. By the time the hero finds himself an unperson, blacks are an endangered species, treated much as the whooping crane is today. But the sociological comment is only background; the real problem is whether Jason Taverner is the victim of a plot or a skid-row bum who dreams that he is a TV star. A recommended slide toward solipsism.

**P. Schuyler Miller: *Analog* December 1974 pp. 167-68**

Here is Philip K. Dick making like A.E. van Vogt of the "Null A" days, and doing it very well.

Jason Taverner, star of one of 1988's top TV shows, goes to the hospital after a cast-off starlet has attacked him with an ordinarily deadly Callisto cuddle-sponge -- and wakes up in a fleabag hotel, stripped of every bit of identification but with a wad of money in his pocket. Little by little he finds that he doesn't exist. Nobody has heard of him or his show. His friends have never seen him. There are no records of his birth or life in the files of one of the nastiest police states you could ever ask to see. He uses his money to buy a set of forged ID cards -- and is promptly betrayed to the police.

Now the focus changes, and we see the Taverner enigma from the point of view of the police. There *can't* be a man in their world for whom there are no records. If some tremendously potent underground agency can extract every mention of a man from a nation's files, they want to find it and smash it -- fast, the way they would treat the "students" who burrow under the ruins of the old universities, or the unreliaables who die in labor camps. But Taverner is helped to escape...and the nightmare begins.

I admit I am still not sure just what KR-3, the police laboratories' multiple space inclusion drug, has done. Is the world where Taverner doesn't exist a hallucination of the poisoned TV star...or is his success a pipe dream of the nobody in the flophouse? What are the people who exist in both worlds, and how can they live mutually exclusive lives and shuttle back and forth between them? How can a woman become a skeleton in moments?

I do not much like the book's Part Four, either. As if he were winding up a Victorian romance, Dick gives us a quick rundown on what happened to every major character and some minor ones. Poor Taverner, of course, has found the police state too much to buck -- or was he a hallucination too? You decide.

**Joanna Russ: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* January 1975, pp. 14-16**

John Brunner's *Total Eclipse* and Philip Dick's *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*. (sic) are hard to assess, since Mr. Brunner can no more be unintelligent than Mr. Dick can lose his feelings for the gritty, chancy irrelevancies of real life. But neither book coheres. *Eclipse* reads like the first draft of a fine novel John Brunner ought to write someday and *Tears* like a beginning that could not find an end with the equivalent of, "He woke up and found it was all a dream."

[...]

*Tears* (also Doubleday's) is non-coherent in the opposite way; Dick apparently starts with the overtones and lets them (when he is at his best, as in *Counter-Clock World*) produce their own, organically whole plot.\* *Tears* is best in its digressions and at its periphery and weakest at the center; the genetically special hero is a very unconvincing superman who in fact has only his charm (and perpetually bad judgement). The theme of finding out what life is like among the proles (i.e. losing your money and power) is God-awfully stale, nor does the author really care about it, and his attempt at the end -- I mean I *think* so -- to replace the hero's second reality by a third, only piles up inconsistencies and unanswered questions instead of attacking our very perceptions of reality. Some of the digressions are fine by any standards; for example the telepathic clerk in a cheap motel who says cheerfully, "I know this hotel isn't much, but we have no bugs. Once we had Martian sand fleas, but no more"; Monica Buff who is a compulsive shoplifter, with a big wicker bag she got in Baja California once, and who never wears shoes or washes her hair (she's only talked about!); Ruth Rae (something of a character herself) tells a marvelous story about the pet rabbit ("lipperty-lipperty) who wanted to be a cat; the agreeable



Jesus-Freak cop who answers Ruth Rae's frightened, "I *hate* L.A." (she's being arrested) with an earnest, "So do I. But we must learn to live with it; it's there." The most brilliant character in the book is a waif named Kathy, all innocence and psychotic emotional blackmail, who has violent temper tantrums in which she goes rigid and screams (she calls them "mystical trances") and who allows the author to render with frightening verisimilitude what happens when you try to tightrope-walk with a skillful, vicious, grown-up eight-month old. Unfortunately the book also has failures like Alys Buckman, who is a Lesbian *and* married to her brother *and* a drug freak *and* an unidentified "fetishist" (she wears tight pants, a leather shirt, hoop earrings, and a chain-link belt), *and* a sadist (her stiletto-heeled boots are hardly Lesbian), *and* an electronic-sex addict *and* lobotomized in some way never clearly described, *and* a collector of "bondage" photos (another male specialty). In short, she is pure *diabola ex machina*, a male fantasy of a macho, homosexual, leather S&M freak projected on to a woman.\*\* The Epilog is unfortunately like a cartoon *Punch* once printed: author-at-typewriter with the caption "'The hell with it.' Several shots rang out and they all fell dead. The End.'" In any other profession *Tears* would be called good, sometimes fascinating, example of overwork and the prolific author would be pensioned generously for several years in order to mellow and recuperate.

\**Counter-Clock World* is built on the dichotomy of the Hobart Effect, i.e. the physical resurrection of the dead, and the deaths of almost everyone you care about in the book -- as a line of poetry (which is quoted more than once) says, "It is the lives, the lives, the lives that die."

\*\* John Rechy, a homosexual author, has a character very like this in one of his recent books and C.S. Lewis's Fairy Hardcastle in *That Hideous Strength* is another. If a woman can't be a lady, she automatically becomes Marlon Brando in "the Wild Ones." Pfeh. See other recent stories about hairy, muscled Women's Libbers (yeah) who smoke cigars (chomp) and cut up men (help!).

### **Cy Chauvin: *Delap's F&SF Review July 1975*, pp. 17-18**

This is Philip K. Dick's first new novel in over three years (the hardcover edition was published last year by Doubleday). It deals with Dick's typical themes, but with enough apparent freshness for it to be nominated for a Hugo award this year as Best Novel.

Jason Taverner, a tv star in the year 1988, wakes up and finds himself completely unknown. His friends find him a stranger, and no one recognizes him at all. More than that, he does not even legally exist -- there is no record of his birth in the central computer banks. The book details his struggles to come to terms with this situation.

"I've lost the ability to tell what's good or bad, true or not true, anymore," says Taverner, in a statement that would make a fit epithet for the novel. Taverner is never sure who is for or against him, and as in all Dick's novels, **Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said** has strong elements of paranoia. Taverner himself is neither hero nor anti-hero, and while he attempts to solve his problem, it is not through his own efforts that he achieves success.

The background is more sketchy than in most of Dick's novels, and lacks the clever details -- e.g., talking suitcases, self-propelled shopping carts -- that are such a unique hallmark of his fiction. Dick's prose is not really much better than that of a middling journalist, but then it has rarely been more than work-a-day.

The book's major flaw, however, lies in Dick's explanation of how Taverner woke up one morning without an identity. According to the author, he passed over into another universe that didn't previously exist, due to the effect of a drug on another character. "Taverner, like the rest of us, became another datum in your sister's percept system and got dragged across when she passed into an alternative construct of coordinates," one of the characters explains.

Yet the attentive reader will certainly wonder how a drug taken by a single person can affect the minds of thirty million others (the total viewers of Taverner's tv show), or transport Taverner physically from a hospital to a dingy hotel room. I can see no possible way for a drug to alter the perceptions of anyone besides the user. If the drug had been sprayed into the air or water, or if Taverner had taken the drug himself, Dick's explanation might be sensible. As it stands, the book makes very little sense at all.

Logic has never been one of Philip K. Dick's strengths, however, and his writing appears to have undergone little change during his three year absence.

## **Philip K. Dick: *Electric Shepherd***

**Angus Taylor: *Foundation* no. 10 (June 1976), p. 124-25**

... For the student of Dick, however, the most valuable pieces in this book are the contributions of Dick himself: two letters and the text of "The Android and the Human" a speech delivered in Vancouver in 1972. In these two short letters Dick shows that he is well aware of the themes underlying his work, and gives us a concise statement of his view of the construction and destruction of reality as a function of social organization in an unorganized universe. "Reality" here is something quite specific -- susceptible of definition and investigation. There is the entropic reality of the physical universe and there is the negentropic reality of the social universe. But above all it is the ability and responsibility of the individual human being that Dick affirms - reality as a human creation, as distinct from the common experience of reified reality. As he says in the Vancouver speech:

I have never had too high a regard for what is generally called "reality". Reality, to me is not so much something that you perceive, but something you make. You create it more rapidly than it creates you. Man is the reality God created out of dust; God is the reality man creates continually out of his compassion, his own determination. "Good", for example --that is not a quality or even a force in the world or above the world, but what you do with bits and pieces of meaningless, puzzling, disappointing and even cruel and crushing fragments all around us that seem to be pieces left over, discarded, form another world entirely that did, maybe, make sense.

This other world is Dick's ideal, organized, humanely constructed realm of the spirit -- of God, not transcendent, external, or above the world, but immanent, the full expression of the human potential. It is on this level that Dick the political scientist/sociologist merges with Dick the religious prophet, for if we recognize in his work the concept of immanent divinity, then the religious and the political dimensions need not conflict. When humanity is God, then politics is religion. The struggle for ideal social relations is the struggle of mankind toward its Godhood. By penetrating the mystifications of various anti-human political orders, humanity can hope to organize the relations among its parts in an ideal, liberating manner, and thus manifest its divine, truly *human* nature.

## ***Deus Irae***

**Richard E. Geis: *Science Fiction Review* #19 (August 1976), pp. 19**

DEUS IRAE, an ambitious collaboration by Philip K. Dick and Roger Zelazny (Doubleday, \$5.95), is...beyond me on the religious level, beyond the obvious ironic ending that shows the lies that buttress and often foundation the faiths of men live by. There is a great deal of comment, self-questioning, trotting out of believer/non-believer perspectives and psychology. There is erudition. On one level I'm respectful, and on another I mutter, "Christ, this sort of thing has been thrashed out again and again and again for eons. Why again? Why do these two heavy science fictional talents feel the need to restate the obvious, to retread this old, old tire?"

I'll grant they do it very well, in the body of a fascinating pilgrimage by one Tibor McMaster, an armless, legless painter in the post-Smash world of extreme mutants and isolated small cities in North America. He is on a journey to find and photograph (for a church mural he is painting in Charlottesville, Utah) the face of the worshipped God of Wrath -- a still living man named Carleton Lufteufel, former head of ERDA, the man who gave the order to drop the Bombs....

The still hanging-on Christian Church is interested in discrediting the ascendant God, and Tibor has a friend/enemy tracking him... There is a hunter out to find and kill the God... There are the strange mutants Tibor meets on the way... The Goulart-like robots and computers (time and shortages have addled their brains)...

It should be noted that Tibor is travelling on a specially made cart pulled by a cow, and that he has powered mechanical arms.

There is hope and redemption at the end, a spiritual upbeat, caused by...well, ambiguity raises its fuzzy head for me here. I was taken aback by the ghost of *Lufteufel* and by the fantasy science. The novel is science fiction only because of its label and its use of standard sf furniture. But sf has many corners, and why not one marked Spiritual SF? Robert Silverberg is not the only one who can write this variety.

There are sections which show the hand of Phil Dick, and sections which betray the strong style of Roger Zelazny. (I particularly liked the satirical mutated human 'bugs' who worship their god named Veedoubleyou. There are many pranks like that.)

I don't know if this is a good book or not. It's sure as hell different, and it kept me reading (with raised eyebrows, but with interest). It has something for everybody but the hard science types.

### **Joe Sanders: *Delap's F& SF Review* February 1977, pp. 17-18**

A few years after World War III, the world is largely depopulated. The survivors, tormented by various war-spawned diseases and deformities, try to pull themselves into a livable social and personal order. One outcome of the war's traumas is the Sons of Wrath sect, which holds that a god who would permit such horror must be the God of Wrath rather than love. They worship the government scientist directly responsible for the horror weapons used in the war. One SOW church has commissioned Tibor McMasters, a limbless mural painter, to portray the angry god, but the church hierarchy insists he must seek out the scientist himself to use as a living model.

This much of the novel, according to Ted White in *Algo!* (Winter 1976), was written by Dick over ten years ago, then put aside. I can see why. The setting is graphically unpleasant; the characters are gropingly, earnestly real; the writing is straightforward but full of complex resources; it's pretty good Dick. But it doesn't seem to lead into immediate or easily-resolved action.

Tibor McMasters is very reluctant to start on his pilgrimage, so he visits the local Christian minister, Dr. Abernathy, in search of council and a graceful way to abandon the search. So they talk. Pete Sands, a young Christian acolyte, takes drugs in search of Truth. He has a vision of God. They talk. Pete describes this experience to Dr. Abernathy; they talk about it. All of this is *good* talk, realistic-feeling conversation that presents the characters vividly and sets up striking ideological problems. However, it doesn't suggest that the problems can be solved by the razzle-dazzle burst of action and mysticism that actually concludes this book.

To do justice to the opening of **Deus Irae** would have to be much longer, richer, more fully worked out novel. It would have to take Tibor (and others?) through the pilgrimage and show what he discovered, how it changed him. But this would have been extremely difficult to do, calling for a major effort of imagination and character exploration. Perhaps Dick felt unsure of the results, unsure it would be worth the investment of labor.

The remainder of the story bears the mark of Zelazny's witty, impatient intelligence. The characters spend much less time talking; they act. Things happen fast, in terse snatches. Some of that is appropriate to the fact that Tibor is traveling on his pilgrimage, no longer confined in one place. And some of the inventions in the last part of the novel are fine: The Great C, a surviving computer that sends female extensors to prowl the ruins, looking for humans to drop into an acid vat; the mad Russian autofact that showers Pete with pogo sticks; the God of Wrath confronts the rats. These bits are quite striking. Zelazny is extremely adept at creating situations in which action is more important than reflection, in which characters can work out their problems by decisive physical effort.

But in **Deus Irae** the change of direction does mean that some vital thing gets lost. For one, too many characters from the book's opening are forgotten, and too many of those who remain seem over-simplified and manipulated. The recovery of spiritual health that ends the story seems forced and unsupported by the action. It's approximately as profound as, "If everyone would light one little candle, what a bright world this would be." And there is no psychological freshness that might have made such an assertion convincing.

Too bad. This strange collaboration fights against itself, rather than permitting the writers' talents to complement each other. It's a novel to wish on: that Dick had finished the book with the same concentration he began it; or that Zelazny had conceived the idea himself and shaped the plot to his skills. **Deus Irae** doesn't give either man the chance to really do well the things he can do best.

## ***A Scanner Darkly***

**Richard E. Geis: *Science Fiction Review* #20 (February 1977), p. 53**

"Philip K. Dick's *A SCANNER DARKLY*, issued by Doubleday at \$6.95, made more interesting because of what Phil had to say about the book in the SFR #19 interview. It's a well-written novel about drug addiction and the dealer/user/narc underground"

"And, it isn't science fiction, in a true sense; it's a translation. The 1986 time-frame, the Substance D drug, the advanced spy devices employed...these are not essential to the plot.

"But it is a terrifying novel, Geis, in the subtle destructiveness of the drugs, in the self-destruction, and the horrible end-justifies-the-means plot of the Federal narcs.

"Better believe it. Phil Dick was a "hero" of sorts to the sf fans who were into drugs, but this book will cool that ardor; he has seen too many friends turn into mental basket cases, and this book is his warning. It has elements of Kafka and Orwell. Recommended."

**Spider Robinson: *Galaxy* August 1977, pp. 142-43**

I understand this latest Phil Dick novel, *A Scanner Darkly*, is the first he's written without the aid of speed, and appropriately enough it's largely a dialectic on the ruinous cost of prolonged drug abuse. There's a dedication at the end to fifteen friends of Dick's who've destroyed themselves with dope, listing the extent of damage each incurred (seven are dead, three are permanently psychotic, like that) – Dick calls this drug misuse "a social error... not different from your life-style, it is only faster." "If," he says, "there was any 'sin,' it was that these people wanted to keep on having a good time forever, and were punished for that, but as I say, I feel that, if so, the punishment was far too great and I prefer to think of it only in a Greek or morally neutral way, as mere science, as deterministic impartial cause-and-effect."

The "sin," I think, was that these people wanted to be able to keep on having a good time forever *by pushing a button*, to rip off the Universe for a good time without paying for it. The "punishment" for this error has *always* been as drastic, and is *not* great, and cause-and-effect is *anything* but morally neutral.

That tirade aside, the *book* ain't exactly terrific either. It's the some times fascinating, sometimes hilarious, usually deadly boring story of a federal narc so wasted by the drugs he saturates his brain with that he begins spying on himself, and eventually busts himself. This notion could have made an extraordinary novelette – but only as black humor. What Dick did was waste enormous heaps of paper trying to make it a plausible science fiction novel, thereby destroying it. He sets it in the future, but every time his attention wanders it becomes the present. He throws in a sort of "invisibility suit" which is supposed to make the premise actually possible – if you're willing to believe that the feds hire narcs without ever seeing them or knowing their names – and he adds a lot of pseudoscientific hogwash about the left and right hemispheres of the hero's brain each achieving autonomy, for a *truly* split personality. He end result is madness, but not the divine kind. Along the way you get to watch the background cast who represent Dick's dooper friends wittily and engagingly does themselves into imbecility (a rather short progression), and as the immortal Jethro (of Homer And) once said, "This sure don't fascinate *me* none."

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**Robert Silverberg: *Cosmos* September 1977, p. 39**

Dick's latest novel, *A Scanner Darkly*, is obviously a deeply felt personal memoir, the surprising outcome of his experiences in the California drug culture. In a recent interview he declared: "I believe that *Scanner* is a masterpiece. I believe it is the only masterpiece I will ever write...because it is unique." In fact, the book is a masterpiece of sorts, full of demonic intensity, but it happens also not to be a very successful novel.

It is, let us note, *not* a science fiction novel however it may be packaged when it shows up in paperback. Ostensibly it takes place in 1986 or thereabouts, but except for some peripheral gadgetry it might just as well be happening in Southern California this week, and there is no real extrapolative content that I can see. It is written in trendy 1969 slang and in the peculiarly clotted prose typical of post-1965 Dick. It is populated by a cast of zonked zombies; people without pasts, without futures, and with precious little in the way of present; and sad burned-out junkies of no redeeming social purpose except as object lessons on the evils of dope. The book is a tract: its characters indulge in hard drugs, lose their grip, and go under, meeting horrid dooms. At times, it has the lunatic seriousness of high farce, as in the sequence which involves the synthesizing of cocaine from drugstore sunburn spray. (This is in places a *very* funny book.)

It is full of metaphors of paranoia not to be taken seriously, as when Dick suggests that *all* telephone calls are monitored in taped playback by police officers, a task that would in actuality require a staff of several million full-time agents. It oscillates crazily between these impossibilities and searing insight into the lives of the assorted losers it displays, and though the book is, beyond doubt, something of terrible importance to its author -- a testament, in truth -- it is such a jumble of levels and techniques that it is hard for the reader to share the intensity of its author's feelings, not when he alternates between distancing us and hauling us into the heart of the turmoil. Page by page, it is a dazzling, wildly comic, desperately inventive; but because its characters are going nowhere, the book goes nowhere. Dick thinks he is taking us on a journey through hell, and undoubtedly *he* has been on a journey through hell while preparing himself for writing this novel, but most of the time he's really only fooling around. Although, suddenly in the thirteenth chapter, his protagonist's drug-sodden head finally comes apart and Dick drops all his jittery hasty pop mannerisms and uncorks a dark and somber chapter, enormously powerful and unexpectedly moving, written in straight pure classical prose. It seems almost gratuitously tacked on to what has gone before, but of itself it is a wonder.

And Philip K. Dick is a wonder. His newest novel is a failure, but a stunning failure, and now that so many of his books have returned to print we can see the magnitude of his accomplishment, the true heroism of the man. He has laid himself bare in two dozen novels and a stack of short stories, and has crated a unique, idiosyncratic, instantly recognizable world. He is a great science fiction writer; in his weird fouled-up way he may also just possibly be a great human being.

## ***The Best of Philip K. Dick***

**Barry Malzberg: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* August 1978, pp. 32-33.**

Philip K. Dick, in his Institute essay, talks about his basic theme being the intersection of dreams and reality with, perhaps, dreams being the successful extra point kick. Dick is a very significant writer, rightly regarded as the most important in the history of the genre, but his work in the last ten years has had the self-consciousness of someone paying too much attention to critics and too little to his inner voice. For what it is worth I don't think that Dick's theme was about levels of reality or the controlling aspects of dreams at all until he began to read the blurbs above his stories and fan magazine reviews. I think that Dick, in his creative prime, was really our first and best exponent of craziness.

Science Fiction is a crazy form of literature -- there is no reason why it should be otherwise, and it is impossible to do creative work of any kind in this genre unless one is at least in touch with one's potential for insanity -- and Dick was the first modern writer within the genre to codify it, to give technological weight and heft to madness.

And here, in *The Best of Philip K. Dick*, a good representative collection drawn more of a necessity from the first half of his career (like many of us Dick virtually stopped writing short stories after he found he could sell novels), are all these coins. "Imposter," whose protagonist turns out to unconsciously be the Alien Among Us; "Colony," in which paranoia becomes an entire planet which creates malevolent physical substitutes for those near and dear (I have had that feeling); "Oh, To Be A Blobel!" which, its artifacts stripped, is the ultimate science fiction story about marriage.

There is the craziness, but there was in the early Phil Dick another theme which to the best of my knowledge has never been picked up on in criticism: Dick wrote painfully about near-future war and the integration of war into the social system, and stories like "Foster You're Dead" showed more than a moderate amount of courage for their time, the dark center of the nineteen fifties. If craziness was his second grand theme, war was his first, and in 1966 came time travel... the most recent story in this book and the only short story Dick has published since 1974 is the brilliant paradox story "A Little Something For Us Tempunauts."

Dick has begun to receive his due in recent years. His work is largely back in print, he has been called by a *Rolling Stone* reporter in a major profile "the best living science fiction writer," he is beginning to generate the kind of income and audience he has deserved since at least 1954 and *Solar Lottery*. I think there are limitations to this writer -- for one thing what I once took to be stylistic clumsiness I now think came from the necessity to publish, in essence, first drafts -- but even the limitations are to be celebrated. He has been a

science fiction writer for a quarter of a century and has never, to the best of my knowledge, published a single story out of cynicism or contempt. Ears and a half tail at least.

## ***The Golden Man***

**Thomas Disch: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* July 1980, pp. 46-48**

On some days of the week Philip K. Dick is my favorite science fiction writer, but while I'm in the witness box and under oath I must say that when *he* is bad he, too, is horrid. *The Golden Man* is not without A+ offerings, and no serious reader should flinch from the categorical imperative of buying it: fifteen heretofore uncollected stories spanning the years from 1953 to 1974, with an introduction and notes by the author -- a First Edition, in fact for only \$2.25. However: a lot of the fowl in this book are turkeys. As such, they have a baleful fascination for us loyalists, who must ask ourselves how the germs of Dick's greatness can be discerned in, Lord help us, *this*.

An instance of *this*, from "the Last of the Masters (1954), a hyperkinetic foray into hairy-chested-style huggermugger. Here is the tail-end of its action-packet denouement:

Tolby was heavier. But he was exhausted. He had crawled hours, beat his way through the mountains, walked endlessly. He was at the end of his strength. The car wreck, the days of walking. Green was in perfect shape. His wiry, agile body twisted away. His hands came up. Fingers dug into Tolby's windpipe; he kicked the youth in the groin. Green staggered back, convulsed and bent over with pain. "All right," Green gasped, face ugly and dark. His hand fumbled with his pistol. The barrel came up.

Half of Green's head dissolved. His hands opened and his gun fell to the floor. If that isn't bogus machismo, John Wayne never had cancer. But I suppose we all look silly, we pulp writers of long, long ago, so I shouldn't cast the first stone.

Other stories here resist being liked by virtue of their depressive rather than their manic tendencies. My least favorite, "Precious Artifact" (1964, when Dick was in his novelistic prime), presents the archetypal Dickean situation -- the world as mirage engineered by invading aliens. But the tone is flat and affectless, the supporting detail thin and uninspired, the prose written with a dogged determination to provide a week's groceries. The story's sixteen pages read like sixty -- not because his theme is depressing, but because he is writing with his last three ergs of working energy.

I've written elsewhere, in his praise, that Dick's method relies more than most writers on improvisation. Characters spring to life and seem to behave autonomously. Such a method is easier to employ in novels, where there's more room, but Dick's best stories display a similar scatty sense of design and amplitude of invention. It may be that Dick conserves his best inspiration for his novels -- or else those ideas just grow, like Topsy, into novels while lesser inspirations wither on the vine. Why ever, his ratio of success for short stories has not been as high as for novels, and these stories represent a kind of second or third pressing, having been passed over when his earlier (and better) collections were assembled.

Even so, the book includes a couple of classics. "The Little Black Box" (1964) is a masterful account of Christian conversion as alien invasion; it strikes a Mozartean balance between irony and sympathy. The title story, from 1954, though a degree less quintessential, is a thoroughly implausible though well worked-out account of a superman of the Blond Beat variety. One can't read it without wondering what the results would have been if Dick had freaked out in *that* direction. Jorge Borges goes to Gor!

But he never would or could have. Witness "The King of the Elves" (1953), a fantasy that rivals Well's "Mr. Skelmersdale in Fairyland" for its blend of the banal and the magical. The hero, Shadrach Jones, a filling station attendant, is approached one night by a group of indigent, pathetic Elves. They elect him their king and ask him to lead them to battle against the Trolls, who are, as we all know, taking over everything. Jones is doubly an underdog, the victim not only of his trollish employer but of his minion elves (who represent a kind of Divine Schizophrenia *a la* R.D. Laing). While many underdogs may turn out to be supermen when their secret identity is revealed, Dick's underdogs are too grounded in an observed humanity for fantasies of *resentment* to come to van Vogtian fruition.

The jewel of this book is the introduction, a meditation on the nature of sf and a memoir of his career, in which he tells of grocery-shopping at the Lucky Dog Pet Store and of writing fan letters to Capital Records to prophecy that Linda Ronstadt's next record would be "the beginning of a career unparalleled in the record

industry." He daydreams of the epitaph to be carved on his gravestone in his alternate existence as a talent scout:

HE DISCOVERED LINDA RONSTADT  
AND SIGNED HER UP!

It's that beguiling mixture of bravado and humility that gives his best stories and novels their induplicable air of being centered in something more than an alert intelligence; Dick's fiction seems prophetic, not in the trivial sense of predicting events or trends, but in the Old Testament sense, in the sense that Dante, Blake, and Shelly are prophetic, because they speak from the burning bush of an achieved human wisdom. Readers who feel such claims are not too large will not rejoice greatly in *The Golden Man*, but Dick is of that stature where even his failures merit publication.

## **Valis**

**Baird Searles: *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* March 1981, p. 16**

And speaking of superstitions and theology, there's Philip K. Dick's new novel, *Valis*. Now if there's one thing I dislike more than people telling me their dreams, it's people telling me their drug experiences, particularly the religious ones. I disliked *Valis* a whole lot.

It's written in the first person by a narrator who editorializes a great deal and tells us a lot more than we (or at least I) want to know about a character named Horselover Fat. Early on, we are informed that the narrator and Horselover Fat are one and the same, and it is being written in this way to give "much needed objectivity." Later the narrator refers to several of his (the narrator's) books, such as *The Man in the High Castle* and *A Scanner Darkly*. Make of this what you will.

Horselover Fat has an encounter with God a la St. Paul about which he is writing an endless exegesis, of which we are told all too much. God may, in fact, be an alien or may be Horselover Fat from the far future (as opposed to the near past; Horselover come across as one of those embarrassing hippies left over from two decades ago). Her (they?) encounter a child, daughter of a jet-set rock singer, who may be a computer terminal, or God, or the Wisdom of the World, or... There are lots of quotes from Schopenhauer, Xenophanes, Wordsworth et al., not to mention an eight-page appendix of yet more quotes. Need I go on?

This all may be one big boring joke or it may be meant seriously; it doesn't matter much. *Valis* is embarrassingly, datedly hip, cute, and infinitely tedious, so far as I'm concerned. A major danger to science fiction these days is in its becoming the new mysticism, what with flying saucers, gods' chariots, Bermuda Triangle and all. Writers such as Mr. Dick are not helping matters.

**Thomas M. Disch: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* July 1981, Pp. 36-38**

[While sitting down to review five books, Disch is startled by the sudden appearance of Jesus Christ who has come to Earth to lend a hand in the reviews. After discussing *Jesus Tales* by Romulus Linney the narrative continues:]

Jesus guffawed.

It turned out that Jesus hadn't read Linney's book, so I went on to retell more of the *Jesus Tales*, and threw in a couple of jokes I'd just heard from my brother in Minnesota about Jesus and St. Peter golfing.

"Well, I hope the book as a whole is as good as that sample," said Jesus, in His mellowest humor.

"It's a delight. I intend to give it a rave review. And if You'd like to add a little testimonial of Your own..." I hinted.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly do that. This visit has to be unofficial. That's why I came to you. As a fiction writer, and an sf writer at that, people will assume, if you mention any of this, that you're just making it up. Or --" He smiled slyly, "-- that you've gone off your rocker. Like our friend here --" He tapped His finger on the cover of *Valis*. "Mr. Philip K. Dick."

"Not to change the subject, but do You know the poem by Jacopone da Todi called (I can't remember the Italian) 'It Is the Highest Wisdom To Be Considered Crazy for the Love of Christ'?"

Jesus nodded, and quoted the first line in a rich Tuscan accent: "*Seno me pare e cortesia, empazir per lo bel Messia.*" Then, for my benefit, He translated: "'It's plain good sense and common courtesy to drive yourself crazy for Christ's dear sake."

"Thus spake da Todi, and likewise William Blake," I put in, unable to resist an easy rhyme. "I mentioned that poem because it seems to me that Dick is carrying on in that tradition. Also, like da Todi, and like Blake too, he's aware of the paradoxes involved. He knows he sounds nuts, and the situation fascinates him. There's a passage I underlined on page 26; let me read it to You:

"...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. A theophany consists of a self-disclosure by the divine. It does not consist of something the percipient does; it consists of something the divine -- the God or gods, the high power -- does..."

At that point Dick goes on to speculate how to distinguish between a genuine theophany and a hallucination. And of course there is no certain way to distinguish, unless God discloses some information that one couldn't possibly know by any other means. Which is rarely, if ever, the case."

Jesus nodded. "Yes, that's the basic theory We have to work on. What would become of human freedom if everyone knew for a fact that heaven is always, as it were, on patrol? The Age of Miracles is over."

"Except in novels. In novels (as in Scripture) miracles are easy to arrange. But the peculiar fascination of *Valis* is that for much of its length it's not exactly a novel. Dick did have his own honest-to-God theophany back in 1974, and on the one occasion I met him, sometime afterward, he gave me an account of that experience that follows the 'plot' of *Valis* fairly closely."

"And did you believe him?" Jesus asked.

"I believe that *he* believed that he'd been in touch with something supernatural. I was a bit envious, having never had a theophany of my own. Until," I thought to add, "this afternoon.

Jesus smiled enigmatically.

"I hope Dick won't think I'm betraying his confidence mentioning that. He's discussed the same experience in his interview in Charles Platt's *Dream Makers*, and in *Valis* itself the hero is called 'Philip K. Dick,' though he also appears in the form of an alter ego called 'Horselover Fat' (which is his own name, rendered from Greek and German). The fascination of the book, what's most artful *and* confounding about it, is the way the line between Dick and fat shifts and wavers, Dick representing the professional novelist who understands that all these mystic revelations are his own novelistic revelations, while Fat is the part of him that receives, for a while, and believes a little longer, messages from ... You, Lord."

"Oh, I'm not the half of it in *Valis*. Wagner, Ikhnaton, UFOs, the Roman Empire, Richard Nixon -- they all are conflated into one thick Jungian stew. When I do appear in person, I've been transmogrified into a two-year-old girl."

"Hm, that was a good scene."

"And the book as a whole? Do you honestly think Dick has made a *novel* of that mish-mash of theology and pseudo-science? You, the esthete, the skeptic, the Doubting Thomas!"

"I'll admit that as a novel, as a *whole* novel, I thought it went off the rails sometimes. But the first half holds together wonderfully, considering how much there is to be held together. If you read it as a realistic, confessional novel, in the sad-mad-glad vein of Plath's *The Bell Jar* or (better) Persig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, *Valis* scores, oh let's say 8.416 on a scale of 10. Even its wilder flights of fancy fall into place, not as a system of belief to be considered on its merits, but as components of the self being confessed. Dick has always had the most hyperkinetic imagination in science fiction. His plots have often played elaborate games with the mechanics of suspended belief. In those ways *Valis* is the next logical step. Where it went wrong, for me, is when Dick, Fat and their friends go off to see a movie called *Valis*. *Valis*-the-movie is a bore, and it is also, significantly, the moment when the book shifts from a confessional, psychological mode in to sf. That is, the world of the novel ceases to be the world of everyday common



consensus and begins to conform to Horselover Fat's imaginings. Suddenly the dialectic tightrope goes slack, and Dick almost falls into the net. But not quite. In fact, his recovery is masterful."

From your description of *Valis*, Thomas, I don't think its own author would recognize it. I think Mr. Dick is more than half-persuaded that his syncretistic ruminations -- that long Appendix he calls *Tractates Cryptica Scriptura* -- are God's truth. I think, in short, that he is a heretic!"

### **Algis Budrys: *Fantasy & Science Fiction* August 1981, pp. 52-53**

Philip K. Dick, for instance. The chapter on Dick [in Charles Platt's *Dream Makers*] is a wow. It wasn't acid he was on while writing *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* and all those other loopy 1960s novels. It was amphetamines, and it was amphetamines because, he says, he needed the speed to produce at a rate that would keep up with his then-wife's ability to spend money. (This is fascinating to me because in every other case I've heard of, speed *slows*; it produces logorrhea, all right, but produces over-meticulousness, too). After a while -- after that slew of books, and in the last increments of that failing marriage -- a peculiar light suffused Dick's world, and a voice began to speak in his mind.

It began by diagnosing a hidden potentially fatal congenital defect in his child. It instructed him to fire his literary agent, showed him moves that enabled him to collect a slew of overdue royalties, and changed his drinking habits. IT systematically re-ordered his world, and his view of the world. At about this time -- I'm not sure of the exact chronology -- his cat and dog died of multiple tumors, possibly induced by radiation from the light, but were making attempts to communicate with him before they died. And then the voice began telling Dick about the avatars of the Savior and the nature of reality. For example, much of the Christian Era is false time, inserted into the world by malefic forces. We are actually only a comparative handful of years past the birth of Christ, and there is nowhere near as much physical distance as we might think between the Mediterranean area and California.

I was saying these were not things we might say face-to-face. But actually Dick has put all this into a novel -- *Valis*, his first novel in four years, a Bantam paperback original. He's not sure what the voice was. It might have been God. It might have been a Vast Active Living Intelligence System. It's gone now as an everyday companion, but the effects of its visit linger, and *Valis* is the semifictionalized account of its doings.

Taken as a novel, it has its drawbacks. Philip K. Dick is in it as a character. As a character, he has the delusion that he has an acquaintance named Horselover fat, to whom most of the adventures happen. Actually, Fat is Dick. (As he points out, "Philip" is derived from the Greek word for horse-lover" and "dick" is German for "fat.") Dick and Fat eventually merge, briefly, and sanity returns to their lives, but that doesn't last. A new Savior is born, probably, as a girl child. But that doesn't last. A number of other purely arbitrary things happen, and seems to have no storytelling purpose.

As a tract, it's a whizbang. The purpose of the book appears to be to convey a series of epigrams on the nature of reality. It concludes with an appendix repeating the epigrams. These are just sufficiently convoluted and confabulatory to make excellent material for a new, short, Holy Book. They are absolutely choc-a-bloc with all the enigma required to support a worldwide, millennia-long, prophetic religion replete with exegetic enterprises and rife for multiple schism. It's a sure bet Dick has founded a mystic cult with this effort. If it turns out to be an enduring and universal one, won't L. Ron Hubbard be jealous.

## ***The Divine Invasion***

### **Tom Easton: *Analog* December 7, 1981, pp. 96-97**

In the end, Philip K. Dick's **The Divine Invasion** affirms the role of free will in a universe dictated by God. But on the way to that end! Dick repeats many of the themes of his last book, *Valis*, even to the knowledgeable beam of pink light, as he tells us of a God who, exiled, must return to Earth doubly enwombed, woman-borne, spaceship borne, to fight the devil who has ruled our planet for two millennia.

"There was a rupturing of the Godhead. A primordial schism. That's the basis of it all, the trouble, these conditions here, Belial and the rest of it. A crisis that caused part of the Godhead to fall; the

Godhead split and some remained transcendent and some ...became abased. Fell with creation, fell with the world. *The Godhead has lost touch with a part of itself.*" (italics Dick's)

A brain-damaged, imperfect God Who must learn compassion. The Torah as heroine. Humanity as battleground. The primordial nature of the split personality. Dick is vitally concerned with making sense of the human condition. In this he resembles the greats of classical literature. Like them, he uses metaphor and personifications to turn abstractions into highly readable and provocative stories. But like them again, he borrows his points -- he says nothing we cannot recognize in the weaker or more academic arguments of predecessors and contemporaries, and we do wish for more philosophical originality.

Or perhaps we can say that Dick's philosophical originality lies in his contrast to the depressing stories I mentioned before. He is optimistic. He has faith in a future worth living. And where other SF writers play their games in the head -- even Ellison does this, really --- he plays in the soul, the heart of hearts. He must be horribly shocking to True believers, though I doubt they read him.

## ***Radio Free Albemuth***

**Byron Coley: *Force Exposure* no. 10 (1986), p. 110.**

...this is the legendary "Valisystem A" manuscript -- that is, the complete bk that was later disassembled and rebuilt as a different bk called "Valis." It is a heaping pile of great stuff. Technically, Dick's writing was entering a whole new phase of mastery when he died and his ideas about how man is able to fuck over his fellow man was entering a similarly heightened plane. In this bk, Dick writes of his "pink light experience" and its complications in terms of their potential political meaning more than in terms of their potential religious meaning. Of course it may turn out that the political conspiracy here (which is of Illuminati-esque proportions) actually has plenty to do with god-incarnate. Wonderfully written, this is an excellent study of the collapse of Sixties-style radical politics in relation to fascism, religion and you. It also has about as much to do with science fiction as my shoe. Please read it.

## ***Gather Yourselves Together***

**Paul Di Filippo: *Asimov's Science Fiction* June 1995, pp. 164-165**

I live with a person who does not know Philip K. Dick as an SF writer at all. Having read only his posthumously published mainstream novels, she thinks of him, perhaps, as a little-known but talented contemporary and colleague of, say, the young John Barth. Her PKD is a quirky anatomizer of fifties angst, a metaphysician of the soul of California suburbia, a drainer of the algae-scummed swimming pools and psyches of that frozen-in-time Lotusland.

Talk about your alternate realities!

Now, thanks to Andy Watson, publisher of WCS Books, my mate Deborah (and you lucky folks too) can read what is believed to be Dick's first novel, heretofore unpublished: *Gather yourselves Together* (hardcover, \$40.00, 291 pages; order through eyeball Books, PO Box 18549, Ashville, NC 28814). This beginner's novel, although relatively simple and unpolished compared to later works, will only cement Dick's reputation as a compassionate genius whose native mainstream narrative impulses were frustrated by an inhospitable marketplace.

*Gather* features a limited cast: Verne Tildon, Barbara Mahler, and Carl Fitter are three employees of "the Company," a mining firm with interest in China. Left behind in the wake of the 1949 Communist takeover, custodians of an enormous overseas plant, the trio is absolved of duties and finally free to workout the psychodramas incipient among them, in a locale that at first covertly, then explicitly, calls up Dick's familiar post-apocalyptic shattered Edens. Verne and Barbara, having had an unsatisfactory affair years ago back in the States, struggle with the emotional residue. Young and innocent Carl, meanwhile, strives to understand his attraction toward Barbara and his fear of leaving behind the things of his youth.

This potent triangle generates plenty of interest, although emotions never quite reach the apex of aching queasiness found in Dick's other mainstream works. Combined with flashbacks to the State-side pasts of the three protagonists, the narrative never loses its momentum or a certain mild suspense.

What has, I believe, been too little mentioned about Dick's sometimes rushed prose style is its compulsive readability. Not quite stream-of-consciousness, full of effective sentence fragments, Dick's occasionally meandering, seemingly haphazard thread of words, woven of emotions and perceptions, hunches and flashes of insight, functions like a guiding twine through the labyrinth of reality.

Present in this book is nearly every Dickian preoccupation that was to exfoliate later in such startling patterns. Dark-haired girls, simulacra, the cardboard nature of reality, the absence or disappearance of God, the fluctuations between past and present, bodies as machines, the seductive allure of philosophy, metaphysical anxieties – from his very earliest work, Dick was fully Dick.

In an intriguing afterword, Dwight Brown explicates the autobiographical components of the book, making a good case that Carl Fitter stands in for Dick himself. (Carl's massive treatise on ethics can even be seen as the prototype for Dick's enormous Valis exegesis.)

While basically agreeing, I'd like to point out that Barbara herself represents a certain element of Dick's persona. The same age as Dick was when he wrote the book, she is simultaneously hardened and vulnerable, a stance that a young PK, coming off a broken marriage, must have found himself often adopting. M Given Dick's notorious identification with his dead sister, and also an episode where Carl strains to "give birth" to a drawing that seems to represent his anima, the cross-gender identification is plain.

This handsomely produced book (credit goes to designer James "Kibo" Parry) rescues from oblivion and important – and entertaining – document from one of the field's seminal writers.