

Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

LITERARY BITS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PHILIP K. DICK

Philip K. Dick is an American novelist and short story writer best known for his science fiction short stories, many of which have become famous film such as 'Blade Runner', 'Minority Report' and 'Total Recall'.

He was born in Chicago in 1928 and spent most of his life in California where he died in 1982.

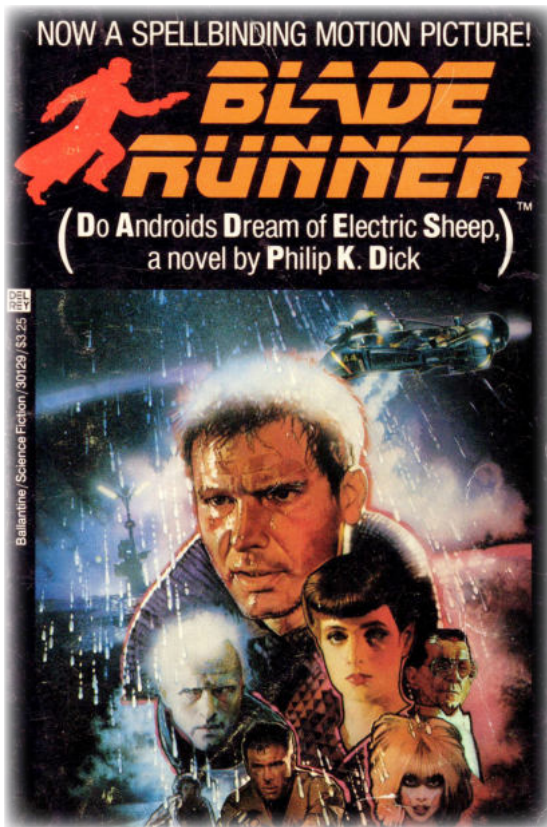
Dick had a series of negative experiences that influenced his life: the death of his twin sister 41 days after birth, a series of bad marriages and drug addiction.

In the 1950s he wrote science fiction stories which appeared in magazines and his first published novel was 'Solar Lottery' in 1954.

His creative period continued in the 1960s and the 1970s. In 1962 he won the highest award in the science fiction world with 'The Man in the High Castle', while 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?' was published in 1968. His other major works were published in the following decade.



P.K. Dick



ABOUT THE NOVEL

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?

The story is set in a post-apocalyptic San Francisco after a nuclear global war in 1992 in the original version of 1968. In later versions the story is set in 2021.

Many animal species are endangered or extinct because of radiation poisoning. For this reason, owning an animal is a status symbol.

The protagonist of the story is a bounty hunter, Rick Deckard, whose task is that of retiring, i.e. killing, six escaped Nexus-6 model androids. With his high reward he will buy a live animal. The novel explores the issue of what it means to be human and the difference between humans and androids.

The book inspired the film 'Blade Runner' in 1982 and the sequel 'Blade Runner 2049' in 2017.

THE TEXT

CHOOSING A MOOD

Rick Deckard wakes up in the morning and chooses the appropriate mood for the day on his console.

1. A merry little surge of electricity piped by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside his bed awakened Rick Deckard. Surprised – it always surprised him to find himself awake without prior notice – he rose from the bed, stood up in his multicolored pajamas, and stretched. Now, in her bed, his wife Iran opened her gray, unmerry eyes, blinked, then groaned and shut her eyes again. ‘You set your Penfield too weak’, he said to her. ‘I’ll reset it and you’ll be awake and ‘...’ ‘Keep your hand off my settings’. Her voice held bitter sharpness. ‘I don’t want to be awake.’ He seated himself beside her, bent over her, and explained softly. ‘If you set the surge up high enough, you’ll be glad you’re awake; that’s the whole point. At setting C it overcomes the threshold barring consciousness, as it does for me.’ Friendlily, because he felt well-disposed toward the world – his setting had been at D – he patted her bare, pale shoulder. ‘Get your crude cop’s hand away’, Iran said. ‘I’m not a cop.’ He felt irritable, now, although he hadn’t dialed for it. ‘You’re worse’, his wife said, her eyes still shut. ‘You’re a murderer hired by the cops.’ ‘I’ve never killed a human being in my life.’ His irritability had risen, now; had become outright hostility. Iran said, ‘Just those poor andys.’ ‘I notice you’ve never had any hesitation as to spending the bounty money I bring home on whatever momentarily attracts your attention.’ He rose, strode to the console of his mood organ. ‘Instead of saving,’ he said, ‘so we could buy a real sheep, to replace that fake electric one upstairs. A mere electrical animal, and me earning all that I’ve worked my way up to through the years.’ At his console he hesitated between dialing for a thalamic suppressant (which would abolish his mood of rage) or a thalamic stimulant (which would make him irked enough to win the argument). ‘If you dial,’ Iran said, eyes open and watching, ‘for greater venom, then I’ll dial

the same. I’ll dial the maximum and you’ll see a fight that makes every argument we’ve had up to now seem like nothing. Dial and see; just try me.’ She rose swiftly, loped to the console of her own mood organ, stood glaring at him, waiting.

He sighed, defeated by her threat. ‘I’ll dial what’s on my schedule for today.’ Examining the schedule for January 3 1992, he saw that a business like professional attitude was called for. ‘If I dial by schedule,’ he said warily, ‘will you agree to also?’ He waited, canny enough not to commit himself until his wife had agreed to follow suit.

‘My schedule for today lists a six-hour self-accusatory depression,’ Iran said.

‘What? Why did you schedule that?’ It defeated the whole purpose of the mood organ. ‘I didn’t even know you could set it for that,’ he said gloomily.

‘I was sitting here one afternoon,’ Iran said.

2. ‘When I had the TV sound off, I was in a 382 mood; I had just dialed it. So although I heard the emptiness intellectually, I didn’t feel it. My first reaction consisted of being grateful that we could afford a Penfield mood organ. But then I realized how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting – do you see? I guess you don’t. But that used to be considered a sign of mental illness; they called it ‘absence of appropriate affect.’ So I left the TV sound off and I sat down at my mood organ and I experimented. And I finally found a setting for despair’. Her dark, pert face showed satisfaction, as if she had achieved something worth. ‘So I put it on my schedule for twice a month; I think that’s a reasonable amount of time to feel hopeless about everything, about staying here on Earth after everybody who’s smart has emigrated, don’t you think?’

to blink: *chiudere gli occhi*
 bounty: *premio, taglia*
 to glare: *guardare con sguardo torvo*
 to groan: *brontolare*
 to lope: *muoversi a lunghi balzi*
 outright: *diretto*
 pajamas: *pigiama (American English)*
 surge: *colpo (di corrente)*

3. 'I'll dial for both of us,' Rick said, and led her back into the bedroom. There, at her console, he dialed 594: pleased acknowledgement of husband's superior wisdom is all matters. On his own console he

dialed for a creative and fresh attitude towards his job, although this he hardly needed; such was his habitual, innate approach without recourse to Penfield artificial brain stimulation.

COMPREHENSION

1 Read the first extract and answer the questions.

1. Define the setting.

Time:

Place:

2. What are the names of the two protagonists? What type of relationship is there between them?
3. What does a mood organ do?
4. What moods do C and D settings correspond to?
5. What is Rick's job? And according to his wife?
6. What are the reasons for the hostility between the protagonists?

2 Read extracts 2 and 3 and answer the questions.

1. What are the moods selected by Iran and Rick? What do they refer to?
2. What does mood 594 correspond to?

ANALYSIS

3 Answer the questions.

aggressive • soft • unhappy • satisfied • depressed • desperate • creative • hopeless • manipulative

1. Decide if the adjectives above apply to Rick or Iran.
2. Find all the expressions that refer to the Penfield artificial brain stimulator.
3. What types of behaviour can be inferred from extract 2?
4. How do you judge Rick's behaviour in extract 3?

DISCUSSION

4 Discuss.

1. Rick and Iran live in a smart home. Apart from the electric sheep and the brain stimulator, what other technological devices do you imagine there?
2. In extract 2, Iran watches TV. How do you imagine the TV of the future?
3. Rick and Iran have an electric sheep. Do you think that electric animals could replace living ones?
4. Imagine a type of software to design the body and facial features of androids. Could CAD or photo editing programs do the job?