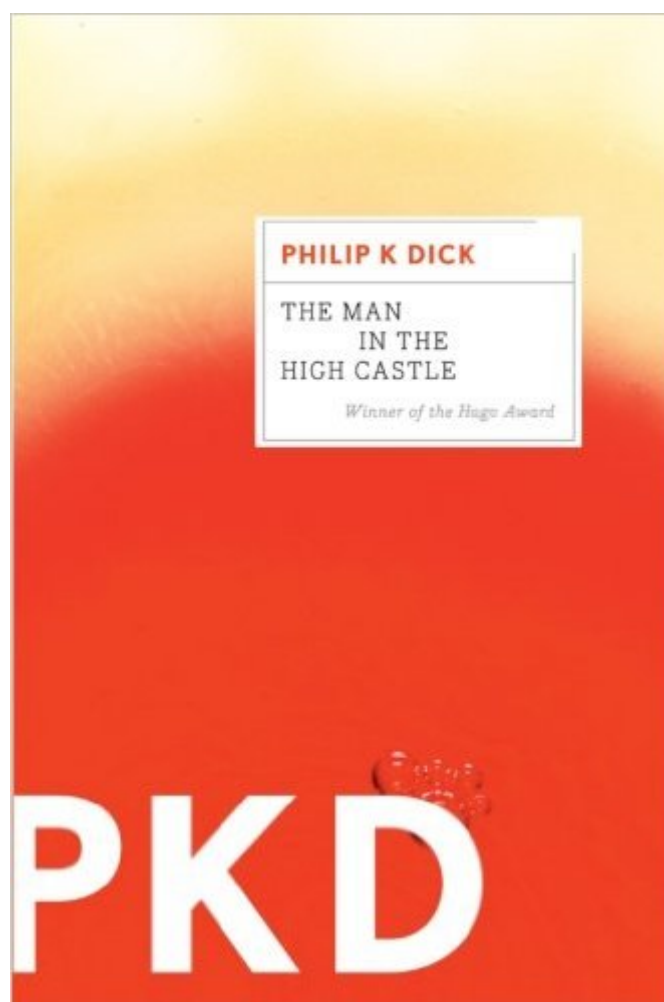


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The Man In The High Castle



Synopsis

“The single most resonant and carefully imagined book of Dick’s career.” — New York Times
It’s America in 1962. Slavery is legal once again. The few Jews who still survive hide under assumed names. In San Francisco, the I Ching is as common as the Yellow Pages. All because some twenty years earlier the United States lost a war and is now occupied by Nazi Germany and Japan. This harrowing, Hugo Award-winning novel is the work that established Philip K. Dick as an innovator in science fiction while breaking the barrier between science fiction and the serious novel of ideas. In it Dick offers a haunting vision of history as a nightmare from which it may just be possible to wake. Winner of the Hugo Award

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Customer Reviews

The Man in the High Castle is Dick’s masterpiece. Along with VALIS and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, it completes the trilogy of the author’s essential works. A must read for Dickheads or for anyone who considers himself a serious fan of science fiction. Dick was clearly influenced by two earlier works of alternative history, Sarban’s The Sound of His Horn and C. M. Kornbluth’s "Two Dooms". In turn, The Man in the High Castle has influenced any number of later works, not just Norman Spinrad’s The Iron Dream and the novels of Harry Turtledove, but Ursula LeGuin’s The Lathe of Heaven as well. This is a very complex, suspenseful novel, consisting of four main plot lines and a host of characters whose lives sometimes interact. Don’t expect any slam-bang pyrotechnic action here, despite the novel’s provocative premise. It’s more a slice of life tale, showing that even after a catastrophic defeat, life in America would go on. Dick is very good at detailing the nuances of

life in Axis-ruled America. For example, at one point as an aside, it is pointed out that after the Nazi pogroms, the only surviving prewar comedian is Bob Hope, and even he has to broadcast out of Canada. Also, an unintended irony for a novel written in 1962 is Dick's conjecture that if the United States had lost WWII, we would all be listening to Japanese audio equipment and driving German cars now. The author achieves the near impossible feat of actually being even-handed towards the Nazis without glamorizing them. He describes them at one point as Neanderthals in white lab coats, technological geniuses who have drained the Mediterranean and are conquering the Solar System, yet are morally bankrupt. Dick is much easier on the Japanese, depicting them not just as benign conquerors, but almost like a group of tourists, just off the latest JAL flight headed for the souvenir stand at Disneyland. Only in one brief instance when Juliana Frink reminisces about conditions in San Francisco immediately after the occupation is their wartime rapacity even hinted at. Several other reviewers here appear to be put off that the novel didn't live up to the action and dramatic tension hinted at in the synopsis above or the 1964 Popular Library cover with its map of the United States superimposed by Nazi and Imperial Japanese flags. When I first read it back in 1964 at age fourteen, I felt much the same way. On rereading it in 1988, however, I saw it for its true worth, an existential novel of the first order (ranking with the best of Camus or Sartre). It represents the fullest flowering of Dick's most consistent theme: What is reality? The provocative setting of an alternative universe where the Axis has won World War II and now occupies a defeated and humiliated America is merely a sensational back drop for Dick's real theme: how can we be sure of what is real? Thus the seemingly minor scene involving two Zippo lighters is actually the key to understanding the whole novel. One is merely a minor collectible, the other is priceless, Mr. Wyndam-Matson tells his mistress. What's the difference? The one was the actual lighter FDR was carrying when he was assassinated in 1934. But how does he know it is real? Well, he has a paper that certifies it is. But how does he know the paper is real? And so on. Likewise, the emphasis on the Japanese obsession with collecting authentic relics of America's prewar past is a symbolic of the authenticity which all the novel's characters are seeking in their own diverse ways. The anticlimactic and ambiguous ending also only serves to re-enforce what Dick was trying to say. In retrospect, he couldn't have ended it any other way. To neatly wrap things up would only subvert the novel's whole premise.

Alternate history...Philip K. Dick style. What does that mean? Well, basically, if you think that the characters in this book seem a little out of place, keep reading, and you may find YOURSELF out of place. On the surface, it is the usual time-shifting novel...FDR was assassinated in 1936, and as a

result, the United States lost WW II. Twenty years in the future, when the novel takes place, Nazi Germany and the Japanese Empire have occupied the United States and imposed their brand of culture on their respective halves of the American populace. But this book really isn't about alternate time lines...its about alternate realities. Things are not as they seem...characters' true identities are hidden, and their moralities are tested. It's about the nature of the true state of the universe, Eastern religion, and the I-Ching. When Philip K. Dick is at his best, his characters question their own existence, and it soon follows that the readers do the same. So when you come to the end of the book, hopefully, a number of things will happen: Number 1: You'll instantly re-read the ending. Number 2: You'll throw the book against the wall and exclaim "that's it?" Number 3: You'll probably re-read the ending again. Number 4: You'll swear that you'll never read another Philip K. Dick novel. Number 5: Later, you'll think a bit about the book, and realize that the novel wasn't really about what you thought it was. Number 6: You'll read it again. And again... This isn't your typical sci-fi novel. The story doesn't wrap-up into a neat little package. Like Eastern religions, time is not linear, it is circular, and that is the reality of the book. Alternate histories are so commonplace in sci-fi today, that it is important to look at this book as the one that really started it all. A completely original masterpiece...even the followers can't keep up.

Philip K. Dick's masterpiece is one of the classics of the alternative history genre. This was my first Philip K. Dick novel and it's so good that I want to light up a Land-o-Smiles and read everything he's ever written. The characters seem like real people. The story is told through interleaved overlapping stories that revolve around the Nazi and Japanese domination of America after America and the British lost WWII in 1947. It's 1962 and the United States has been divided between the Nazis in the East and the Japanese in the West. America has become a third world country controlled and exploited by the victors. The Japanese are better masters than the Germans. The Germans have turned their part of the world into a living nightmare and are plotting to start a war with the Japanese. The Japanese are quiet and philosophical. The scenes of life in Japanese dominated San Francisco are oddly familiar. Dick has transposed the usual circumstance a visiting American finds in third world countries friendly to the United States: Wealthy foreigners living in exclusive enclaves, fawning local businessmen eager to get the foreign visitor's business, local police dominated and loosely controlled by the foreigners. The I Ching is central to the story, guiding the action of many of the protagonists. In all an imaginative take on what life could have been like, uniquely flavored by the influence of Eastern Philosophy.

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