

PHILIP K. DICK SUGGESTED READING LIST

BY MICHAEL SLÁDEK

CONFESSIONS OF A CRAP ARTIST (w. 1959, p. 1975)

One of PKD's finest mainstream novels regarding a dysfunctional 1950's family and the nature of what is considered normal. The ending packs a mean punch. For other early mainstream novels try *Mary and the Giant* and *Puttering About in a Small Land*.

POLICE-STATE FUTURE

FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID (w. 1970 – 1973, p. 1974)

Winner of the John W. Campbell Award. One of PKD's darkest novels about a police-state future, in which a TV personality suddenly finds himself erased from memory and record. Intense emotion, a dystopian setting.

ESCAPED ANDROIDS

THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE (w. 1961, p. 1962)

Winner of the 1963 Hugo Award. PKD used the I, Ching to direct plot points in this poetic and ingenious vision of 1960's America after the Allies' defeat in World War II. Germany and Japan have split the U.S., Jews and blacks are all but extinct. An underground novel tells of an alternate history wherein the Allies won the war.



A SCANNER DARKLY (w. 1973 – 1975, p. 1977)

A black comedy about drug abuse and the loss of identity. PKD dedicates this one to the drug users in his life who killed or permanently scarred themselves through their "mistake in playing." Perhaps PKD's funniest novel, containing some of his sharpest dialogue and most memorable characters.

THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH (w. 1964, p. 1965)

Martian colonists, mind-altering drugs, a new substance with the marketing slogan: "God promises eternal life. We can deliver it." Includes one of PKD's most amazing characters in Palmer Eldritch. Explores concepts of faith, addiction, and evil. John Lennon showed interest in adapting this novel to film. One of Dick's best.

MARTIAN COLONISTS

VALIS (w. 1978, p. 1981)

The first book in the loosely connected VALIS trilogy based on PKD's "2-3-74" experiences. PKD himself is the main character split in two. One is a skeptical but open-minded SF writer while the other is dealing with visions from an unknown source. This leads the main character and his pals on a search for God. Ingenious. Read the lesser novel *Radio Free Albemuth* before this if you want to make the full connection with "2-3-74" and PKD's novels.

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? (w. 1966, p. 1968)

The source novel for *Blade Runner*. But don't rest on having seen the film, as the book is very different. Rick Deckard still hunts escaped androids and finds himself torn between morality and duty. This future, however, focuses more on environmental catastrophe and a religion-based society wherein animal ownership and empathy are the highest motives.

UBIK (w. 1966, p. 1969)

A metaphysical maze about death and salvation, psychic powers, cryogenic freezing and an aerosol spray that restores everything. Certainly one of PKD's most ingenious and comic visions.



THE DIVINE INVASION (w. 1980, p. 1981)

Book two in the trilogy. God must be smuggled into the world via an off-Earth colonist couple in order to repair the Godhead and begin the battle for salvation. Based on Gnostic, Zoroastrian, and Judaic concepts of God, creation and evil.

THE TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER (w. 1981, p. 1982)

PKD's last novel and the final edition of the trilogy. There's no SF here, but lots of philosophy. Based on PKD's friendship with the Episcopal Bishop of California. Deals with Nag Hammadi, the Synoptics, Q, Gnosticism, Christ, schizophrenia and faith. If you have no idea what these things are, you will by the end. A fascinating read.

ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE

Blade Runner (1982)

As early as 1968, Dick envisioned his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* being adapted for the screen. At the time he suggested the casting of Gregory Peck as Deckard, Dean Stockwell as Isidore and Grace Slick, Linda Rondstadt, or Barbara Hershey as Rachael. Martin Scorsese first showed interest in making the film version in 1969. In 1975, Ray Bradbury connected screenwriter Hampton Fancher with PKD and Fancher optioned the book. Thereafter, the project went through multiple production companies and seemed dead until 1980. Dick wasn't informed of Ridley Scott's production until well into the process and hated an initial draft of the script. Eventually, the producers sent him a later draft with which PKD was much happier. Dick was able to see some initial footage, but died before the film's release. It went on to become one of the finest and most influential examples of Science Fiction in movies. Definitive Director's Cut released in 1997.



Total Recall (1990)

Based on PKD's 1965 short story *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale*, the film did well with fans of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Director Paul Verhoeven turned Dick's story into a gung-ho tough-guy pic more akin to the work of Robert Heinlein, whose writing and politics PKD hated and whose novel *Starship Troopers* Verhoeven would adapt in 1997. Although it does embody the essence of the story's theme, the film is mediocre at best with its kitschy humor, terrible acting, and a lowbrow screenplay.

Confessions d'un Barjo (1992)

French adaptation of *Confessions of a Crap Artist*.

Screamers (1995)

Based on PKD's haunting short story "Second Variety," written in 1953. The botched film version starring Peter Weller is barely worth mentioning. The script totally guts the Lovecraftian spookiness of PKD's story about post-apocalyptic soldiers and the self-producing machines built to destroy them. Don't bother, and if you do, don't blame PKD.

PKD FILM ADAPTATIONS PENDING

Imposter

Based on the 1953 short story. Stars Gary Sinise, directed by Gary Felder (*Kiss the Girls, Things to Do in Denver When You're Dead*). To be released some time this year.

Minority Report

Based on the 1956 short story. Steven Spielberg directing, Tom Cruise starring. Shoots March 2001, to release 2002.

A Scanner Darkly

Based on the book. Was at Jersey Films, now seems to be lost in some Hollywood netherworld. Various names have been associated with the once and future project, including director Terry Gilliam (*Brazil, The Fisher King*), and writer Charlie Kaufman (*Being John Malkovich*).

James P. Crow

Based on the 1953 short story. Reportedly in development at DreamWorks.

Paycheck

Based on the 1952 short story. In development at Paramount.

Total Recall II

Has nothing to do with any PKD story. Supposedly in development at Dimension Films but no one there seems aware of it. Internet sites report Jonathan Frakes, who plays Riker on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, was interested in directing. Lord knows.

PKD ONLINE

www.philipkdick.com

The most comprehensive, obsessive, and fun of the Dickhead sights; has all the links you could ever need on the subject. In fact, there's no reason to mention any other sites, just go here and they'll point you in the right directions.