

NOTES FROM: *Ubik*, by Philip K. Dick

SUMMARY: This is a *wild* science fiction story the likes of which you can just *tell* came from a mind like Dick's. It's got that feel to it. It's also got tons of twists and turns, and you're never entirely sure where it's going to end up.

The basic story (at least how it starts) is that there is an agency of psychics competing with an agency of *anti*-psychics and the one agency is commissioned to work off-planet on this job that's kind of "sketchy but lucrative." It may or not end up being a trap.

The way Dick constructs this world is that medical science has advanced to such a level that people can be kept alive by being held in some kind of "half-life" suspended animation. Throughout, you're never entirely sure who's actually *in* half-life and who's in the "real" world, or whatever that even means.

It's also pretty damn funny in places, when for example, certain appliances are coin-operated and one of the main characters can't afford to pay his door to let him out of his apartment!

Where does the name of the book come from? I hesitate to tell you, not because you'll be able to figure out the direction of the plot just by knowing that, but because it was cool how it all unfolded and finding out what *Ubik* stood for was a big part of the reading experience. At least for me.

That being said, it's short for "ubiquitous," meaning found or appearing everywhere. It's obvious when you *finish* the book, or when you're told that, but it's really only spelled out completely at the end, when you're left with this feeling like, "Wow, this guy can do *anything* with words."

You finish the book and your mind is all twisted out of shape, but you enjoyed it so much that you just want to read another Philip K. Dick novel and have him do it all over again.

"He chuckled, but it had an abstract quality; he always smiled and he always chuckled, his voice always boomed, but inside he did not notice anyone, did not care; it was his body which smiled, nodded, and shook hands. Nothing touched his mind, which remained remote; aloof, but amiable, he propelled Herbert along with him, sweeping his way in great strides back into the chilled bins where the half-lifers, including his wife, lay."

"‘I was dreaming,’ Ella said. ‘I saw a smoky red light, a horrible light. And yet I kept moving toward it. I couldn’t stop.’ ‘Yeah,’ Runciter said, nodding. ‘*The Bardo Thodol*, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, tells about that. You remember reading that; the doctors made you read it when you were –’ He hesitated. ‘Dying,’ he said then. ‘The smoky red light is bad, isn’t it?’ Ella said. ‘Yeah, you want to avoid it.’"

"When his enthusiasm goes, there isn't much left of him."

“You’re a little, debt-stricken, ineffective bureaucrat who can’t even scrape together enough coins to pay his door to let him out of his apartment.”

“My personal secretary, Miss Beason, will escort you to a consultation lounge; if you will wait there, being subliminally influenced into peace of soul by the colors and textures surrounding you, I will have Mr. Runciter brought in as soon as my technicians establish contact with him.”

“On the screen, a girl’s face, modified by artificial beauty aids of an advanced nature, manifested itself.”

“Metabolism, he reflected, is a burning process, an active furnace. When it ceases to function, life is over. They must be wrong about hell, he said to himself. Hell is cold; everything there is cold. The body means weight and heat; now weight is a force which I am succumbing to, and heat, my heat, is slipping away. And, unless I become reborn, it will never return. This is the destiny of the universe. So at least I won’t be alone.”

“I don’t think of myself as an ‘entity’; I usually think of myself as Ella Runciter.”

“I am Ubik. Before the universe was, I am. I made the suns. I made the worlds. I created the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I say, they do as I tell them. I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name which no one knows. I am called Ubik, but that is not my name. I am. I shall always be.”