

Martian Time-Slip Short Guide

Martian Time-Slip by Philip K. Dick

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Characters

Arnie Kott, the corrupt union boss who tries to use Manfred Steiner's precognitive abilities to make a fortune in land speculation, is really a stereotype, and he himself embodies many racial stereotypes about the Bleekmen.

He fills the big protagonist slot in Dick's typology. Bohlen, the little protagonist, works for Kott in trying to get at Manfred, and yet has profoundly different, simple caring values. It is he who survives his encounter with madness (Kott does not) and ends up by becoming the most well-rounded character in the book — if only because he is the sanest and therefore Dick's spokesman — who views madness as a kind of brave voyage in which the feeling function is restored. All of the women are presented more sympathetically in this novel than in most of Dick's work, which contributes to the book's balance.



Social Concerns/Themes

In many ways *Martian Time-Slip* is Dick's most subversive, both of the conventions of science fiction and ultimately of what man takes to be reality.

Set on a future Mars which is in the process of being colonized by Earth, it seemingly follows all of the science fiction notions about the red planet.

Mars is mostly a desert with the colonists (mainly American whites) managing to eke out a living near the old canals which still have some water.

Besides being studded with UN colonies, it is also traversed by the last wandering representatives of the native civilization, the Bleekmen. Mars is presumably a frontier civilization and should embody the values of the American frontier (it is billed in Earth propaganda as "Earth's future"). In reality it is being exploited in the worst way by land speculators and is being used as a dumping ground for one of Earth's most ominous and frightening problems: increased mental illness, manifesting itself as schizophrenia. But schizophrenia has increased on Mars as well, especially among the children of the colonists. The real protagonist of the novel, Manfred, is an autistic child inexorably cut off from any communication with the outside world and tormented by terrifying entropic visions of the future. Gradually, the other important characters are drawn more and more into his world in trying to bring him into theirs.

The effect of this entry into the world of the schizophrenic is to make the reader recognize that the normal state of affairs is to be so immersed in what R. D. Laing calls "social fantasy systems" that one takes them to be real. Man is shaken out of a false sense of reality by his encounter with madness, and at the end, the world of Mars is no longer absolutely distinct from that of Manfred. Indeed, Manfred himself ruptures the very fabric of reality by appearing at the end as an old man surrounded by a company of Bleekmen, finally free of the obscene decaying future of Mars where his life had been artificially prolonged in a decrepit nursing home (the result of a building scheme to provide housing for the colonists that is in progress as the novel opens). Thus, the disintegrated vision of Martian reality determines the breakdown of the myth of space pioneering, on which *Martian Time-Slip* may appear to be constructed. Thus it makes its themes — the fine line between madness and sanity, the fundamentally corrupting nature of capitalism — vivid to the reader. As one critic has astutely pointed out, Dick's Mars is another symbol of the "Waste Land" in modern literature.

Techniques/Literary Precedents

Dick's dry language, functional to the limits of triviality, his rejection of any kind of lyricism and decorative description, is at the antipode of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), which is also critical of the myth of progress prominent in much science fiction of the Golden Age. In terms of larger structures, in the central chapters concerned with the timeslip, Jack, Arnie, and Doreen, Jack's secretary, all experience a particular hour or two several times over, living as if they were Manfred, who is there with them. Just who is experiencing any one of the repetitions — who the point-of-view character is — is impossible to tell. Dick structures this experience so that it cannot be recuperated into the realm of the rational. The very style and techniques, however, may have barred its popular acceptance.



Related Titles

Reality breakdown is the central experience of Dick's fiction. Indeed, it would be hard to find a story of his, no matter what elements of science fiction were being used, in which it was not present in some form or another. But *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965) takes place in part on a colonized Mars like that described in *Martian Time-Slip*. A hallucinogenic drug, Can-D, allows the planet's demoralized colonists to retreat into an acceptable fantasy analogue of Earth. Leo Bulero, the big protagonist, gets rich by supplying their needs. But when Palmer Eldritch, a business competitor, returns from the Prox system with a better drug, Leo is concerned and hostile. The new drug, Chew-Z, transports its users to universes of their own, which they can manipulate as they will. These universes all have a common god, however, and that god is Palmer Eldritch, one of Dick's most convincing incarnations of evil. Furthermore, it seems impossible to escape this "divine invasion." Once one has taken Chew-Z, reality has been permanently altered — and all the major characters do take it.



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