

# **Ubik Study Guide**

## **Ubik by Philip K. Dick**

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# Plot Summary

Ubik is a science fiction novel written by Philip K. Dick. It follows the story of Joe Chip, a technician at Runciter Associates. When an explosion kills Joe Chip's boss, Glen Runciter, strange things begin to happen. Soon Joe realizes his boss did not die in the explosion, but he is in a state of half-life. If he wants to stay that way, he has to keep the evil Jory from eating his life energy.

The novel begins by detailing the disappearance of the dangerous telepath S. Dole Melipone. For Glen Runciter, this causes a major problem, and he visits his dead wife Ella at the Beloved Brethren Moratorium. She is in a state of half-life, but through headphones, Glen can still talk to her. He is just running through the problem when a young man called Jory invades her body. Angry, Runciter goes to see the manager of the Moratorium. The manager says there is nothing he can do.

Meanwhile the debt-ridden technician, Joe Chip, hears a knock at his apartment door. It is the Runciter scout G.G Ashwood and with him is a beautiful young lady named Pat Conley. Ashwood tells Joe that Pat possesses an unusually strong anti-telepath ability, and Joe should assess her. With Ashwood gone, Pat shows Joe a piece of paper proving he has already tested and failed her. She has now created a different present and if Joe passes, she will help him get out of debt. On a test paper Joe draws a symbol meaning dangerous. He tells Pat the symbol means Runciter should hire her immediately.

Runciter meets a woman called Zoe Wirt. Her boss, Shepard Howard, needs some anti-telepaths to rid his company of psychics. Runciter leaves her for a few moments and talks to his in-house psychic, Nina. She tells him Miss Wirt is lying and she works for Stanton Mick. This pleases Runciter, as he knows Mick is a very rich man, and Joe stands to make a lot of money. Back in the office, Miss Wirt says the job will take place on the planet Luna and lays out the conditions.

For the contract, Runciter decides to get together 11 anti-telepaths, including Pat Conley, plus himself and Joe Chip. Runciter is in his office familiarizing himself with the group when he suddenly finds himself outside an antique shop, looking at old coins. When he returns to the room, he finds only Pat, Joe and G.G still present. Even stranger, Pat and Joe are now married. Eventually, Pat admits she is just showing them her capabilities and takes them back to the original present.

The group leaves for Luna. Miss Wirt meets them on their arrival and takes them to a conference room where Joe Chip immediately starts taking a psi reading. Stanton Mick walks into the room and tells Joe to stop before floating to the center of the room and exploding. The blast kills Runciter. Joe and the others rush his body back to the ship, put him in coldpac and fly him to a Moratorium in Zurich.

On Al's advice, Joe stays at a hotel in Zurich and says he will send Wendy Wright to keep him company. However, when Joe wakes up in the morning, he is by himself. He



goes to the phone to ring Al, but all he can hear is Runciter's voice. There is a knock and Joe opens the door to the Moratorium manager. The manager asks where Wendy Wright is and Joe says she never came. Thinking this strange, the manager searches the room. In the closet is Wendy's dead body.

Joe goes back to the Runciter offices in New York. Here Al shows him that all the coins and notes are now emblazoned with Runciter's profile. In addition, they are buying coffee and cigarettes that are already years old. Al and Joe decide to go to Baltimore to see if they can spend the Runciter currency. In a shop in Baltimore, the cashier takes the money, but the cigarettes they buy crumble in their hands. They go back into the shop and look at some of the other goods. In a big box of cigarettes, they find a note from Runciter. It tells them the situation they are in is serious.

Back in New York, Joe and Al are stepping into a lift when Al pulls Joe back. He says the elevator was not the usual one, but looked about 50 years old. Joe tells Al the elevator was normal and Al must be ill. In the bathroom they find another message from Runciter. It says he did not die from the blast, but they did. Al thinks he is dying the same way Wendy died, by regressing rapidly into old age. He says he has no chance for survival, but Joe will still live if he gets back with the others and stays with them.

Joe goes back to the room where they had earlier left the others watching TV, but no one is there. However, the television is still on and showing Runciter's funeral in Des Moines. Joe switches the television off, but it turns back on, this time Runciter's face appearing on the screen. He is advertising a product called Ubik, a spray that works to reverse deterioration. Suddenly Runciter begins to speak directly to Joe, telling him his only chance of survival is finding Ubik. He says he sent a sample to Joe's apartment.

When Joe gets back to his apartment, everything has regressed to what looks like the 1950s. In his post box, he finds a sample of Ubik, but instead of a spray can, it is nothing but old-fashioned medicine. At this point Joe knows he needs to get to Des Moines.

The funeral director Mr. Bliss picks Joe up from an airfield in Des Moines and takes him to the funeral. Mr. Bliss talks about Hitler, and Joe realizes it is now 1939. Joe is too late for the funeral, but drives back to the hotel with the others. On the way, a policeman stops them and hands Joe a ticket with a note from Runciter. It states that Pat Conley is big trouble. At the hotel, Joe starts to feel weak and Pat offers to escort him to his room. Joe refuses to take the elevator because of what Al saw earlier and insists they take the stairs instead. As he slowly makes his way, Pat taunts his efforts, claiming Ray Hollis hired her to kill Runciter and his best anti-telepaths. She leaves Joe outside his hotel room to die.

Joe eventually manages to open his room door where he sees Runciter sitting on a chair beside his bed. He sprays Joe with Ubik, restoring Joe's health, though he admits it is only temporary, and Joe needs to find more. Runciter goes on to say he is currently sitting in the Moratorium and Joe, along with the others, is in half-life. He blames all the



problems on Pat, but when Joe questions him further Runciter admits he is lying and does not know what is happening.

Don Denny comes to Joe's hotel room with a doctor. Joe tells him what Runciter said and offers him the Ubik spray to restore his health. When Denny uses the spray, he evaporates and a young boy called Jory replaces him. He says he is a half-life that eats other people's energy so he can continue to exist and control the half-life world. Joe tries to kill Jory, but it proves impossible.

Joe takes a taxi to the Matador restaurant. On the way, he sees a young lady walking down the road and tells the driver to stop. The lady tells him she has nothing to do with Jory and hands Joe a certificate that guarantees him a lifetime supply of Ubik. She says her name is Ella Runciter. She is helping Joe because she is passing onto another life and needs him to keep her husband company.

Joe goes to a pharmacy to pick up his Ubik. However, the spray can has regressed to a box of useless powder. Joe says he knows the pharmacist is Jory and that he has spray cans in the shop. Jory appears, but Joe still cannot get any spray. Outside the pharmacist, a woman approaches him and hands him some Ubik, saying she works for the company, and Joe summoned her when he refused to accept that there was no spray.

Back in the Moratorium Mr. Runciter tries in vain to find the manager, as he wants to have a chat with Ella. Finally, a worker brings out her casket. Runciter goes to hand him a tip, but on each of his coins is Joe Chip's profile.



# 1

## 1 Summary

Glen Runciter receives a telephone call from one of his technicians at Runciter Associates. He tells Mr. Runciter that the most powerful telepath on earth has escaped their attentions. A couple of Runciter's people followed him to a hotel, but at 3.30, his position on the identimap disappeared. Mr. Runciter tells the technician he will consult his dead wife. He leaves New York and travels to the Beloved Brethren Moratorium in Zurich. Here he meets the owner Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang. He tells Mr. Runciter to go through and talk to his wife, but Mr. Runciter says it is a very private business matter and he needs to talk to her somewhere quiet. Von Vogelsang orders an employee to bring Ella into his office.

## 1 Analysis

The book starts with one of Runciter's employers calling him in the middle of the night. Immediately Dick gets into the story, explaining that a dangerous telepath has gone missing from the identimap. Such terms as the identimap may confuse the reader initially, but rather than over explain, Dick intertwines any new terms into the plot, knowing they will become clear as the story progresses. Because of this, it takes the reader a few chapters to become involved in the story, but when they do, the reader finds this technique works to constantly drive the plot forward rather than getting it stuck in overly-complicated scientific facts. In fact, this book is completely plot driven and Dick only shows the differences between his futurist world and sixties America, which relate to the story, and even then gets the differences into the open in the first few chapters. In this chapter, he introduces telepaths, anti-telepaths and the concept of half-life. Dick explains Half-life when he visits his wife and then Joe Chip explains telepaths and anti-telepaths in the third chapter. From here, the books plot works to expand on these ideas.



## 2

### 2 Summary

Runciter talks to his wife, Ella, who is in a state of half-life. She cannot open her eyes or move her lips, but via a wire and headphones, Runciter can access her thoughts. Before she died, Ella wrote in her will that she wanted her husband to consult her on business matters and now with the loss of Meliphone, Runciter has gone to her for advice. Ella says she has no idea who Meliphone is, and Runciter has to explain that he is Ray Hollis's most powerful man with twice the psi energy of anyone else. In that case, Ella says, Runciter needs to warn people that Meliphone is free. Runciter is reflecting on his wife's ability to think clearly, even about people she does not know, when her voice disappears. A boy called Jory replaces her, saying he just wants to chat for a few moments and find out what is happening in the outside world. Angry that Jory has disconnected him from Ella, Runciter goes to find the owner. Von Vogelsang tells him Jory does this all the time, and if Runciter is willing to pay more money, he will move his wife away from Jory and into her own isolated cubicle. Runciter tells him to move her as soon as possible.

### 2 Analysis

This chapter foreshadows what will happen at the end of the book. First, the reader notices Runciter's reliance on his wife. Every time he has a problem, he says he consults his wife, but here it seems less like a consultation than her telling him exactly what to do and that, despite the fact, she knows little about the reality of the situation. The reader will discover his complete reliance on his wife at the end when it becomes known it was Ella who invented Ubik and Ella who has to help Joe Chip survive. Furthermore, she helps Joe because she has to leave half-life and needs someone to look after her husband.

A young boy named Jory takes over his wife's body. Dick will not mention Jory again until the very end, but he is responsible for almost everything that happens after the bomb blast. That Dick does not mention Jory for so long, allows him to create an uncertain environment, where neither Chip nor the reader knows who or what to trust. Here Dick hints at Jory's evil influence by the way Runciter panics when Jory takes over his wife's thoughts. When he asks the owner to get his wife back, Von Vogelsang says there is nothing he can do, foreshadowing the idea Jory is unstoppable.





### 3

## 3 Summary

It is in early morning and Joe Chip has just woken. He takes out his pap machine and asks for the latest gossip. The machine prints out a news report about a rich magnate, but Joe tells the machine that is not proper gossip. Gossip is which film stars are sleeping with each other. The machine tells Joe to move the dial to low gossip and then prints out information about an Actress who got into a fight the previous night. At this point, someone knocks on Joe's door. Joe is worried it is one of his debtors and he asks who it is. He hears G.G Ashwood's voice say he has a new inertial that he wants Joe to assess. However, she is female and Joe does not want her to see his messy apartment. He phones a cleaning company, but Joe is deep in debt and the cleaning company will not accept his credit card. Eventually, Joe decides to let them in anyway, but the door asks him for a nickel, which he does not have, and he has to ask Ashwood to pay from the other side. The girl's name is Pat and she is beautiful with olive skin and large brown eyes. Joe asks Pat what her special power is and Ashwood tells him she can counteract precogs, but moreover, she can go back in time. Pat says that is not true. She can only change time by thinking about it. One time, she says her telepathic father punished her when he saw she was going to break his vase the next day and so she spent the rest of the day changing her destiny. Joe Chip persuades Ashwood to leave his apartment. When he is gone, Pat takes off her clothes. Joe is not comfortable, but Pat pulls out a piece of paper in Joe's writing. She said in a previous present, Joe invalidated her ability because she kept her clothes on. She says she can help him get out of his financial mess if he writes her another form, saying the company should hire her. Joe writes one out and tells her the symbol at the bottom means the company should take her on immediately; however, the symbol really communicates she is dangerous.

## 3 Analysis

In this chapter, Dick creates the impression Pat Conley is a dangerous character. However, this is a red herring that later serves to create an environment of uncertainty. Near the end of the book, Joe thinks he has worked out that Pat and G.G Ashwood work for Ray Hollis and are responsible for all the killings. The reader can believe this is true because in this chapter she walks into the apartment holding G.G's waist and then proceeds to say her parents are both employers of Hollis. By the end of the book, the likelihood is that she is nothing but a teenager rebelling against her parents and enjoying the power her talent gives her over her elders.



## 4

### 4 Summary

Glen Runciter lands his ship on the roof of the Runciter Corporation. He has just come back from seeing his wife, and once he is in his office, he begins to implement her suggestions. He is on the phone ordering more adverts when his secretary, Mrs. Frick, interrupts him. She says there is an important new client to see him named Miss Wirt. She says she has come on behalf of her boss, Mr. Howard, who needs some of Runciter's anti-telepaths to rid his workplace of psi people. Before she goes any further, Runciter buzzes Mrs. Frick and tells her to bring through Nina. Mr. Runciter goes out of his office and tells the telepathic Nina to sit outside and read Miss Wirt's mind.

Back in his office, Runciter continues his conversation with Miss Wirt while listening to Nina through a hidden earpiece. Nina tells him Miss Wirt has not come from Mr. Howard, but rather Stanton Mick. Mick is a very rich man and Runciter knows his company stands to make a lot of money out of the deal. With this in mind, he gives Miss Wirt a high price. She says she will need to talk to her boss, though Nina claims she has the power to accept the contract. Runciter walks her out into the waiting room where he sees Joe Chip and Pat. Joe introduces Pat as a potential employee and hands Runciter her test score. Runciter is just leading them into his office when Miss Wirt tells him her company will take eleven inertias.

### 4 Analysis

In this chapter, Runciter completes the business deal with Miss Wirt, which seals the fate of all the characters. It is difficult to know why he goes through with it when he knows Miss Wirt is lying about who she is working for. Furthermore when he speaks to Miss Wirt in the company of Pat and Joe, Dick states Runciter feels strangely fearful as if he knows what he doing is going to lead to major problems. In retrospect, this is the first sign someone is playing with reality and that someone may be Pat. She has already changed time to make sure Joe recommends her and here she may have gone back in time to make sure Runciter accepts her on the trip. If so, this gives credence to the idea that she is working for Hollis. Yet the reader will never know if this is the case and, in fact, Dick leaves the end of the novel so open the reader can go back through the book, make a number of guesses and still never get any closer to the truth.



## 5

### 5 Summary

The anti-telepath Tippy Jackson is at home dreaming about Hollis and two men named Mick and Bill. Mick and Bill are just saying "we are going to get you" when she wakes up to the sound of her phone. It is her boss Runciter. He tells her he has a job and she needs to get down to the office right away. At the Runciter offices, Runciter talks to G.G Ashwood about Joe and Pat. He wonders why Joe wants to send Pat on the Stanton Mick mission when he put her down on the test paper as dangerous. Runciter calls Joe and the eleven anti-telepaths into his office. He is going through the names when suddenly he finds himself away from the room and at a rare coin shop. When he opens his eyes, he is back at the office with only Joe, G.G and Pat. Both Joe and Runciter wonder what has happened but cannot quite work out the exact problem. Runciter turns to Pat and asks her if she knows what happened. This starts an argument between Joe and Pat, with Joe claiming she has done something to change time. Runciter interrupts, saying he does not want any domestic quarreling in his office, making Joe realize Pat is his wife. At this point, G.G steps in and says Pat could not possibly have any special powers because she does not work for them and has only stopped by for lunch. Joe convinces Runciter to check to see if he has any files on her, and Runciter finds Joe's test report under her maiden name. Finally, Pat admits she has changed time to show them her capabilities.

### 5 Analysis

Here Dick again plays with reality. The chapter begins with the anti-telepath, Tippy Jackson, having a dream about two people named Mick and Bill. Later on, the reader finds out Mick and Bill are actually Jory, so this raises the question, are they already dead? It could be that Tippy is just having a premonition, but then when Joe comes face to face with Jory, he tells him he is also Mick and Bill, suggesting he already knew they were having dreams about him, if they were dreams. If they are in half-life, then how much of reality does Jory already control? Later on, Joe figures out Pat was so drunk from her power that she just presumed she was responsible for all the deaths. With the knowledge of the power, Jory later shows himself capable, suggesting Jory was the one controlling Pat's talent.



## 6

### 6 Summary

The group lands on Luna, where Zoe Whirl is waiting to pick them up. She takes them to a meeting room and Joe starts taking a psi reading. Zoe Whirl asks him to wait, but Runciter tells Joe he is his (Runciter's) employee and if he says he can continue, he can continue. Miss Whirl says Mr. Howard will not like it, but Runciter tells her he knows that Mr. Howard does not exist, and they are there on the say so of Stanton Mick. Zoe Whirl smiles and tells Runciter she will go and get him. While she is gone, Francesca Spanish talks about taking hallucinogens to help her work. The others think she is ridiculous, but she continues to say she recently had a visitation from a man called Bill and thinks he probably works for Hollis. Three of the others claim to have had a similar dream.

Stanton Mick arrives and addresses the group. Joe is still measuring the psi activity, and Mick bluntly tells him to stop. Joe stops, but he tells Runciter something strange is happening because there is no psi field. Runciter immediately says they should leave, but Mick tells them to stay and hovers to the center of the room, prompting Runciter to proclaim Mick is a self-destruct humanoid bomb. Mick explodes, killing Runciter in the blast. However, the others are alive, and Joe, now in charge, tells them to get their guns. When they come back armed, Joe and a few of the others take Runciter back to the ship. To their surprise, nobody is waiting for them outside and they manage to leave the planet unimpeded.

### 6 Analysis

Dick creates such an uncertain world it becomes apparent the only way Joe Chip survives is on his own instincts. In this chapter, they come to meet Stanton Mick only to find he is a humanoid bomb intent on killing them all. As the novel continues, characters die or prove they are not as they seem. For example, Runciter tells Joe, Pat is responsible for everything, when all along he knows it is Jory. In the end, the only way Joe can survive is by making and trusting his own decisions. This is not something that comes immediately and for the most part he has to learn the hard way. In this chapter he begins to show signs that has the capabilities when after Runciter's death, he takes complete control of the situation. The others complain that he could be leading them to their own deaths, but Joe sticks by his decision.



# 7

## 7 Summary

The group land in Zurich where a helicopter picks up Joe Chip, Al and Runciter's body, taking them to the Beloved Brethren Moratorium. Joe is upset at his boss's death and can hardly control his emotions. At the Moratorium, he tries to buy a cup of coffee, but the machine rejects his money, saying it is old currency. Joe manages to swap his coin for Swiss money; however, the coffee that comes out is old and moldy, sending Joe into a rage. He claims machines are taking over, but one day humans will regain their grip on life. Joe borrows some money from Al and phones Ray Hollis. A woman answers and says they have been expecting him to call. When she puts him through to Mr. Hollis, Joe tells him knows he knows he is responsible for Runciter's death and he will drag Hollis through the courts to prove it. Hollis is unmoved by the threat and Joe slams down the phone.

Al tells Joe the doctors could not save Runciter. Joe is upset but tempers his feelings with the thought he will be the one that gets to take over the business. Joe says he does not want to go back to Pat and will take a hotel room in Zurich. Unfortunately, his bad credit prevents him from booking a room, and he has to borrow money from Al. As an added bonus Al says he will send Wendy Wright to keep him company.

## 7 Analysis

Whereas the previous chapter showed Joe's capabilities to make decisions on his own and use his instincts, here the reader can see that to utilize his ability fully, he needs to get over his reliance on others. In this chapter he becomes so upset with Runciter's death he cannot think clearly, needing his friend Al to tell him exactly what to do. However, the reader knows that this is not Joe's natural state, and he has allowed the world he is living in to dictate how he should live. For example, Joe gets into debt because he has to pay everything to work—from his door to his television. From this perspective, his instincts are his downfall because they contribute to him losing his much-needed freedom, relying on the goodwill of others to borrow money. When Jory renders money unimportant, Joe finally finds himself in a world he can understand. A world where spontaneity becomes a positive attribute rather than a negative one.



## 8

### 8 Summary

Joe wakes up in his hotel room and finds himself alone. He picks up the phone to make a call, but can only hear Runciter's voice on the other end. At this point, there is a knock at the door. Joe is too scared to answer it, thinking Hollis has sent one of his men to kill him. He asks who it is and a voice says it is Von Vogelsang from the Moratorium. Joe opens the door and immediately asks the Moratorium owner for money so he can have breakfast. Von Vogelsang ignores him and says he has spoken to Al on the phone, who said Joe should go with Vogelsang to the Moratorium. Joe is not so sure and tells Van Vogelsang he thinks Ray Hollis is after him because moments ago he heard Runciter's voice over the phone. The Doctor listens to the phone himself, but hears nothing but static. He turns to Joe and asks the whereabouts of Wendy. Joe says she never came, but Vogelsang insists they check the room. When Von Vogelsang opens the closet, they find Wendy lying dead on the floor.

Back in New York, Al has gathered the Luna group for a meeting. He suggests they watch television to see if there is any news of Runciter's death. Pat gives him a coin to pay the TV, and Al notices the coin has Runciter's profile. The others reach for their own money, which also have Runciter's profile. Joe interrupts the meeting and asks to see Al in private. In his office, he shows Al, Wendy's dead body, and they both link the strange goings on to age. The coffee in Zurich was old and moldy; the cigarettes were old and dry, and the phone book was 2 years out of date. Al says they need to get away from New York and asks Joe to think of a city that he would never go to. Joe suggests Baltimore.

### 8 Analysis

Though he is a relatively minor character, Vogelsang represents a futuristic world Dick portrays as being entirely about money and little about human feeling. In the opening chapters, he tells Runciter he can only help Ella if Runciter pays a large sum of money to put her into an isolated cubicle and later on states that he keeps Jory because his parents pay him a large sum of money. From this perspective, the reader wonders both how much Vogelsang is responsible for what happens and how much he actually knows. In this section Vogelsang never doubts that Joe heard Runciter's voice on the phone, even when he listens to the line and hears just static. He then tells Joe to look for Wendy in the closet, a suggestion that seems far more than just a wild guess.

However, Vogelsang is not necessarily a bad character, but the product of a world dominated by money. In this, he is not alone. We have already seen Joe destroy his life by getting into debt, but Dick also suggests Runciter puts his workers in danger for the promise of a large contract. Interestingly, the narrator shows Vogelsang is not happy with the situation by often commenting on how worried Vogelsang looks when

something goes wrong. Here when he asks about Wendy, the narrator states that Vogelsang's face looks concerned. This suggests that he wants to help, but to do so would ruin his business and standing in life.



## 9

### 9 Summary

Joe and Al visit a supermarket in Baltimore to see if they can use the Runciter money. They ask for cheap cigarettes and the cashier takes the money. However, when they try to take the cigarettes out of the packet, they break in their hands. Al goes back into the shop to buy a more expensive brand and overhears one of the customers complaining that the items she has brought are all a year out of date. Al and Joe look around the shop until they find boxes of cigarettes. Al shakes one of the boxes, and when he hears it is empty, he opens it and finds a note inside from Runciter. It says the situation is desperate and they need to get in contact with him. Al buys a tape recorder and they head back to New York.

Back in the office, they get one of the employers to look at the tape recorder. He tells them it is about a hundred years old and completely worthless. On the bottom of its box, it says made by Runciter of Zurich. Al realizes that Zurich is not the Zurich in Switzerland, but rather the maintenance station in Des Moines. He asks Joe if Runciter had any connections with Des Moines, and Joe tells him Runciter grew up there. The two men wait for an elevator. When one comes, Al pulls Joe back and says they should wait because that elevator is over 50 years old. The next elevator to arrive is normal, but Joe tells Al it is exactly the same as the last one. At this point, Al realizes he aging the same way as Wendy and he will soon die. Joe notices Al looks unwell and takes him to the bathroom. Inside the bathroom, Al sees some graffiti left by Runciter. It says they are dead and it is Runciter who is alive. Al realizes this is the truth and they are all in half-life. He tells Joe that to stay alive he must find and stay with the group. Unfortunately, it is too late for Al and Joe has to leave him in the bathroom to die. He goes back up to the meeting room, but no one is there.

### 9 Analysis

In this chapter, it seems that Al is close to working out what is happening. He is the first person to connect the old coffee and cigarettes with their own regression and is even the first to find the notes from Runciter, first in the cigarette box and then later on the bathroom wall. However, the reader has to question why Al finds these things so easily. For example, how does he know to go back into the shop and look in the cigarette box? In later chapters, Runciter claims it is because he had the help of a telepath, but immediately afterwards Joe finds out Runciter has been lying to him, probably because Runciter wants to be seen as their savior. The likelihood is that Jory is already controlling Al's mind in order to cause Joe to come to the wrong conclusions. Dick further foreshadows this when Al and Joe talk to the shop foreman about the tape recorder. Here Al mentions an old nickname of the Brooklyn Dodgers and the foreman shows disbelief because he claims no one could know the Dodgers' old name. If that is the case, then how does the foreman know? In this respect, it is feasible Jory is the



foreman and is there to counteract Runciter's sudden involvement in their plight. By doing this, Jory makes sure Joe can trust no one.



# 10

## 10 Summary

The T.V announcer says Runciter is dead and shows pictures of his funeral taking place in De Moines. The presenter interviews Denny, one of the members of the Luna group. The presenter asks if all Runciter's employers are at the funeral and Denny replies everyone except for Wendy, Al and Joe. Joe turns off the T.V, but it comes back on, showing an advertisement starring Runciter. The advert is about Ubik, a spray can that changes old thing into new. Suddenly ,Runciter addresses Joe. He says that despite what Al says, Runciter is dead and Joe needs to go to Des Moines to see everything for himself, but first he needs go to his house and pick the free sample of Ubik that Runciter has sent him. When Joe gets back to his apartment, everything has changed from being new to antique. A dial now operates the radio; the telephone is pre-dial, and there is a bag of golf clubs in his closet.

Joe goes downstairs to his post box and finds the package. However, when he opens the box, it is not a spray, but old and useless medicine. At this point, Joe realizes his perception of the world is changing and he can no longer get to Des Moines by modern means. When he step outside, he sees he is now in possession of a La Salle car. Realizing it would take too long to drive to Des Moines, Joe remembers that back in the thirties they had airplanes. Joe drives to the nearest airfield and tries to pay a pilot to take him; however, the pilot tells him his money is fake. Joe says he can swap his Le Salle in payment and takes the pilot to have look at his car. However, the car has changed into a Ford Coupe. Inside the Coupe, the bottle has also regressed with a note next to it saying, "Don't do it, Joe. There is another way. Keep trying. You will find it. Lots of luck."

## 10 Analysis

The goal of Joe's character is to trust his own instincts. As the reader has seen previously, Joe is quite capable of doing this when he is in his own company. He shows it here when he not only works out how to drive the LeSalle, but also knows that he has to get to an airfield and fly to Des Moines. At the same time, Dick has already shown that Jory is controlling their minds, and as the world regresses, their thoughts are becoming at one with that particular period. From this perspective, it has nothing to do with Joe's abilities that he can drive the LeSalle; however, because he thinks it is his innate ability, he becomes more confident and more his true self.



# 11

## 11 Summary

The pilot sees the bottle of Ubik on the front seat of the car and tells Joe he will fly him to Des Moines in exchange for the bottle. Joe instantly agrees and asks what is in the bottle to make it worth having. The pilot tells him it contains gold. The following day, they reach Des Moines and Joe phones someone at the mortuary to pick him up. Mr. Bliss arrives in a 1930 Willys-Knight 87 and Joe climbs in. On the way, they talk about the Second World War. Mr. Bliss thinks Hitler is, in some ways, doing the right thing and it is about time they started solving the Jewish and nigger problem in America. Joe has never heard anyone say the word nigger, and it makes him feel uncomfortable. Mr. Bliss continues to say it is England's war and America should not get involved.

At the mortuary, Joe finally meets up with the others. They have all experienced the same regression and Francesa tells Joe she had a dream about Ubik. She dreamed a big hand reached from a sky and handed her a bottle. The group works out that you pronounce Ubik the same as ubiquitous, which is Latin for everywhere. Joe tells them they are all dead and in half-life, but Pat claims Joe is insane. The group separates into two cars and drive to their hotel.

## 11 Analysis

Dick uses the regression to the 1930s as an excuse to divulge in some social commentary, portraying the period as no better than the future. Here Mr. Bliss comments not only that Hitler has some good ideas, but also says if America is going to go into the war, then it should be against the communists. In this respect, the futurist world Dick portrays stems from this point of view.

In the novel, the author shows an environment that has evolved entirely around the idea of the individual making money, yet at the same time, completely disregarding human feeling. Within this world, Joe struggles to cope, getting into debt and in general living for himself. The past is no better, but it is also not real, and subsequently Joe finds himself free to become himself. In these terms, the reader can class Ubik as an Existentialist novel.



# 12

## 12 Summary

In the car, Joe realizes there is something wrong with his theory. According to what Al said about staying with the group, he should have died on the airplane, whilst Edie, who is now sick, should have been all right. He asks Pat why she did not go back in time to help Edie, and she claims her powers have not worked since the blast. A policeman stops Joe for not indicating his turn with the turn signal. He writes Joe a ticket and on the back, there is a message from Mr. Runciter. It says, "You are in much greater danger than I thought. What Pat Conley said is..." More writing at the bottom of the slip tells him to go to Archer's pharmacy.

At the pharmacy, Joe asks for some Ubik. The pharmacist brings down a bottle of the stuff and Joe asks what is in it. The pharmacist does not know so Joe reads the label. On the label, it says Pat is lying about not being able to use her powers. Joe goes back to the hotel and shows Don Denny, Runciter's note. Suddenly Pat approaches and Joe decides to show her the note as well. He tells her this is all her doing and it is not the bomb blast that is killing everyone, but her ability to change the present. Furthermore, he thinks that along with G.G Ashwood, she is working for Ray Hollis.

## 12 Analysis

In this chapter, Dick continues the idea that Pat is responsible for everything. Joe accepts this idea because no one trusts Pat, and she is a convenient scapegoat. However, later on, the reader finds out that Pat probably did not have anything to do with the blast at all, showing Runciter's involvement as more of a hindrance than a help. This shows that each character is living its own reality and only within each character's own reality does what they think and see make sense. In fact, only when Joe begins to concentrate himself on his own role in half-life can he survive.



# 13

## 13 Summary

Joe is now feeling tired and thinks his time is up. Denny tells Pat to wait with him and he will fetch a doctor. However, when Denny is gone, Joe decides he should go to his room and die. He does not want Pat to come with him, but she insists. She escorts him to the elevator, but remembering what Al saw before he died, Joe decides to take the stairs. At this point, he can hardly walk and Pat runs ahead and taunts his efforts. She says it was a shame she never got to see the others die because watching her power work on other people is fascinating. She talks about how Wendy was a dull person, just like Joe implying she was jealous of their love. She says Joe was right in everything he said about her, but he missed one delightful fact, that she was having an affair with Ashwood. At the door of his room, Pat leaves Joe to struggle to find his keys. He is now very weak and wants nothing more than to lie down and die in the corridor. However, with one last effort, he manages to unlock the door and enters his room. To his surprise, Mr. Runciter is sitting next to his bed, and he pulls out a bottle of Ubik and restores Joe's health.

## 13 Analysis

In this chapter the reader sees Pat thinks she is responsible for everything. She tells Joe she works for Hollis and killed Wendy Wright. However, the reader finds out in the following chapter she is responsible for very little, if anything, and it seems someone is pushing her to believe her powers are more than what they are. In fact, by the end of the story, the reader may question whether she had any power in the first place. It seems Jory is giving each person a role that plays to their desires and in the long term blinds them to the truth, that they are in half-life. As a precocious, yet rebellious, teenager, Pat wants power and control over the adult world and in half-life she gets her wish.



# 14

## 14 Summary

Joe takes a cigarette and begins to talk to Runciter. Runciter says he is alive while Joe and the others are in half-life. He says currently he is not in Joe's hotel room, but in the moratorium talking to Joe's dead body. He needs to make Joe aware that Pat is his enemy and was hired by Ray Hollis to entice them to Luna. Fortunately by taking the group back to 1939, she has taken her power to its limit and cannot do anymore. Suddenly Joe interrupts. He says there is no reason why she would want to take them back to 1939. What purpose would it serve? Runciter agrees Joe has found a hole in his theory and perhaps there is more to it. Joe says Runciter is only pretending to know what is going on and only knows as much as him. Runciter admits this is the truth, but he says he has saved Joe's life, and if he can, he will save the others as well. As Joe gets increasingly angry, Runciter pulls off his ear phones and walks away. As he wanders through the moratorium, he wonders how they can defeat Jory.

## 14 Analysis

Runciter is also living out his own desires, which is to save everyone's life and end up the hero. In this chapter, Joe shows Runciter he does not know what he is talking about. Runciter agrees with Joe but insists Runciter has saved Joe's life and would have saved the others as well if he was able to do so. Again Runciter's desire to be the hero blinds him to the truth. The reader may think this truth is that Pat is not responsible for the destruction of their lives, but by the end of the chapter, he already knows it is down to Jory. In fact in his desire to save everyone, Runciter blames Pat because he knows this will make sense to the others, and it is the only way they are likely listen. The truth, of course, is this just blinds everyone to Jory's role, which further points to the idea that Jory is controlling even the way people think, which foreshadows that Runciter is already in half-life.



# 15

## 15 Summary

Don Denny comes into Joe's room with a doctor. As the doctor checks him over, Joe tells Denny he has just seen Runciter, who cured him with a spray can of Ubik. He tells Denny there is a bit left and he should spray himself as well. At first Denny is not sure because, as he says, he thinks they will all die anyway so why prolong the agony? Eventually Joe persuades him, but as soon as Denny activates the cannister, Denny disappears into a cloud of spray. When the cloud evaporates, a dirty, evil-looking boy has taken his place. Joe asks who he is and the boy replies he is a number of people, including Matt and Bill, but his real name is Jory and he is responsible for everything that has happened in half-life. He ate Wendy first, then Denny and a short while ago ago, he ate Pat. The Ubik is protecting Joe at the moment, but when it wears off, he will eat Joe as well. Joe asks what he means by eating him and Jory tells him he eats the energy from the other half-lifers to prolong his own half-life. Jory continues to say everything Joe sees is a product of Jory's imagination and to prove it, makes the doctor disappear. At this Joe tears into Jory, kicking and hitting him. However, Jory ends the fight, saying that Joe cannot kill him and there is no point in trying. Joe leaves the room and asks the hotel receptionist if there is a restaurant nearby. The receptionist recommends the Matador.

## 15 Analysis

Finally in this chapter, Joe realizes he is on his own, and to survive he has to think for himself. In the previous chapter, he worked out that it has nothing to do with Pat because the slow torture of what is happening is akin to a child pulling the wings off an insect. Joe's theory proves correct when Jory appears in place of Don Denny. Such moments only serve to raise Joe's confidence and he continues to think if Jory died when he was young his knowledge is limited. The way to defeat Jory is to push him past his limits, which is probably why Joe asks about brothels at the reception desk. However, Jory could also be playing to Joe's desire to be free of debt and other outside influences. The difference is that Joe's attribute suits the situation because Jory is up against someone he cannot control, showing he is not the undefeatable monster he claims.



# 16

## 16 Summary

Joe catches a taxi and asks the driver to take him to the Matador. On the way, he sees a girl with blond hair and pigtails and asks the driver to stop. The driver does not want to because he thinks Joe is after sex and says she is likely to call the police. Eventually he relents and Joe gets out to ask her to come to the restaurant with him. She accepts his offer and they both get into the cab. She tells Joe she is not one of Jory's deformations and has nothing to do with him. Reaching into her purse she hands Joe a certificate that guarantees him a lifetime supply of Ubik. Her real name, she says, is Ella Runciter and she has spent most of her time in half-life fighting Jory and the Ubik is a product of the battle. However she is now on the way to being reborn, and Ella has selfish reasons for helping out Joe. She wants to find someone to keep her husband company and give him advice. She has chosen Joe because Mr. Runciter respects him.

Joe stops at a pharmacy and goes into the building, showing the pharmacist his certificate. Unfortunately, the pharmacist says he has no Ubik left, but Joe tells him he is wrong and that the pharmacist is really Jory. The pharmacist's voice changes to the high-pitched voice of a boy, and he says there is nothing Joe can do because he has regressed all the Ubik in the half-life world. Joe says he wants to see, and Jory happily bring him a tin of Ubik in its regressed form. Joe concentrates on the tin and tells it to evolve to its 1992 state. Nothing happens and Joe leaves the shop.

Outside, a tram is just leaving and Joe runs to catch it but at the last minute decides not to bother. As the tram moves away, a pretty girl approaches him with a package. She says Dr. Sanderbar has sent her to give Joe a spray can of Ubik. She says Joe summoned her when he tried to evolve the tin at the pharmacy.

## 16 Analysis

This chapter focuses on a battle of wits between Joe and Jory. Joe catches a cab and continues his talk of finding prostitutes. When Joe sees a young and pretty girl walking down the sidewalk, he asks the driver to stop. The driver does not think it is a good idea however because the girls in Des Moines are not easy, and she is likely to call the police. Such defensive talk raises Joe's suspicions, and Joe realizes Jory is trying to stop him from speaking to the girl. The girl is, of course, Ella Runciter, who gives him a certificate guaranteeing him a lifetime supply of Ubik. Joe takes the certificate to a pharmacy, and here Joe shows he has developed enough understanding about the world to know the pharmacist is Jory. Jory has regressed all the Ubik in the shop and Joe tries to evolve it back into its 1992, but with no luck. Interestingly, Jory then further tries to dampen Joe's spirits by saying he has regressed all the Ubik in half-life and Joe will be dead before tomorrow.





Joe's dampened spirits almost lead him to taking a bus out of town, but at the last minute he decides not to go, realizing the bus is just another product of Jory's world. If he had taken the bus he would have missed the girl that gives him the can of Ubik, saying that he summoned her when he tried to evolve the tin Ubik in the pharmacy. It now looks as though Joe has enough information about his new environment to survive.



# 17

## 17 Summary

In the mortuim, Runciter looks in vain for the owner so he can see his wife. Finally, he meets the secretary Miss Beason, who tells him she will have Ella brought out shortly. Eventually, a worker comes out with her casket and Runciter hands him some change as a tip. Looking at the money, the worker asks what kind of money it is. When Runciter looks at the coins, he sees Joe Chip's profile is on each one. The book ends with the line, "This was just the beginning."

## 17 Analysis

In the final chapter, Dick adds a twist by suggesting Runciter is also in half-life. By doing this, Dick questions the whole nature of reality, saying the world and no one within it is as they seem. For example, in this chapter Runciter cannot find Van Vogelsang, suggesting numerous things, but of which only one could be right. Has Van Vogelsang been killed by Jory? Was he one of Jory's deformations? Has he simply gone for cup of coffee? Furthermore, the reader may ask whether the group was in half-life from the very beginning and even if half-life is not just a reality the character's have always lived. Basically, Dick is claiming that the only way for a person to survive is to trust his/her own decisions.



# Characters

## Joe Chip

Joe is the main protagonist. He is a technician at the Runciter Company, which means he often assesses the anti-telepaths scouted by such people as G.G Ashwood. Joe lives on his own in an apartment in New York. At the beginning of the book, Joe is deeply in debt and cannot even afford money to open his front door. He claims the fact he has to pay to get out of his apartment is inhumane, but really this just the rant of a man on the down slide.

Joe's savior is Pat Conley. She offers to help him get out of debt if he passes her to work as an anti-telepath. However, Joe is loyal to Mr. Runciter and passes her simply because her powers are great. At the bottom of the test, he indicates she is dangerous.

Joe demonstrates his loyalty towards Runciter when the bomb explodes on Luna. Despite the fact, his boss is dead, Joe puts Runciter's on half-life before anyone else and rushes to preserve his body. In Zurich Joe becomes hysterical about Runciter's death and his friend Al has to calm him down. In the end, he suggests Joe has a relaxing evening in a hotel room with Wendy Wright. Joe is deeply in love with Wendy and agrees with the suggestion. Unfortunately, the next morning, he finds her dead. It is interesting at this point he shows little emotion. This does not prove Joe is cold hearted, but demonstrates how much he works on his instincts. He knows something is very wrong and that he must focus on the job at hand. He takes Wendy's body back to New York and with Al goes about trying to work out what is happening.

Joe's instincts work well when the world around him is regressing. Joe has to get to Des Moines, but all modern modes of transport are unavailable. Instead, Joe manages to work out how to use a LaSalle car and then drives it to an airfield. From here he manages to pay a pilot to take him to Des Moines, a feat perhaps none of the others could have achieved. Nevertheless, Joe's natural instincts can also work against him. For example, Joe's recommendation of Pat Conley may have lead to Runciter's death. For his instincts to work well, Joe needs a stable presence with him. Initially he finds this in Al and then later with Runciter himself. Both of them help him to focus his energy towards the reality, or in this case, the lack of reality, of the situation.

## Glen Runciter

Glen Runciter is head of the Runciter Company. He organizes the trip to Luna because he thinks it will bring his company a lot of money. He needs the money because, despite his excellent reputation, he is getting little business. In retrospect, Runciter must have an idea of the danger of going to Luna. First of all, Miss Wirt lies to him about the name of her boss and then, despite the fact he is fearful of Pat Conley, he still invites her



along as one of the eleven. If anything, this shows the desperate situation of his business.

Runciter is very proud of his company and loyal to all his workers. When all the eleven and Joe Chip die in the blast, he goes out of his way to help them realize they are dead and in half-life. He leaves messages for them on toilet walls, in cigarette cartons and on television. However, though he come across as someone who knows what is happening, he knows little and seems to find this a difficult thing to admit. When Joe meets him in his hotel room, Runciter admits he lied about the extent of Pat's involvement in their deaths and that the whole situation is too complex for him to understand.

Perhaps the reason he finds it difficult to admit his shortcomings is because his wife Ella makes many of his decisions. To make it worse, she is in half-life. When Joe becomes a half-life, the reader thinks it is Runciter helping him out, when actually he is doing it all on his wife's instructions, and it is not until she becomes involved in the situation that Joe finally finds a solution.

## Pat Conley

Dick describes Pat as a beautiful 19-year-old woman with olive skin and large brown eyes. Ashwood says she is the daughter of parents who work for Runciter's enemy, Ray Hollis. She gives no reason for wanting to work as an anti-telepath, but gives every impression she will do anything to get the job.

Most of the men she meets find her very attractive, but no one falls in love with her. Rather they are fearful of her powerful talent. Pat can go back in the past and change what has happened. In the story, she only uses this power a few times. The first time is in Joe's apartment when she shows Joe the failed test he wrote her in an alternative present. She says this time she wants Joe to pass her, and in awe of her ability, he immediately does what she requests. The second time is in Runciter's office when she takes Joe, Runciter and G.G Ashwood to an alternative present, where she and Joe are married, and Runciter has lost his contract with Stanton Mick. She quickly changes it back to the original present, but again she has shown her power. This power is so great the others soon grow suspicious of her.

Near the end, Runciter claims Pat is responsible for killing them and the problems happening in half-life. She admits this herself, saying Hollis hired her and G.G Ashwood to kill Runciter's best anti-telepaths. This makes perfect sense and probably helps the other characters understand their fear, but it turns out that Jory is the instigator of the half-life world and if Pat did work for Hollis, then she sacrificed her life doing so. That she claims it is true shows both her annoyance at the others' mistrust of her and that she was jealous of Joe's love for Wendy Wright. By the end of the novel, the reader sees her as an unhappy and isolated teenager looking for attention.



## **Ella Runciter**

Ella is Runciter's young wife. She is in half-life, however she had stipulated in her will that she wanted to still have a say in the Runciter business. Subsequently, her husband, Glen, often visits her for advice. Ella appears to Joe near the end of the novel. She gives him a certificate that guarantees a lifetime supply of Ubik. She says she is helping him because she is leaving half-life to become reborn and needs someone to look after her husband.

## **Al**

Al is one of the eleven who Runciter takes to Luna. He is an intelligent man with great leadership skills. When Runciter dies, Al is the only member of the group who shows clear thinking. He advises Joe to spend the night in a Zurich hotel and then the next day holds a meeting with the other inertials, coming very close to working out the problems they face. When Joe comes back from Zurich, it is Al's proactivity takes them to Baltimore and the Runciter's messages. Unfortunately Al is the second person of the eleven to die.

## **Wendy Wright**

Wendy is one of the eleven who Runciter takes to Luna. Wendy and Joe are in love and Joe arranges to meet her in a hotel in Zurich. In the morning he finds her dead in his closet.

## **Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang**

The owner of the Beloved Brethren Moratorium.

## **Jory**

It turns out Jory is a major character in the book and responsible for almost everything that happens. However, he appears only towards the end and little is known about him. What the reader does know is that he died at age 15 and was put Beloved Brethren Moratorium as a half lifer. Because he was so young at death, he still has a lot energy and creates havoc in the half-life world. To continue his games, he drains the energy from other half-lifers, killing them forever. Runciter wants him removed from the Moratorium, but his parents pay a lot of money to keep him there.



## **Ray Hollis**

Ray Hollis is Runciter's main adversary. Runciter sends out anti-telepaths to counteract Hollis' psychics. The reader only sees him once on vid phone, but he is often blamed for the explosion in Luna.

## **Zoe Wirt**

Miss Zoe Wirt claims to work for Stanton Mick. Mick sends her to Runciter to negotiate the Luna deal.

## **Stanton Mick**

Stanton Mick is the business magnate who asks Runciter to send eleven anti-telepaths to Luna. When they arrive, Mick floats above them like an insect and explodes. It is probable that Stanton Mick never invited them at all, and it was a trap laid by Ray Hollis.

## **Tippy Jackson**

Tippy is one of the eleven who Runciter takes to Luna.

## **Don Denny**

Don is one of the eleven who Runciter takes to Luna.

## **Francesca Spanish**

Francesca is one of the eleven who Runciter takes to Luna.

## **Tito Apostos**

Tito is one of the eleven who Runciter takes to Luna.

## **Jon Ild**

Jon is one of the eleven who Runciter takes to Luna.

## **Edie Dorn**

Edie is one of the eleven who Runciter takes to Luna.



## **G.G Ashwood**

G.G Ashwood scouts anti-telepaths for the Runciter company and is the man who asks Joe Chip to assess the abilities of Pat Conley. Later on, Pat tells Joe that she and G.G were working together to destroy Runciter's best telepaths. However this may have been a lie to make Joe jealous.



## Objects/Places

### Earth

Dick creates a futuristic earth where people can travel into space and read minds.

### Luna

Eleven anti-telepaths, Joe Chip and Mr. Runciter go to Luna on business and a bomb explodes, killing them all.

### Joe Chop's Conapt

Conapt is an apartment. In his apartment, Joe has to pay for everything, for example, opening the door. He meets Pat here for the first time.

### Des Moines

The eleven go to Runciter's funeral in Des Moines and find they have gone back in time to 1939.

### Baltimore

Al and Joe go to Baltimore to see if they can use their Runciter money.

### The Runciter Co-operation.

The co-operation is situated in New York and headed by Mr. Runciter. Joe Chip and the eleven inertials all work there.

### Ubik

When Joe Chip starts to regress, the Ubik spray is the only thing that can restore his health.

### Pratfall II

Runciter's spaceship. They use it to travel to Luna.





## **Beloved Brethren Moratorium**

A place in Zurich where they keep half-life's. Jory and Ella both stay here.

## **LaSalle**

The car Joe uses to drive to the airfield. It regresses to a Ford Coupe.



# Themes

## Reality

Dick asks the question what is reality? In *Ubik*, the story begins with all the characters apparently alive and in New York. They leave for Lunar and Runciter dies in an explosion. However, in proceeding chapters, the reader finds out it is not Runciter who is dead, but Joe Chip and the rest of the anti-telepaths. Dick further throws this into confusion in the last few lines of the novel, suggesting Runciter has been dead all along. In fact, within the uncertain environment Dick creates, the reader may ask if the characters have been in half-life from the beginning, and if the characters have always been part of Jory's world. The reader can go back through the book and find a few clues pointing to such conclusions. For example the anti-telepaths have dreams about characters called Matt and Bill, and at the end of the book, Jory admits he is both of these characters, suggesting he could get to them even in so-called reality.

As the book continues, Dick suggests each individual has his/her own reality, which is a true reality only for that person. Pat thinks she is more powerful than she is; Al thinks he is able to work everything out; Runciter cannot get it out of his mind that Pat is responsible for everything; Ella is heading towards rebirth; Jory just wants to have fun, and Joe has a need to become more human. The reader can argue that Jory creates these reality's for each character in order to play them against each other, because after all, each person's view either contradicts another's or holds them back from discovering the truth. However, Dick is also making a serious point, suggesting that though a person is responsible for themselves, not to understand the plight of others can have a negative effect on one's own decision making. In the end, it is only Joe who has the ability to understand this and thus survive.

## Money

At the beginning of the book, Joe Chip is in serious debt. This causes a major problem because in Dick's futuristic world, people have to pay for everything, including watching television, opening the front door and opening the fridge. For Joe, this is a catch-22 situation. He is the sort of person that needs his freedom, and in such a money-orientated world, money is the only way he can get that the freedom, and the only he can experience the freedom is through spending money. Of course, once he spends all his money, he is no longer free. Furthermore, Dick presents no alternative to this lifestyle so it seems Joe is stuck in this situation.

However, Joe is not the only character it affects. Mr. Runciter takes the contract with Stanton Mick because he knows it is worth a lot of money; however, he also knows that he could be leading his staff into a dangerous situation. Similarly, the moratorium owner, Vogelsburg, refuses to move the dangerous Jory because his parents pay so money to



keep him there. This all points to a world where people are forced to think about nothing other than money because the alternative is very grim.

Dick suggests such a mindset lacks any real humanity. Nevertheless, when the world regresses back to 1939, it is not necessarily any better. In this world, people support white supremacy and in general have no understanding of people outside their community. All this suggests that the way forward for the characters is to escape from the controls of money, religion or community. Ironically it is only half-life which can provide the environment to do so.

## Evolution

A major theme in the novel is evolution. Joe Chip addresses evolution in the early chapters when he explains to Pat why people have developed anti-telepathy. He says one insect learns to fly and another insect learns to build a web to catch them, and these relationships are everywhere in life to counteract potential problems. So when telepaths evolved, anti-telepaths evolved soon after.

With this in mind, Jory attempts to go against evolution by regressing the world back to 1939. Suddenly the characters find themselves completely at odds with their environment. Dick highlights this when Joe is talking to Mr Bliss about the upcoming second world war. Mr. Bliss talks about what he calls the nigger problem and how not all of what Hitler says is wrong. Joe had never heard such attitudes before and feels uncomfortable. He thinks to himself that he could have coped with the world going back 10 or 20 years, but to go back this far is likely to cause him and the others major problems psychologically. This theory proved correct by the way Jory takes advantage of the character's confusion. In particular, Pat's delusions of grandeur are out of place. However, Joe's earlier statement that humans evolve in order to survive, proves correct when he increasingly adapts to his surroundings until he is no longer in fear for his life.

# Style

## Point of View

Philip K. Dick tells the story in the third person, but in general through the eyes of Joe Chip. Occasionally, Dick will enter the thoughts of another character. For example, when Al and Joe wait for an elevator at the Runciter co-operation, Dick describes the old-fashioned elevator only Al sees. However, as the story continues and characters such as Al die, Joe has to fend for himself; Dick shows this by concentrating almost entirely on Joe's thoughts and actions. The exception is when Dick focuses on Runciter. Dick uses the point of view of Runciter to show Runciter is living an entirely different reality. While Joe is in half-life, Runciter is apparently alive and trying to help his dead employees.

Though Dick tells the story through one character, the point of view is generally reliable as Joe is trying to make sense of an unreliable and confusing environment where neither Joe nor the reader has the information to make sound judgments. By using this increasingly insular point of view, Dick can create the uncertainty that allows for the final twist.

## Setting

Ubik is initially set in the futuristic world of the 1990's. Within this world, people can fly across to other countries in a very short time. For example, Runciter travels from New York to Switzerland at 3.30 am and then back to New York the same morning to begin work. The characters also travel by space transport to a planet called Luna. This, of course, is not a real planet and therefore the reader can guess technology has moved on to the point where people can travel to other universes. This futuristic world has its negatives. In Joe Chip's apartment, he has to pay for everything from opening his door to turning on the television. When asks the objects why, they argue back.

The other setting Dick uses is 1939. In this setting, Joe Chip has to travel to Des Moines first by a LeSalle car and then an old style airplane. In fact, instead of taking only a few hours or less to get to his destination, it takes him a number of days. When he eventually gets to Des Moines it is full of old style, wooden shops and an atmosphere that is akin to a western. However, this setting is imagined by the evil character, Jory, and other than a few streets, he does not have the power to create anything huge. This means the Des Moines setting has a claustrophobic and isolated feel that suits the novel's theme of alienation.

Nevertheless, Joe operates better as a person in 1939 than he does in 1992. This is because Dick presents 1992 as a world where machines replace the need for people to think for themselves, and Joe is someone who needs the freedom to be himself. While



the real 1939 may not have provided that, the imagined and dangerous reality in which Joe finds himself allows him to develop into the person he wants to be.

## Language and Meaning

Ubik is set in the future, and as such, Philip K. Dick introduces many words the reader will not initially understand, such as cold pacs and pap machines. Dick does not waste any time defining these words, but the reader can quickly work out their meaning by how they relate to the plot. In fact, Dick wastes very few words. He keeps description down to the minimum and constantly drives the plot forward with short sentences and heavy use of dialogue.

Dick uses the dialogue to explain what is happening in a simpler way. For example, at the end of the book, the girl that brings Joe the Ubik explains to him exactly what the Ubik is and who made it. The reader may have questions about what she says but these questions are raised by Joe. This is a pattern throughout the book. The reader will question why something has happened and almost immediately one of the characters will ask exactly the same thing, creating an environment where the reader and the main character are in the same position. This means Dick never isolates the reader from what could otherwise be a confusing plot.

## Structure

Philip K. Dick divides Ubik into 17 chapters, each one following seamlessly on from the previous one, creating a fast pace that works towards what the reader expects to be a logical conclusion. However, this "logical conclusion" does not happen and the ending leaves more questions than it answers. For this ending to work as well as it does, Dick creates a number of different realities that serve to confuse both the readers and the characters. The first reality is the 1992 world in which the novel is set. Here, the character, Pat Conley, has the ability to change time, and she does so on a number of occasions. This serves as the book's second reality. The third reality is 1939, which is the time period the characters regress to in half-life.

Dick initially presents each reality separately with explanations why the character is or has been in that particular time period. However, he throws all this into confusion with the last line of the book when he suggests Runciter is also dead. This changes the novel's composition, and if the reader looks back at the book, s/he will see the structure is not as it initially appeared. For example, in retrospect, the reader could question why Von Vogelsang knows to look in the closet for Wendy Wright, and if it is more than a guess, what is his actual role in the story?

If anything, this shows Joe Chip can trust no one. Runciter lies to Joe about knowing what is happening. Joe questions if Pat and G.G Ashwood are working for Ray Hollis. Ella claims she only has selfish reasons for helping Joe out, and Jory pretends to be other people. Anyone who Joe can trust, such as Al, are quickly killed off. In terms of

structure, this works to create an environment where, in order to survive, Joe has to learn to think and act for himself.



## Quotes

"'Burial is barbaric,' Herbert muttered aloud. 'Remnant of the primitive origins of our culture.'"

P. 6

"Herzburg-Wright, licked his lips with satisfaction at the naughty exposure of her entire right ear, then feasted on the text."

P.20

"'These electrical-expert types have no time for tarradiddle,' G. G. Ashwood said irritably. 'Listen, Chip, this girl's parents work for Ray Hollis. If they knew she was here they'd give her a frontal lobotomy.'"

P.28

"It seems so—negative. I don't do anything; I don't move objects or turn stones into bread or give birth without impregnation or reverse the illness process in sick people. Or read minds. Or look into the future—not even common talents like that. I just negate somebody else's ability."

P.29

"'As a survival factor for the human race,' Joe said, 'it's as useful as the psi talents. Especially for us Norms. The anti-psi factor is a natural restoration of ecological balance. One insect learns to fly, so another learns to build a web to trap him. Is that the same as no flight.'"

P.29

"But beside him lounged a long-legged girl with brilliant, tumbling black hair and eyes; her intense, distilled beauty illuminated that part of the room, igniting it with heavy, sullen fire. It was, he thought, as if the girl resisted being attractive, disliked the smoothness of her skin and the sensual, swollen, dark quality of her lips."

P. 52

"And found himself standing before a shop window on Fifth Avenue, a rare-coin shop; he was studying an uncirculated U.S. gold dollar and wondering if he could afford to add it to his collection.

What collection? he asked himself, startled. I don't collect coins. What am I doing here? And how long have I been wandering around window-shopping when I ought to be in my office supervising—he could not remember what he generally supervised; a business of some kind, dealing in people with abilities, special talents."

P.64

"Probably she was twenty-five or -six, but he could not imagine her looking younger, and certainly she would never look older. She had too much control over herself and outside reality for that."

P.70



"His nose, Joe thought; it looks like the rubber bulb of a New Delhi taxi horn, soft and squeezable. And loud. The loudest noise, he thought, that I have ever seen."  
P.82

"My cigarettes,' Joe said. 'Dried out. The two-year-old phone book in the ship. The soured cream and coffee with scum on it, mold on it. The antiquated money."  
P.182

"Maybe Baltimore is only there when one of us goes there."  
P.190

"Al said, 'Didn't you see the old elevator? Open cage, brass, from around 1910? With the operator sitting on his stool?' 'No,' Joe said. 'Did you see anything?' 'This.' Joe gestured. 'The normal elevator I see every day when I come to work.'  
P.194

"JUMP IN THE URINAL AND STAND ON YOUR HEAD. I'M THE ONE THAT'S ALIVE. YOU'RE ALL DEAD."  
P.196

"I never actually heard the term "nigger" used,' Joe said, and found himself appraising this era a little differently, all at once. I forgot about this, he realized."  
P.229





## Topics for Discussion

Philip K. Dick creates a futuristic earth. How does he introduce the new and sometimes complicated elements and still move the plot forward ?

Do you think the ending of the novel works or do you think it is too much? Why does it matter that they are all dead?

How does the 1939 setting suit Joe better than the 1992 setting?

How much, if any, of the story elements are real and how much of the story elements does Dick use to merely create an uncertain environment?

Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang is a mysterious character who appears a number of times. What do you think his role is as a character? Is his character just another red herring?

How does Dick use dialogue and point of view to simplify what could otherwise be a confusing plot?

In what way is each character his or her own reality and how does that blind him or her to the truth of his or her own situation?