

# Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (retitled *Blade Runner: Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in some later printings) is a science fiction novel by American writer Philip K. Dick, first published in 1968. The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic San Francisco, where Earth's life has been greatly damaged by nuclear global war. Most animal species are endangered or extinct from extreme radiation poisoning, so that owning an animal is now a sign of status and empathy, an attitude encouraged towards animals. The book served as the primary basis for the 1982 film *Blade Runner*, and many elements and themes from it were used in its 2017 sequel *Blade Runner 2049*.

The main plot follows Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter who is tasked with "retiring" (i.e. killing) six escaped Nexus-6 model androids, while a secondary plot follows John Isidore, a man of sub-par IQ who aids the fugitive androids. In connection with Deckard's mission, the novel explores the issue of what it is to be human and whether empathy is a purely human ability.

## Contents

### Synopsis

- Background
- Plot summary

### Adaptations

- Film
- Radio
- Audiobook
- Theater
- Comic books

### Sequels

### Critical reception

### Awards and honors

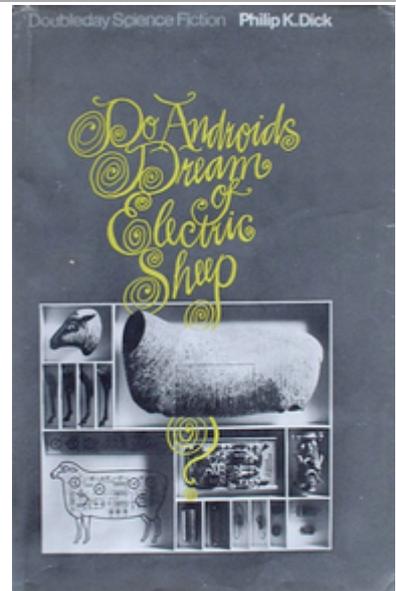
### See also

### References

### Further reading

### External links

## Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?



Cover of first hardback edition

| Author           | Philip K. Dick                           |
|------------------|--|
| Country          | United States                            |
| Language         | English                                  |
| Genre            | Science fiction, philosophical fiction   |
| Publisher        | Doubleday                                |
| Publication date | 1968                                     |
| Media type       | Print (hardback & paperback)             |
| Pages            | 210 <p>61,237 words<sup>[1]</sup></p>    |
| OCLC             | 34818133                                 |
| Followed by      | <i>Blade Runner 2: The Edge of Human</i> |

## Synopsis

### Background

In post-apocalyptic 1992 (2021 in later editions),<sup>[2]</sup> after "World War Terminus", the Earth's radioactively polluted atmosphere leads the United Nations to encourage mass emigrations to off-world colonies to preserve humanity's genetic integrity. This comes with the incentive of free personal androids: robot servants identical to humans. On Earth, owning real live animals has become a fashionable status symbol, because of mass extinctions and the accompanying cultural push for greater empathy, which has coincidentally

motivated a new technology-based religion called Mercerism. Mercerism uses "empathy boxes" to link users simultaneously to a virtual reality of collective suffering, centered on a martyr-like character, Wilbur Mercer, who eternally climbs up a hill while being hit with crashing stones. In terms of the owning of live animals, poor people can only afford realistic-looking electric imitations of animals. Rick Deckard, for example, owns a robotic black-faced sheep. The story also contains passing mention of "Penfield mood organs", similar to mind-altering drugs in other Dick stories, and used as a technology for inducing any desired mood among people in its vicinity.

## Plot summary

Bounty hunter Rick Deckard signs on to a new police mission in order to earn enough money to buy a live animal to replace his lone electric sheep, seeking greater existential fulfillment for himself and his depressed wife, Iran. The mission involves hunting down ("retiring") six Nexus-6 androids that violently went rogue after their creation by the Rosen Association and fled Mars for Earth. Deckard visits the Rosen headquarters in Seattle to confirm the validity of a question-and-answer empathy test: the typical method for identifying any androids posing as humans. Deckard is greeted by Rachael Rosen, who quickly fails his test. Rachael herself attempts to bribe Deckard into silence, but he verifies that she is indeed a Nexus-6 model used by Rosen to attempt to discredit the test.

Deckard soon meets a Soviet police contact who turns out to be one of the Nexus-6 renegades in disguise. Deckard retires the android, then flies off to retire his next target: an opera singer android. However, he is suddenly arrested and detained at a police department he has never heard of by a police officer whom he is surprised never to have met. At this strange station, Deckard's worldview is shaken when an official named Garland accuses Deckard himself of being an android. After a series of mysterious revelations at the station, Deckard ponders the ethical and philosophical questions his line of work raises regarding android intelligence, empathy, and what it means to be human. Phil Resch, the station's resident bounty hunter, retrieves testing equipment to determine if his coworkers—including Deckard and Resch himself—are androids or humans. Garland subsequently reveals that the entire station is a sham, staffed entirely by androids, including Garland himself. Resch shoots Garland in the head, allowing him and Deckard to escape; together, they find the opera singer, whom Resch brutally retires in cold blood. Although Resch and Deckard are now collaborators, each still worries that he (or the other) might be an android. Deckard administers the empathy test to himself and to Resch, which confirms that Resch is a human being—simply a particularly ruthless one—and that Deckard is also human, but with a sense of empathy for the androids.

Only three of the Nexus-6 android fugitives remain, and one, Pris Stratton, moves into an apartment building whose only other inhabitant is John R. Isidore, a radioactively damaged, intellectually below-average human classified as a "special." The lonely Isidore attempts to befriend her Roy and Irmgard Baty, the final two rogue androids, visit the building, and together they all plan how to survive. Meanwhile, Deckard buys Iran an authentic Nubian goat with his reward money. After quitting, Deckard is pulled back in after being notified of a new lead and experiencing a vision of the prophet-like Mercer confusingly telling him to proceed, despite the immorality of the mission. Deckard calls on Rachael Rosen again, since her own knowledge as an android will aid his investigation. Rachael reveals that she and Pris are the same exact model, meaning that he will have to shoot down an android that looks just like her. Rachael coaxes Deckard into sex, after which they confess their love for one another. However, she reveals she has slept with many bounty hunters, having been programmed to do so in order to dissuade them from their missions. He threatens to kill her, but instead he abruptly leaves.

Isidore develops friendships with the three android fugitives, and they all watch a television program giving definitive evidence that Mercerism is a hoax. Roy Baty tells Isidore that the show was produced by androids to discredit Mercerism and blur the distinction with humans. Suddenly Deckard enters the building, with strange, supernatural premonitions of Mercer appearing to both him and Isidore. Since they attack him first, Deckard is legally justified as he shoots down all three androids without previously testing them. Isidore is devastated, and Deckard is soon rewarded for a record number of Nexus-6 kills in a single day. When Deckard returns home, he finds Iran grieving because Rachael Rosen recently showed up and killed their goat.

Deckard goes to an uninhabited, obliterated region of Oregon to reflect. He climbs a hill when he is hit by falling rocks and realizes this is an experience eerily similar to Mercer's martyrdom. Rushing back to his car, he stumbles abruptly upon a toad, an animal previously thought to be extinct, and one of the animals sacred to Mercer. With newfound joy, Deckard brings the toad home, where

Iran quickly discovers it is just a robot. While Deckard is unhappy, he decides that he at least prefers to know the truth, making the remark that "the electrical things have their lives too, paltry as those lives are".

## Adaptations

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### Film

In 1982, Hampton Fancher and David Peoples wrote a loose cinematic adaptation that became the film *Blade Runner*, featuring several of the novel's characters. It was directed by Ridley Scott. Following the international success of the film,<sup>[3]</sup> the title *Blade Runner* was adopted for some later editions of the novel, although the term itself was not used in the original.

### Radio

As part of their *Dangerous Visions* dystopia series in 2014, BBC Radio 4 broadcast a two-part adaptation of the novel. It was produced and directed by Sasha Yevtushenko from an adaption by Jonathan Holloway. It stars James Purefoy as Rick Deckard and Jessica Raine as Rachael Rosen!<sup>[4]</sup> The episodes were originally broadcast on Sunday 15 June and 22 June 2014.

### Audiobook

The novel has been released in audiobook form at least twice. A version was released in 1994 that featured Matthew Modine and Calista Flockhart

A new audiobook version was released in 2007 by Random House Audio to coincide with the release of *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*. This version, read by Scott Brick, is unabridged and runs approximately 9.5 hours over eight CDs. This version is a tie-in, using the *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* film poster and *Blade Runner* title.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Theater

A stage adaptation of the book, written by Edward Einhorn, ran from November 18 to December 10, 2010 at the 3LD Art & Technology Center in New York<sup>[6]</sup> and made its West Coast Premiere on September 13, playing until October 10, 2013 at the Sacred Fools Theater Company in Los Angeles.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Comic books

BOOM! Studios published a 24-issue comic book limited series based on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* containing the full text of the novel illustrated by artist Tony Parker.<sup>[8]</sup> The comic garnered a nomination for "Best New Series" from the 2010 Eisner Awards.<sup>[9]</sup> In May 2010 BOOM! Studios began serializing an eight issue prequel subtitled *Dust To Dust* and written by Chris Roberson and drawn by Robert Adler.<sup>[10]</sup> The story took place in the days immediately after World War Terminus.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Sequels

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Three novels intended to serve as sequels to both *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner* have been published:

- *Blade Runner 2: The Edge of Human* (1995)
- *Blade Runner 3: Replicant Night* (1996)
- *Blade Runner 4: Eye and Talon* (2000)

These official and authorized sequels were written by Dick's friend K. W. Jeter.<sup>[12]</sup> They continue the story of Rick Deckard and attempt to reconcile many of the differences between the novel and the 1982 film.

## Critical reception

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Critical reception of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* has been overshadowed by the popularity of its 1982 film adaptation, *Blade Runner*. Of those critics who focus on the novel, several nest it predominantly in the history of Philip K. Dick's body of work. In particular, Dick's 1972 speech "The Human and the Android" is cited in this connection. Jill Galvan<sup>[13]</sup> calls attention to the correspondence between Dick's portrayal of the narrative's dystopian, polluted, man-made setting and the description Dick gives in his speech of the increasingly artificial and potentially sentient or "quasi-alive" environment of his present. Summarizing the essential point of Dick's speech, Galvan argues, "[o]nly by recognizing how [technology] has encroached upon our understanding of 'life' can we come to full terms with the technologies we have produced" (414). As a "bildungsroman of the cybernetic age," Galvan maintains, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* follows one person's gradual acceptance of the new reality. Christopher Palmer<sup>[14]</sup> emphasizes Dick's speech to bring to attention the increasingly dangerous risk of humans becoming "mechanical".<sup>[15]</sup> "Androids threaten reduction of what makes life valuable, yet promise expansion or redefinition of it, and so do aliens and gods".<sup>[15]</sup> Gregg Rickman<sup>[16]</sup> cites another, earlier and lesser known Dick novel that also deals with androids, *We Can Build You*, asserting that *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* can be read as a sequel.

In a departure from the tendency among most critics to examine the novel in relation to Dick's other texts, Klaus Benesch<sup>[17]</sup> examined *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* primarily in connection with Lacan's essay on the mirror stage. There, Lacan claims that the formation and reassurance of the self depends on the construction of an Other through imagery, beginning with a double as seen in the mirror. The androids, Benesch argues, perform a doubling function similar to the mirror image of the self, but they do this on a social, not individual, scale. Therefore, human anxiety about androids expresses uncertainty about human identity and society. Benesch draws on Kathleen Woodward's<sup>[18]</sup> emphasis on the body to illustrate the shape of human anxiety about an android Other. Woodward asserts that the debate over distinctions between human and machine usually fails to acknowledge the presence of the body. "If machines are invariably contrived as technological prostheses that are designed to amplify the physical faculties of the body, they are also built, according to this logic, to outdo, to surpass the human in the sphere of physicality altogether".<sup>[19]</sup>

## Awards and honors

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- 1968 – Nebula Award nominee<sup>[20]</sup>
- 1998 – Locus Poll Award, All-Time Best SF Novel before 1990 (Place:51)

## See also

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- Biorobotics

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- Philip K. Dick, [The Little Black Box](#), 1964 - a short story depicting Mercerism's origin, published 4 years prior to "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"

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## External links

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- *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* title listing at the [Internet Speculative Fiction Database](#)
  - *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* at the Internet Book List
  - Complete publication history and cover gallery
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