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Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

Written by Philip K. Dick

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Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

PHILIP K. DICK



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CHAPTER ONE

A merry little surge of electricity piped by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside his bed awakened Rick Deckard. Surprised – it always surprised him to find himself awake without prior notice – he rose from the bed, stood up in his multicolored pajamas, and stretched. Now, in her bed, his wife Iran opened her gray, unmerry eyes, blinked, then groaned and shut her eyes again.

‘You set your Penfield too weak,’ he said to her. ‘I’ll reset it and you’ll be awake and—’

‘Keep your hand off my settings.’ Her voice held bitter sharpness. ‘I don’t *want* to be awake.’

He seated himself beside her, bent over her, and explained softly. ‘If you set the surge up high enough, you’ll be glad you’re awake; that’s the whole point. At setting C it overcomes the threshold barring consciousness, as it does for me.’ Friendly, because he felt well-disposed toward the world – *his* setting had been at *D* – he patted her bare, pale shoulder.

‘Get your crude cop’s hand away,’ Iran said.

‘I’m not a cop.’ He felt irritable now, although he hadn’t dialed for it.

‘You’re worse,’ his wife said, her eyes still shut. ‘You’re a murderer hired by the cops.’

‘I’ve never killed a human being in my life.’ His irritability had risen, now; had become outright hostility.

Iran said, ‘Just those poor andys.’

‘I notice you’ve never had any hesitation as to spending the

bounty money I bring home on whatever momentarily attracts your attention.’ He rose, strode to the console of his mood organ. ‘Instead of saving,’ he said, ‘so we could buy a real sheep, to replace that fake electric one upstairs. A mere electric animal, and me earning all that I’ve worked my way up to through the years.’ At his console he hesitated between dialing for a thalamic suppressant (which would abolish his mood of rage) or a thalamic stimulant (which would make him irked enough to win the argument).

‘If you dial,’ Iran said, eyes open and watching, ‘for greater venom, then I’ll dial the same. I’ll dial the maximum and you’ll see a fight that makes every argument we’ve had up to now seem like nothing. Dial and see; just try me.’ She rose swiftly, loped to the console of her own mood organ, stood glaring at him, waiting.

He sighed, defeated by her threat. ‘I’ll dial what’s on my schedule for today.’ Examining the schedule for January 3, 1992, he saw that a businesslike professional attitude was called for. ‘If I dial by schedule,’ he said warily, ‘will you agree to also?’ He waited, canny enough not to commit himself until his wife had agreed to follow suit.

‘My schedule for today lists a six-hour self-accusatory depression,’ Iran said.

‘What? Why did you schedule that?’ It defeated the whole purpose of the mood organ. ‘I didn’t even know you could set it for that,’ he said gloomily.

‘I was sitting here one afternoon,’ Iran said, ‘and naturally I had turned on Buster Friendly and His Friendly Friends and he was talking about a big news item he’s about to break and then that awful commercial came on, the one I hate; you know, for Mountibank Lead Codpieces. And so for a minute I shut off the sound. And I heard the building, this building; I heard the—’ She gestured.

‘Empty apartments,’ Rick said. Sometimes he heard them at night when he was supposed to be asleep. And yet, for this day and age a one-half occupied conapt building rated high in the

scheme of population density; out in what had been before the war the suburbs one could find buildings entirely empty . . . or so he had heard. He had let the information remain second-hand; like most people he did not care to experience it directly.

‘At that moment,’ Iran said, ‘when I had the TV sound off, I was in a 382 mood; I had just dialed it. So although I heard the emptiness intellectually, I didn’t feel it. My first reaction consisted of being grateful that we could afford a Penfield mood organ. But then I realized how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting – do you see? I guess you don’t. But that used to be considered a sign of mental illness; they called it “absence of appropriate affect.” So I left the TV sound off and I sat down at my mood organ and I experimented. And I finally found a setting for despair.’ Her dark, pert face showed satisfaction, as if she had achieved something of worth. ‘So I put it on my schedule for twice a month; I think that’s a reasonable amount of time to feel hopeless about everything, about staying here on Earth after everybody who’s smart has emigrated, don’t you think?’

‘But a mood like that,’ Rick said, ‘you’re apt to stay in it, not dial your way out. Despair like that, about total reality, is self-perpetuating.’

‘I program an automatic resetting for three hours later,’ his wife said sleekly. ‘A 481. Awareness of the manifold possibilities open to me in the future; new hope that—’

‘I know 481,’ he interrupted. He had dialed out the combination many times; he relied on it greatly. ‘Listen,’ he said, seating himself on his bed and taking hold of her hands to draw her down beside him, ‘even with an automatic cut-off it’s dangerous to undergo a depression, any kind. Forget what you’ve scheduled and I’ll forget what I’ve scheduled; we’ll dial a 104 together and both experience it, and then you stay in it while I reset mine for my usual businesslike attitude. That way I’ll want to hop up to the roof and check out the sheep and then head for the office; meanwhile I’ll know you’re not sitting

here brooding with no TV.’ He released her slim, long fingers, passed through the spacious apartment to the living room, which smelled faintly of last night’s cigarettes. There he bent to turn on the TV.

From the bedroom Iran’s voice came. ‘I can’t stand TV before breakfast.’

‘Dial 888,’ Rick said as the set warmed. ‘The desire to watch TV, no matter what’s on it.’

‘I don’t feel like dialing anything at all now,’ Iran said.

‘Then dial 3,’ he said.

‘I can’t dial a setting that stimulates my cerebral cortex into wanting to dial! If I don’t want to dial, I don’t want to dial that most of all, because then I will want to dial, and wanting to dial is right now the most alien drive I can imagine; I just want to sit here on the bed and stare at the floor.’ Her voice had become sharp with overtones of bleakness as her soul congealed and she ceased to move, as the instinctive, omnipresent film of great weight, of an almost absolute inertia, settled over her.

He turned up the TV sound, and the voice of Buster Friendly boomed out and filled the room. ‘—ho ho, folks. Time now for a brief note on today’s weather. The Mongoose satellite reports that fallout will be especially pronounced toward noon and will then taper off, so all you folks who’ll be venturing out—’

Appearing beside him, her long nightgown trailing wispily, Iran shut off the TV set. ‘Okay, I give up; I’ll dial. Anything you want me to be; ecstatic sexual bliss – I feel so bad I’ll even endure that. What the hell. What difference does it make?’

‘I’ll dial for both of us,’ Rick said, and led her back into the bedroom. There, at her console, he dialed 594; pleased acknowledgment of husband’s superior wisdom in all matters. On his own console he dialed for a creative and fresh attitude toward his job, although this he hardly needed; such was his habitual, innate approach without recourse to Penfield artificial brain stimulation.

After a hurried breakfast – he had lost time due to the discussion with his wife – he ascended clad for venturing out, including his Ajax model Mountibank Lead Codpiece, to the covered roof pasture whereon his electric sheep ‘grazed.’ Whereon it, sophisticated piece of hardware that it was, chomped away in simulated contentment, bamboozling the other tenants of the building.

Of course, some of their animals undoubtedly consisted of electronic circuitry fakes, too; he had of course never nosed into the matter, any more than they, his neighbors, had pried into the real workings of his sheep. Nothing could be more impolite. To say, ‘Is your sheep genuine?’ would be a worse breach of manners than to inquire whether a citizen’s teeth, hair, or internal organs would test out authentic.

The morning air, spilling over with radioactive motes, gray and sun-beclouding, belched about him, haunting his nose; he sniffed involuntarily the taint of death. Well, that was too strong a description for it, he decided as he made his way to the particular plot of sod which he owned along with the unduly large apartment below. The legacy of World War Terminus had diminished in potency; those who could not survive the dust had passed into oblivion years ago, and the dust, weaker now and confronting the strong survivors, only deranged minds and genetic properties. Despite his lead codpiece the dust – undoubtedly – filtered in and at him, brought him daily, so long as he failed to emigrate, its little load of befouling filth. So far, medical checkups taken monthly confirmed him as a regular: a man who could reproduce within the tolerances set by law. Any month, however, the exam by the San Francisco Police Department doctors could reveal otherwise. Continually, new specials came into existence, created out of regulars by the omnipresent dust. The saying currently blabbed by posters, TV ads, and government junk mail, ran: ‘Emigrate or degenerate! The choice is yours!’ Very true, Rick thought as he opened the gate to his little pasture

and approached his electric sheep. But I can't emigrate, he said to himself. Because of my job.

The owner of the adjoining pasture, his conapt neighbor Bill Barbour, hailed him; he, like Rick, had dressed for work but had stopped off on the way to check his animal, too.

'My horse,' Barbour declared beamingly, 'is pregnant.' He indicated the big Percheron, which stood staring off in an empty fashion into space. 'What do you say to that?'

'I say pretty soon you'll have two horses,' Rick said. He had reached his sheep, now; it lay ruminating, its alert eyes fixed on him in case he had brought any rolled oats with him. The alleged sheep contained an oat-tropic circuit; at the sight of such cereals it would scramble up convincingly and amble over. 'What's she pregnant by?' he asked Barbour. 'The wind?'

'I bought some of the highest quality fertilizing plasma available in California,' Barbour informed him. 'Through inside contacts I have with the State Animal Husbandry Board. Don't you remember last week when their inspector was out here examining Judy? They're eager to have her foal; she's an unmatched superior.' Barbour thumped his horse fondly on the neck and she inclined her head toward him.

'Ever thought of selling your horse?' Rick asked. He wished to god he had a horse, in fact any animal. Owning and maintaining a fraud had a way of gradually demoralizing one. And yet from a social standpoint it had to be done, given the absence of the real article. He had therefore no choice except to continue. Even were he not to care himself, there remained his wife, and Iran did care. Very much.

Barbour said, 'It would be immoral to sell my horse.'

'Sell the colt, then. Having two animals is more immoral than not having any.'

Puzzled, Barbour said, 'How do you mean? A lot of people have two animals, even three, four, and like in the case of Fred Washborne, who owns the algae-processing plant my brother works at, even five. Didn't you see that article about his duck in yesterday's *Chronicle*? It's supposed to be the heaviest, largest

Moscovy on the West Coast.’ The man’s eyes glazed over, imagining such possessions; he drifted by degrees into a trance.

Exploring about in his coat pockets, Rick found his creased, much-studied copy of Sidney’s Animal & Fowl Catalogue January supplement. He looked in the index, found colts (vide horses, offsp.) and presently had the prevailing national price. ‘I can buy a Percheron colt from Sidney’s for five thousand dollars,’ he said aloud.

‘No you can’t,’ Barbour said. ‘Look at the listing again; it’s in italics. That means they don’t have any in stock, but that would be the price if they did have.’

‘Suppose,’ Rick said, ‘I pay you five hundred dollars a month for ten months. Full catalogue value.’

Pityingly, Barbour said, ‘Deckard, you don’t understand about horses; there’s a reason why Sidney’s doesn’t have any Percheron colts in stock. Percheron colts just don’t change hands – at catalogue value, even. They’re too scarce, even relatively inferior ones.’ He leaned across their common fence, gesticulating. ‘I’ve had Judy for three years and not in all that time have I seen a Percheron mare of her quality. To acquire her I had to fly to Canada, and I personally drove her back here myself to make sure she wasn’t stolen. You bring an animal like this anywhere around Colorado or Wyoming and they’ll knock you off to get hold of it. You know why? Because back before W.W.T. there existed literally hundreds—’

‘But,’ Rick interrupted, ‘for you to have two horses and me none, that violates the whole basic theological and moral structure of Mercerism.’

‘You have your sheep; hell, you can follow the Ascent in your individual life, and when you grasp the two handles of empathy you approach honorably. Now if you didn’t have that old sheep, there, I’d see some logic in your position. Sure, if I had two animals and you didn’t have any, I’d be helping deprive you of true fusion with Mercer. But every family in this building – let’s see; around fifty: one to every three apts, as I compute it – every one of us has an animal of some sort.

Graveson has that chicken over there.’ He gestured north. ‘Oakes and his wife have that big red dog that barks in the night.’ He pondered. ‘I think Ed Smith has a cat down in his apt; at least he says so, but no one’s ever seen it. Possibly he’s just pretending.’

Going over to his sheep, Rick bent down, searching in the thick white wool – the fleece at least was genuine – until he found what he was looking for: the concealed control panel of the mechanism. As Barbour watched he snapped open the panel covering, revealing it. ‘See?’ he said to Barbour. ‘You understand now why I want your colt so badly?’

After an interval Barbour said, ‘You poor guy. Has it always been this way?’

‘No,’ Rick said, once again closing the panel covering of his electric sheep; he straightened up, turned, and faced his neighbor. ‘I had a real sheep, originally. My wife’s father gave it to us outright when he emigrated. Then, about a year ago, remember that time I took it to the vet – you were up here that morning when I came out and found it lying on its side and it couldn’t get up.’

‘You got it to its feet,’ Barbour said, remembering and nodding. ‘Yeah, you managed to lift it up but then after a minute or two of walking around it fell over again.’

Rick said, ‘Sheep get strange diseases. Or put another way, sheep get a lot of diseases but the symptoms are always the same; the sheep can’t get up and there’s no way to tell how serious it is, whether it’s a sprained leg or the animal’s dying of tetanus. That’s what mine died of: tetanus.’

‘Up here?’ Barbour said. ‘On the roof?’

‘The hay,’ Rick explained. ‘That one time I didn’t get all the wire off the bale; I left a piece and Groucho – that’s what I called him, then – got a scratch and in that way contracted tetanus. I took him to the vet’s and he died, and I thought about it, and finally I called one of those shops that manufacture artificial animals and I showed them a photograph of Groucho. They made this.’ He indicated the reclining ersatz

animal, which continued to ruminate attentively, still watching alertly for any indication of oats. 'It's a premium job. And I've put as much time and attention into caring for it as I did when it was real. But—' He shrugged.

'It's not the same,' Barbour finished.

'But almost. You feel the same doing it; you have to keep your eye on it exactly as you did when it was really alive. Because they break down and then everyone in the building knows. I've had it at the repair shop six times, mostly little malfunctions, but if anyone saw them – for instance one time the voice tape broke or anyhow got fouled and it wouldn't stop baaing – they'd recognize it as a *mechanical* breakdown.' He added, 'The repair outfit's truck is of course marked "animal hospital something." And the driver dresses like a vet, completely in white.' He glanced suddenly at his watch, remembering the time. 'I have to get to work,' he said to Barbour. 'I'll see you this evening.'

As he started toward his car Barbour called after him hurriedly, 'Um, I won't say anything to anybody here in the building.'

Pausing, Rick started to say thanks. But then something of the despair that Iran had been talking about tapped him on the shoulder and he said, 'I don't know; maybe it doesn't make any difference.'

'But they'll look down on you. Not all of them, but some. You know how people are about not taking care of an animal; they consider it immoral and anti-empathic. I mean, technically it's not a crime like it was right after W.W.T. but the feeling's still there.'

'God,' Rick said futilely, and gestured empty-handed. 'I *want* to have an animal; I keep trying to buy one. But on my salary, on what a city employee makes—' If, he thought, I could get lucky in my work again. As I did two years ago when I managed to bag four andys during one month. If I had known then, he thought, that Groucho was going to die . . . but that had been before the tetanus. Before the two-inch piece of broken, hypodermic-like baling wire.

‘You could buy a cat,’ Barbour offered. ‘Cats are cheap; look in your Sidney’s catalogue.’

Rick said quietly, ‘I don’t want a domestic pet. I want what I originally had, a large animal. A sheep or if I can get the money a cow or a steer or what you have; a horse.’ The bounty from retiring five andys would do it, he realized. A thousand dollars apiece, over and above my salary. Then somewhere I could find, from someone, what I want. Even if the listing in Sidney’s *Animal & Fowl* is in italics. Five thousand dollars – but, he thought, the five andys first have to make their way to Earth from one of the colony planets; I can’t control that, I can’t make five of them come here, and even if I could there are other bounty hunters with other police agencies throughout the world. The andys would specifically have to take up residence in Northern California, and the senior bounty hunter in this area, Dave Holden, would have to die or retire.

‘Buy a cricket,’ Barbour suggested wittily. ‘Or a mouse. Hey, for twenty-five bucks you can buy a full-grown mouse.’

Rick said, ‘Your horse could die, like Groucho died, without warning. When you get home from work this evening you could find her laid out on her back, her feet in the air, like a bug. Like what you said, a cricket.’ He strode off, car key in his hand.

‘Sorry if I offended you,’ Barbour said nervously.

In silence Rick Deckard plucked open the door of his hovercar. He had nothing further to say to his neighbor; his mind was on his work, on the day ahead.