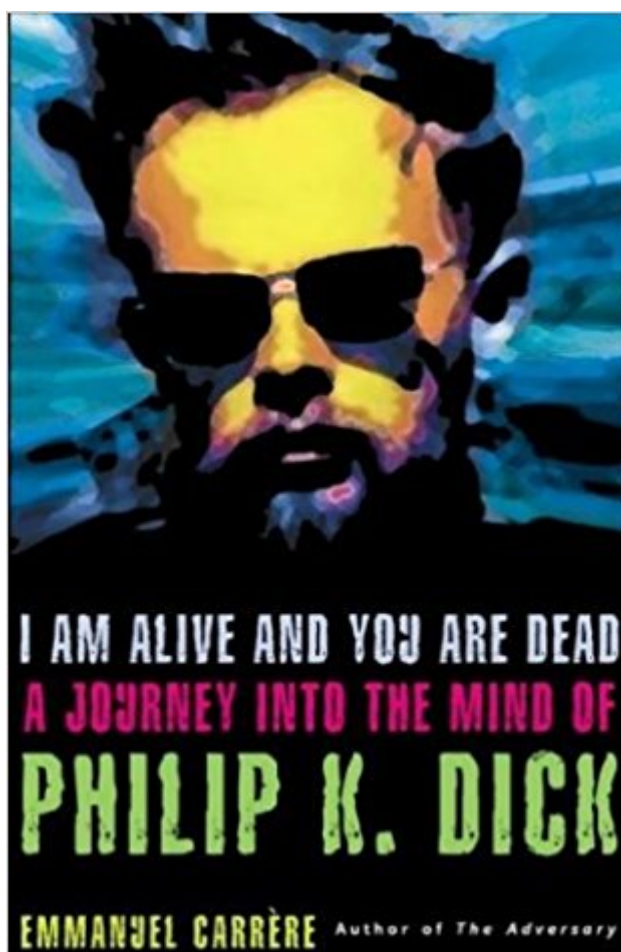


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# I Am Alive And You Are Dead: A Journey Into The Mind Of Philip K. Dick



## Synopsis

From the master chronicler of psychological extremes, an unforgettable portrait of the "Shakespeare of science fiction" whose work has influenced millions. For his many devoted readers, Philip K. Dick is not only one of the "most valiant psychological explorers of the 20th century" (The New York Times) but a source of divine revelation. Dick, whose work inspired such films as Blade Runner, Total Recall, and Minority Report, dedicated his life to solving one ultimately unanswerable question: What is real? In the riveting style that won accolades for *The Adversary*, Emmanuel Carrère follows Dick's strange odyssey from his traumatic beginnings in 1928, when his twin sister died in infancy, to his lonely end in 1982, beset by mystical visions of swirling pink lights, three-eyed invaders, and messages from the Roman Empire. Drawing on interviews as well as unpublished sources, Carrère traces Dick's multiple marriages, paranoid fantasies, and vertiginous encounters with the drug culture of sixties California. He vividly conjures the spirit of this restless observer of American postwar malaise whose more than fifty novels subverted the materials of science fiction—parallel universes, intricate time loops, collective delusions—to create classic works of contemporary anxiety. As disturbing and engrossing as a book by its subject, Carrère's unconventional work interweaves life and art to reveal the maddening genius whose writing foresaw "from cloning to reality TV" a world that looks ever more like one of his inventions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Strange, fascinating man, and this a strange, fascinating book." —The San Diego Union

Tribune Emmanuel Carrère's *I Am Alive and You Are Dead: A Journey into the Mind of Philip K. Dick* is remarkable—a depth charge, a CAT scan, and an exorcism. Carrère, whose own eerie novels include *The Adversary*, proves that it's still possible for the French to write like Voltaire rather than Derrida. Informed, affectionate, sardonic, he is also crystal clear.

- John Leonard, Harper's: "Consistently fascinating and brilliantly written . . . Carrère combines fact and fiction to form a new sort of genre, blending literary criticism and cultural history with a novelist's earnest speculation."
- Los Angeles Times Book Review: "The story of a remarkable life marked by great burst of creativity and equally frequent bouts of mental turmoil . . . Carrère wisely eschews the 'and then he wrote' approach to literary biography . . . He neither overstates Dick's gifts nor belittles his more outlandish hypotheses about the underlying meaning of reality . . . Captures . . . [Dick's] sense of humor, his intellectual curiosity, his very human vulnerability . . . Compelling."
- Michael Berry, San Francisco Chronicle: "Startling . . . Carrère gets so far inside the head of the deeply troubled author . . . the resulting text is remarkably vivid, intimate, often haunting."
- The Philadelphia Inquirer: "What Dick thinks and feels as a man and writer is richly developed in this riveting biography. Mr. Carrère's book is mesmerizing. Seldom have I read a biographer who drew me so deeply into his subject's world."
- Carl Rollyson, The New York Sun: "Every whorl of Dick's mind, every delusion, every leap through the looking glass, is chronicled. The effect is powerful."
- James Parker, The Boston Globe: "[A] painful and unconventional biography [that] portrays Dick as a Cold War Don Quixote, flailing at the totalitarianism he suspected was taking over 1950s-60s America. Aimed at hardcore Dick fans, it's a powerful treatment of a difficult subject."
- Publishers Weekly --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Emmanuel Carrère, novelist, filmmaker, journalist, and biographer, is the award-winning internationally renowned author of *The Adversary* (a New York Times Notable Book), *Lives Other Than My Own*, *My Life As A Russian Novel*, *Class Trip* and *The Mustache*. Carrère lives in Paris.

There is a sense in which this is a strange book about a very strange man. It's basically a biography but it's a biography by a novelist and at times reads like a pretty good novel. I'd have to say Dick lends himself to that approach. He wasn't exactly Mr. Mainstream. Undeniably bright, talented and extremely imaginative, Dick was a self-destructive mess. I'd say as he got older it sounds like he was completely losing it. Harlan Ellison had promoted the myth of Dick as groovy counter-cultural guy and eventually Dick - embarrassingly tried to live the myth. Dick had little higher education. This is sometimes a strength particularly when it frees you from academic pretension but it can be a

disadvantage. It was for Dick. A little organized learning and academic discipline would have done him a world of good. It might have freed him from a tendency to wander off in a thousand disorganized directions at once. I almost hate to do it but I feel compelled to compare him to Ursula LeGuin in this context. My point is not that she is a better writer - *per se* - (although she is a much better literary stylist) - but in part because of her more academic, intellectual background LeGuin comes across as more grounded and lucid than Dick. Still, Dick wins the mad genius award! I tend to like him best at his craziest - *UBIK*, *VALIS*, *THE DIVINE INVASION*, *PALMER ELDRITCH*. Finally, my favorite anecdote, Dick convincing himself that Stanislaw Lem was trying to lure him to Warsaw so the KGB could take control of him.

I don't know much about Philip K. Dick. I'm not a fan. But surfing the web, I came across some articles about him that intrigued me enough to want to learn more. I found myself spending about an hour on *'s Search Inside the Book*, reading through as much of this book as I could (i.e., the first 3 or 4 pages of each chapter). Well, that wasn't enough to quench my thirst. So I bought it, and it was a book that I swallowed in one gulp -- I couldn't put it down. Fascinating stuff. Carrère is a very good writer, and this is a book that works on several levels. First, he brings to life the various phases of Dick's personality, from his nerdy adolescence, to his semi-straight 20s, to his drug-drenched 30s and 40s. The book is also very good at evoking the three distinctive eras of American culture Dick lived through: the 1950s, the 1960s, and the 1970s. Too, Carrère limns with great clarity the complex twists and turns of Dick's spiritual journey, and also offers thoughtful commentary on Dick's prolific body of writing (with some especially interesting observations on how the details of Dick's life were reflected and transformed in his fiction). All in all, a great introduction to Dick. He was a fascinating man, and this is a fascinating book. Carrère is clearly a fanboy, but he's also a very smart and talented writer, so this book far transcends typical fanboy biographies. Indeed, it's a first-rate work of literature. By way of a postscript, I liked this book so much I picked up Carrère's *The Adversary* -- which is a superb non-fiction thriller, another mind-blowing great read (that appears to be Carrère's specialty).

Wow! What can you say about Philip K. Dick and this biography? I mean, I knew Philip K. Dick was a paranoid, but I had no idea to what degree he was. Stunning. I'm surprised he didn't die from a stroke much earlier in his short life. This book also confirmed for me that many of Dick's books were written in a drug addled state, although he only took LSD once -- everything else was uppers, for the most part. It's how he churned out his novels so

fast. It seemed to me that Dick had a miserable, tortured life, and I left the book feeling quite sorry for him. His interactions with women played a significant role in his life – he was married five times. We can see elements of these women in some of his works. However, I thought the biographer kind of glossed over some really critical information about these relationships for several of the marriages. I think more could have been learned about Dick if more were put into that area. I always wondered if Dick was writing from his life, if he was as paranoid as his characters, as caught up with alternative worlds and realms of being. This book seems to answer those questions with a resounding yes, I was right! He really did seem to write from his life. Clearly, he was one messed up dude. However, his literary gems wouldn't exist today without his tortured life to serve as an example for him. On the whole, it was a pretty sound book, and I don't know how Carrere pulled off such a comprehensive work.

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