



# Ubik as a Science Fiction

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## Abstract

Ubik is a 1969 science fiction novel written by American novelist Philip K. Dick. It is one of Dick's most acclaimed novels. It was chosen by "Time Magazine" as one of the hundred greatest novels since 1923. In his review for "Time" critic Leu Grossman described it as "a deeply unsettling existential horror story A night mare you will never be sure you have woken up from".

**Keywords:** *science fiction, psychic phenomena, telepath, half-life, animation*

## Full Text

The novel takes place in the North American confederation of 1992, where civilians regularly travel to the moon. The novel's protagonist, Joe Chip is a debt-ridden technician for Glen Runciter's "prudence organisation" which employs people with the ability to block psychic power to help enforce privacy. Runciter runs the company with the assistance of his deceased wife Ella, who is kept in a state of half-life, a form of cryonic suspension that gives the deceased limited consciousness and the ability to communicate.

When business magnet Stanton Mike hires Runciter's Company to secure his lunar facilities from telepath, Runciter assembles a team of eleven agents. The group includes Pat Conley, a mysterious young woman who has the parapsychological

ability to undo went by changing the past Joe Chip and Pat have a repressed and distressful sexual tension throughout the story.

When Runciter, Chip and others reach Dick's moon base they discovered that the assignment is a trap, presumably set by the company's main adversary, Ray Hollis, who leads an organisation of psychics. A bomb explosion apparently kills Runciter without significantly harming the others. They rush back to Earth to place him in half life.

Afterwards, the group begins to experience strange shifts in reality. Consumables, such as milk and cigarettes, begin to rapidly deteriorate also, the group sees Runciter's face on coins and receives strange messages from him. Most of these messages imply that Runciter is alive and that the rest of the group is in half life, or cold pack, as it is informally called. Group members who separate from the others are found dead in an advanced stage of decomposition.

The reality gradually shifts backward in time until the group finds itself in a world resembling the United States in 1939. Throughout, they tried to deduce what is causing these strange occurrences, prevent each other from dying, and find a mysterious product called Ubik, which is advertised in every time period they enter. Messages from Runciter indicate that Ubik may be their only hope of survival.

Ultimately, Joe Chip learns that Runciter was, in fact, the sole survivor of explosion on the moon, and the messages to the group are the result of his attempts to communicate with them while they are in half life. The regressing world in which they find themselves is discovered to be the product of Jory Miller, another half lifer whom Runciter encounters earlier in the story while communicating with Ella. It is revealed that Jory devours the life force of other people who are in suspended animation in order to prolong his own existence. The group of anti-psychics and technicians, only Joe Chip eludes him, aided by the product Ubik. Ubik, whose name is derived from the Latin word *Ubique*, meaning everywhere, can preserve people who are in half-life. Ubik was invented by a group of half lifers, led by Ella Runciter, who developed it as protection from Jory. Joe Chip is instructed in its use by Ella, who is on route to a reincarnation.

In what he perceived as the 'living' world, Glen Runciter encounters several coins showing Joe Chip's face, just as Joe and others first encountered coins with Runciter's face. Runciter suspects that the new currency is 'just the beginning', and the novel ends with the unresolved implication that Runciter himself may be dead after all.

Dick's former wife Tessa remarked that "Ubik is a metaphor for God. Ubik is all powerful and all knowing, and Ubik is everywhere. The spray can is only a form that Ubik takes to make it easy for people to understand it and use it. It is not the

substance inside that can help them, but rather their faith in the promise that it will help them”.

She also interpreted the ending by writing, many readers have puzzled over the ending of *Ubik*, when Glen Runciter finds -300 Chip coin in his pocket what does it mean? Is Runciter dead? Are Joe Chip and the others alive? Actually, this is meant to tell you that we can't be sure of anything in the world that we call reality” it is possible that they are all dead and in old pack or that the half-life world can affect the full life world. It is also possible that they are all alive and dreaming.

It is all together possible to take Glen Runciters convictions that he himself is alive and that the others are in half-life at face value, given Joe Chips ruminations on the organic values of his own words psycho reality at the end of the pen ultimate chapter. The re-enforcement of this limbo states 'reality' by repeated use of *Ubik*, as well as its prolong-ment viva widespread half-life, could allow it to cross over into true reality by being set up as its parallel just as Glen Runciter was able to impose his presence on half-life by repeated contact with Joe part of the confusion of interpretation is down to the mystery concerning the means of survival and escape of Glen Runciter following the explosion on the moon.

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