

Book review

# Do androids dream of electric sheep?

APPARENTLY, they don't. Anyway, that is NOT what this book is about. Continuing on my sci-fi spree, I picked up this old classic, which has been written by the same mind behind *Total Recall*.

As evidenced by that particular Arnold Schwarzenegger-starrer, author Philip K Dick (take a moment to laugh at the name, if you will) has been fiddling with the concepts of reality and perception long before the makers of the Matrix trilogy came up with their mind-boggling series.

Originally published in 1968, the novel is set in 2021, where the World War had killed off millions, driving entire species into extinction and sending mankind off-planet. Those who remained, coveted any living creature, and for people who couldn't afford one, companies built incredibly realistic simulacra: horses, birds, cats, sheep. . .

They even built humans. Emigres to Mars received androids so sophisticated it was impossible to tell them from true men or women. Fearful of the havoc these artificial humans could wreak, the government banned them from Earth. When androids didn't want to be identified, however, they just blended in. Enter Rick Deckard, bounty hunter who 'retires' rogue androids. Not a pleasant job, really, since cornered androids tended to fight back, with deadly results. While this makes his life that much harder, it does provide the readers with action-packed rison Ford.

Personally, I'm not really into this whole android-and-robot kind of sci-fi. Give me some good old genetic mutations any day. However, I wasn't too disappointed by this book, particularly coming on the heels of 'Brave New World'. Dick waxes philosophical

on existential angst, sentimentality, art, and environment issues. Not quite what you would expect in a sci-fi about a bounty hunter for androids, right? The pacing is good, with enough twists to keep it interesting. Flying cars, deadly robots, lethal bounty hunters, and electric animals...Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep makes an entertainingtwists to enjoy. Woven into the fabric of this story is the author's pet theme of truth and manipulation of reality. There's no religion in this very futuristic world, just a simulated collective experience called 'Mercerism', which may sound really fuzzy and confusing now, but becomes clearer once you actually read the book. This novel ultimately went on to become the movie Blade Runner, starring Har travel read.

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# A reader's reverie

From Centre  
 1996

A class party. The furniture has been pushed back against the wall to create a dance floor. The teacher's table is piled, not with exercise copies, but fast food goodies from *Candyfloss*, *Cooper's* and even *Sausly's*, and someone's brand-new CD player is blaring out hits from the *Backstreet Boys*, *Bayzone*, 911, as well as the year's biggest hit: the Macarena. Those who are not boogying away on the dance floor or stuffing their faces with food, are discussing the biggest thing to happen to television since *Mcgyver* and the *A Team: The X Files*, ushering into Dhaka the concept of cult television. Oh, of course there was *Twin Peaks*, but that was so last decade!

Riding on the success of the sci-fi series, came a trendy new bookstore in Old Airport Road, called The Bookworm, which brought in another dimension to the lives of Dhaka's readers: fan fiction. Glossy novels based on the series, books on FAQ's about the show and its cast and crew, were suddenly available for the adoring teens...if only at an exorbitant price. Nilkhet, Gyankosh, the Zeenat Bookstore at New Market and Boi Bichitra were still popular for cheap reads, but for once, buying a book was a style statement.

1998

When you're the senior-most batch in junior high, life's a party. You get to be the school prefect, the cricket captain, the drama leads, and basically boss over the juniors. So much power can go into the head, and what these power-drunk teens were doing was running a roaring black-market trade in 'banned' books. From DC comics to Harlequin romances, if the school didn't allow it, you could be certain that the 'senior's would have a copy or three stashed somewhere to be swapped for other contraband reads. Now, every dealer has a source, and as the glamour of the expensive bookstore's worn off, the students are once more flocking to affordable places like Bishwa Bichitra, Boi Bichitra, and of course, Nilkhet. Shelves are lined with Mills and Boons, Judith Mcnaught, Sidney Sheldon, Jackie Collins and Harold Robbins all selling for Tk 150-300 depending on the thickness of the book. The racks are filled with back issues of Superman, Spiderman, Batman and dozens of other spandex-clad superheroes vying for space with Riverdale's best, all for way below Tk 50 a pop. The book business never had it this good.

2006

A jaded book reviewer sits in front of her computer, smiling sadly as she types up a rear-view write-up. The city now boasts three big-name bookstores that offer you everything from Tom Holt to Stephen Hawking, and the option of ordering online what is not available on the shelves. Street hawkers are selling books dirt cheap at every traffic signal, and the old favourites like Nilkhet are still a treasure trove for awesome reads, and despite all this, the number of young readers is dropping everyday. Kids here would rather watch the Harry Potter movies than read the books. Teen girls would rather watch overly made-up women engage in kitchen politics in a dozen interchangeable and unimaginative soap serials than sigh over the romance of a Jude Devreaux or a Johanna Lindsay. Most guys just grimace at the mention of the word 'books' and go back to discussing cars, cell-phones, and girls. Whatever happened to the voracious readers of the '90's?

# Battling the heat!

DHAKA is turning into a badly over baked over cooked and even more over jam-packed habitat with the sun pouring down around 35 degrees of heat every single day! Even worse with such dense humidity, everyone should be rain dancing around a fire in misty black nights singing, "Oga laga oga laga" probably meaning, "We want rain, we want rain!" But apparently, God already knows that and is showering us now and then... but is it enough?

It's like this every time during this time of the year; the cycle is repeating and getting worse year by year. With HSC, SSC, O' Level, A' Level and many other examinations going on, the students already have a heated head and the sun only contributes more to it. Not to mention the ever frequent load shedding causing boiled scrambled eggs on people's heads (especially on bald ones... no offense) that our beloved DCC seems to enjoy very much although I am sure they have a generator or two providing them with all their 'necessities' of AC and *thanda* Coca Cola while others wash their clothes in sweat. In fact, the generator and IPS companies should be making loads and consequently, loving DCC as their demands and sales graphs sky-rock out of their ranges.

per day! The non-cheap ones should be earning double than usual. Nonetheless, this is our country so we have to deal with it. Usually the upper middle and upper 'earning' (earning replaced in place of class... class sounds rude) people deal with this problem by buying IPS and Generators and stuff (as mentioned earlier), however, the middle and lower earning people are having a hard time and the creative ones are figuring out innovative ways to battle the rising heat of Dhaka, and for a few, the heat is doing the advertisement of their business for them. Global Warming or not, eventually these are the people who form the labor force of our country but always suffers the most.

A few days back when I was returning home via a local bus, everything was just the same the usual noise level, the usual crowdedness, and the usual crap state of the bus everything except a huge block of ice. The driver had a huge block of ice kept just a little in front of the acceleration and brake paddles! Apparently, from time to time as the ice melted the cold water kept his feet cold, safe from the heat. I do not know how much it

actually helped, but hey it's something, and you really can't blame his desperateness; he was innovative cheap and cool! Who knows, we Bengalis might even come up with a new sort of bus "the *thanda* bus" where there will be a water circulation system via pipes throughout the bus and constant cool water will pass through the pipes keeping the bus cool and, consequently, *thanda*.

I also witnessed a child holding a Fiz Up bottle... but the peculiar thing was that the liquid inside the bottle was solid, solid ice! Ice

sellers (although the rise in prices of *shoshas* isn't helping), the soft drink companies, water bottle producing companies (like Mum and Fresh etc) and the Water Based Parks (like Water Kingdom etc.) A dip in the water is always preferred in the heat, although there has been reports from girls of 'wrong-doings' in the water pool by boys... so beware!

In such a time when even car ACs seems not to work properly, what could be worse? Well apparently it can be if you don't have a proper and adequate water supply. WASA, on the other hand is crippled down, as water shortages are appearing in many parts of the country as you already know. It really is a huge crime to not have water supply in such weather; those who do not have the proper supply of water know about how hard it is. After all, water is life!

The rickshaw pullers, bus drivers, construction workers, other road-side and walking sellers (you know banana, fish, and fruits etc. sellers) and especially the beggars are having a really hard time, having to rest more often to recover from the heat and hence not earning as usual. These people are usually warping their heads in wet *gamchas* to protect at least their head from getting overheated. You can also try that if you want... it actually is effective!

Dhaka is also over-saturated with love-birds. Soon enough, if the couples can't find a shady place, it is going to become difficult for them meeting beside *Shongshad Bhabon*, *Romna* Park and those other places, so to all of you, better start making plans. I would suggest to start buying extra huge umbrellas so that one shade can support both of you and can also block others from seeing whatever you guys do.

This is just the beginning of the increasing heat; the worst is yet to come and when it comes, chickens are probably going to give birth than laying eggs. An ending note to all of you: You are probably reading this article comfortably in your room sitting under a fan or in an AC room. Just think for a while about all the other people, who does work a dozen more times than you and look at their standard of living. Even if you don't do anything for them, the least you can do is appreciate them, respect them and thank God for giving you what you have. Do not take anything for granted.

By Anan M. S. Fakir



is having a very busy schedule and is in high demand, although I do not know how much 7UP Ice is helping the crowd. However, all is not gloomy. The cheap (of Tk.2) ice cream sellers are having a pretty good time roaming around from bus to bus during the stoppages selling over Tk.300 to Tk.400 worth Tk.2 ice cream

The sugarcane juice (road-side ones... you know Tk.5 per glass) sellers too are now being able to finish 25 kg of cane per day. Other beneficiaries from the heat are the *shosha*