

## **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Runner Up of English Section**

### **Junior Division**

<b>Name of Winner</b>	<b>: Ma Ho Yin, Jason</b>
<b>Name of School</b>	<b>: St. Joseph's College</b>
<b>Book Title</b>	<b>: The Man in the High Castle</b>
<b>Author</b>	<b>: Philip K. Dick</b>
<b>Publisher</b>	<b>: Penguin Books</b>

Imagine you are living in a completely different Hong Kong - a war-torn city that everyone speaks Japanese and hails Emperor Hirohito as a living god, although this “god” is no different to any other human being; Every day, “rebels” are shot dead right in front of your eyes, while the “righteous” Japanese can kill whoever they want without bearing any consequences, and you still have to bow to those ruthless people... A sheer nightmare that would only pop up in your fantasies, right? No, at least not to those who live in the totalitarian world depicted in “The Man in the High Castle”

“The Man in the High Castle” by Philip K. Dick is in fact an alternate history novel, something that is contradictory with what happened in the past. History is completely distorted in this book when the Axis Powers had won World War 2 and conquered the whole world!

The world is subsequently divided into two parts, one controlled by Nazi Germany and the other by Japan. It may seem that since both these countries upheld fascist idealism, there should finally be peace on the planet after all the turmoil. However, this is absolutely not the case. The differences between the two soon heat up, and both superpowers embarked on a Cold War immediately after WWII ended – Jews, Slavs and Africans were annihilated; the Mediterranean was drained entirely to become a large flat basin of farmland; and the Nazis colonized the Solar System.

The story unfolded in this horrific background on the *Japan-controlled* West Coast of former U.S.A. in 1962, 15 years after the prolonged World War 2 in the novel ended. Rather than having a main protagonist in the story like most other stories, “The Man in the High Castle” had six main characters. This gives us an in-depth picture of daily life in the occupied United States. Though loosely connected, these six characters helped narrate a tense time when war would soon rage between the Nazis and the Emperor’s servants; when new forms of destructive warfare would imminently affect everyone on the earth. The six characters, from a German defector trying to warn the Japanese the incoming war, to an antique dealer submissive to the Japanese, have illustrated the society literally from top to bottom. The vastly different characters made the book realistic. Rather than one single hero that seems to be able to save the world, the six characters brought us a non-biased, complete picture.

When we study History at school, most of us tend to relate the word “History” to synonyms such as boring and

facts-filled. So why is this book worth reading from my point of view? In my opinion, the book is simply *chilling*. The lives of each individual are described meticulously. Imagery and dialogues filled the lines and bit by bit, the hopelessness of the people, and the horror that was literally in the mist of San Francisco was revealed. *For example, in the very first paragraph, the writer used the dialogues between Robert Childan, a major character in this book, and a young Japanese couple to silently illustrate how bonding among people deteriorated from a time when San Francisco was filled with friendly Americans, rather than cold Japanese who proclaimed themselves superior.* History books often use narrative paragraphs to feed information into readers' brains. However in this book, with the description of how distinct people from different sectors of the society go on living under a fearful regime, this novel becomes a captivating one. Readers can literally enter the characters' parallel world and experience the fear it is like to live in a world where *freedom is the "right" to say  $2+2=4$ .*

However, the most distinct feature of this book is not the vivid description of lives, nor the vast collection of characters, but rather the book's ability to provoke deep thoughts. A powerful idea portrayed in this book lightly is *human's greed for power*. In the history as we all know now, although the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union were on the same side during the war, these superpowers soon entered the Cold War, sending unrests to people around the world. On the other hand, in the novel the Japanese and the Nazis entered utterly an identical situation after the war. The underlying principle is in fact the same for the two contrasting situations – the struggles do not come

because of the differences in ideology, but rather the greed of power. Politicians in this world proclaim different kinds of ideology, claiming they want the best for their people. Is that the truth? In this book the writer is trying to tell readers that politicians are simply dribbling for power. No matter how nice their ideology may seem, the greed always comes first. When they conquered countries, they went on to continents; when continents were done, they moved on to the whole world; when the planet was firmly in their grasp, they leaped on to the Solar System. Their greediness simply keeps increasing.

This book is not perfect however as there is one serious loophole – the lack of a clear ending. We know how miserable life is, but we have no idea does war break out, or what happens to the characters afterwards. This makes readers like me feel hollow and lost – are we left to imagine what happened afterwards? The open-ended ending is one big flaw for the book, one that makes the book less readable.

In a nutshell, although “The Man in the High Castle” used *languages a bit tough for readers at my age and has flaws that undermine its readability*, it is indeed a distinct novel of its kind. It leads to streams of thoughts deep down readers’ mind, and very successfully it leads us all to rethink the dark side of human nature. While there are a lot of varying alternate history novels, *The Man in the High Castle’s* link to the reality does put it in the top among the bests.