



The Gun

Philip K. Dick

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The plot of The Gun centers around a group of space explorers who investigate a planet which appears deserted. However, they are shot down and crash land on the planet. While repairing their ship, a team of explorers sets to survey the surrounding area, where they discover the ruins of an ancient city. The Captain peered into the eyepiece of the telescope. He adjusted the focus quickly. "It was an atomic fission we saw, all right," he said presently. He sighed and pushed the eyepiece away. "Any of you who wants to look may do so. But it's not a pretty sight." "Let me look," Tance the archeologist said. He bent down to look, squinting. "Good Lord!" He leaped violently back, knocking against Dorle, the Chief Navigator. But when they got there, nothing moved or stirred. Everything was silent, dead. Only the gun showed signs of life . . . and the trespassers had wrecked that for all time. The return journey to pick up the treasure would be a cinch . . .

The Gun Details

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From Reader Review The Gun for online ebook

Jared Beiswenger says

As much as I like PKD, there's not a whole lot to this short story. The story is based on an interesting idea, but everything leading up to the idea is lackluster.

Noelle says

3.5

Ali says

When it was first published, in 1952, this must be an interesting story about a weapon that outlived its creators, today, when wars started to be fought with semi-autonomous drones, and military are on the brink of making "The Gun" real, it is eerily close to the real life.

Jason Meinig says

Another short, scifi story - picked up free for iBook app. This story was about a spaceship crew come to investigate a planet for intelligent life. The captain spots ruins and the ship is quickly attacked by a large, ominous gun. The rest of the plot deals with the crew investigating the gun and what it is protecting since the ruins seem to suggest no remaining civilization. While I won't give any more of the story away, I think the author was ahead of his time, seemingly calling to mind artificial intelligence (in service of defense), as well as other non-militaristic ideas such as what things are worth saving, and the story might even be an allegory about how we as individuals deal with the past.

Rayn says

This was one of his free short stories on Amazon I think which is why I got it. Not his best work, but it does offer a lot of insight into a time when women still weren't overly common doing the same jobs men do. It's like watching the smartest neanderthal try to write about how cool equality would be, but still so deep in the inequality pit that he can't quite get it right.

Also, this is cold war lit like much of PKD's writing was. The Gun is very good commentary on how stupid nuclear war is albeit very dated and like I said simplistic. Very black and white. Still, short enough that it's a good read.

Maggie says

I'm new to science fiction. Maybe a short story isn't enough to pull me in.

Max says

This was definitely a quick and entertaining short story by Philip K. Dick.

A ship is sent to explore a huge blast that was visible all the way from their home planet. When they arrive at the source, they find a world that has been destroyed by nuclear war. At least, they thought it was completely destroyed until they start taking fire.

When the story begins, you assume that the explorers represent our race and their investigating an alien culture. It quickly becomes obvious that those roles are reversed. The story turns into a treatise on nuclear war and the inevitable destruction that would arise from it. The story is quick, well-written, and a little haunting.

Abimanyu says

A scintillating short story about a star-ship that crash lands on a destroyed planet when an atomic missile strikes it. They find a gun installed on the forsaken planet. What will the voyagers do next? I was wondering about the lack of enthusiasm in the story line when the end brought a smile to my face!

Bill Kerwin says

This early Dick effort first published in *Planet Stories* (1952) is remarkable both for its sobering theme of the dangers of automation--a theme Dick would return to again--and the playful way in which it develops its narrative.

A spaceship is dispatched to a distant planet because of a powerful fission explosion. It arrives to find a planet devastated by nuclear holocaust, but guarded by an apparently indestructible anti-aircraft gun which persists in its relentless and fatal fire, unaffected by the death of the civilization it was designed to protect.

Its theme—the merciless automation of the machines of death, which may now be nearly immortal, capable of outliving the destroyed civilizations which create them—is handled well, but I liked even better the way Dick transformed his story into a quest narrative in the middle, turning the gun into a guardian dragon, the records of the burnt civilization into a treasure to be guarded, and giving us a little hint of a romantic triangle as a bonus. All this serves to lighten the narrative, and disarm the reader so he may be surprised when the tale returns to its grim central theme.

This sort of narrative trick is one of the things Dick did best: keeping the reader unbalanced, unsure of his relationship to the story itself and the unsettling world it creates.

Shhhhh Ahhhhh says

Interesting, and self-aware, retelling of an archetypal story, including the part where you can never permanently vanquish the enemy.

Gary says

A bit simple, not real PKD.

Tristram says

If It's Broken, Don't Mend It

The Gun, a short story Philip K. Dick had published in 1952, is a clever comment on the dangers of armament and military innovation, written probably under the influence of the first stages of the Cold War, but it also has a double-barrelled twist in its tail.

A group of space explorers has been attracted to a hitherto unexplored planet by the light of nuclear fission, and a scan of the planet's surface tells them that a nuclear maelstrom has made it uninhabitable.

Nevertheless, they are suddenly shot at and have to make an emergency landing. While the ship is being repaired, some of them reconnoitre the planet and come across a huge gun in a deserted and contaminated city, and it soon becomes obvious to them that the gun is an intelligent weapon, automatically scanning the sky and destroying any object it detects there. The explorers are dismayed at and puzzled by a culture that apparently spent so much effort and skill on developing and building such powerful weapons:

”They must have been used to the sight, guns, weapons, uniforms. Probably they accepted it as a natural thing, part of their lives, like eating and sleeping. An institution, like the church and the state. Men trained to fight, to lead armies, a regular profession. Honored, respected.”

By now, probably the most unsuspecting reader will have got some idea of what planet our more peacefully-minded spacemen, who even wonder at the possibility of inter-species warfare, have discovered. And yet, they discover something more: Beneath that monstrous gun, deep down below the ground there is a treasure trove of cultural artefacts, books, films, and other relicts, the planet's culture in a nutshell. They decide to salvage this treasure and soon also find a way of destroying the gun – simply because it is not able to defend itself from an attack led from the ground. This is why they can simply batter it to pieces. When they take off in their spacecraft, determined to return one day and salvage the whole treasure instead of just the few samples they take on board, one of them says:

”[...]After all, their possessions, their music, books, their pictures, all of that will survive.

We'll take them home and study them, and they'll change us. We won't be the same afterwards. [...]"

Now, I couldn't help thinking that it might not be such a good idea for those apparently less bellicose people to learn more about and allow themselves to be influenced by a culture who had evidently destroyed itself. Nevertheless, there is another surprise in store for us, but if you have not read the story as yet, you might want to experience it on your own.

If you don't, read on here:

(view spoiler)

Edwin Lowe says

A Great Science Fiction Short Story!!!

Philip K Dick scores with yet another excellent science fiction short story. While visiting a world ruined in the past by a nuclear war, the investigation team's space craft is damaged by a remotely fired gun located on the planet's surface. Will the visitors be able to repair their ship? Will they be able to avoid the fire of the remotely actuated gun, or are they doomed to stay forever on this ruined world? I encourage everyone to read this excellent story!!!

Erik Angle says

Quick lil' story featuring PKD's standard 1950s ouvre: criticism of the Cold War mentality and war in general. Alas, it didn't really grab me like some of his other pieces from this time and theme (e.g. Mr. Spaceship, The Skull, et al.). Worth a read, but probably not a re-read.

Anna says

I've recently read a bunch of Philip K. Dick's short stories and love how, although they are all dealing with similar situations (cold war turned into hot war, terra uninhabitable due to radiation, underground factories, robot wars, humans forced to live underground; OR interstellar wars (Terra-Centauri)/other interstellar situations), they still can't be compared to each other, they still differ enough to be enjoyed one after another (without getting bored by repetition).

This one I didn't quite like, though, a tad boring.

Sparks ideas about war, modern warfare, is war an innate reaction in man or is it learned behaviour?
