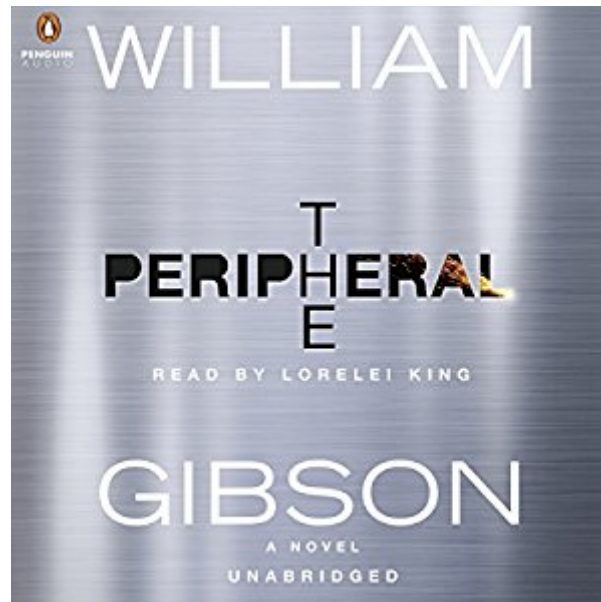


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The Peripheral



Synopsis

William Gibson returns with his first novel since 2010's New York Times best-selling *Zero History*. Where Flynne and her brother, Burton, live, jobs outside the drug business are rare. Fortunately, Burton has his veteran's benefits, for neural damage he suffered from implants during his time in the USMC's elite Haptic Recon force. Then one night Burton has to go out, but there's a job he's supposed to do - a job Flynne didn't know he had. Beta-testing part of a new game, he tells her. The job seems to be simple: work a perimeter around the image of a tower building. Little buglike things turn up. He's supposed to get in their way, edge them back. That's all there is to it. He's offering Flynne a good price to take over for him. What she sees, though, isn't what Burton told her to expect. It might be a game, but it might also be murder.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Excellent book but perhaps not a wise choice for your first Gibson novel. The first few chapters will only make sense in retrospect. The plot as a whole does not fully make sense at all. Prior readers of Gibson are used to this. Gibson does flashy technodystopia and this is his best in some time [which given the high quality of the worst of his writing should be a sign]. Fast pace, a few good characters, an excellent talent for dialog and setting. The ending won't exactly resolve anything but its so much fun I doubt anyone will care. A wonderful melange of time travel, printed matter, nano tech, declining Atlantic civilization, kleptocracy, postmodern art and ever so much more. The politics are mildly left but not to the point of preachy. The two worlds created in the novel cry out for more stories.

Remains to be seen if we shall get them. If not I am quite sure the author will invent new worlds to amaze and amuse me.

William Gibson imagines worlds of such otherworldly familiarity that it almost seems that they will, they must, exist - if not coincident in time with our world, only in a parallel space, then in some nexus-branched alternative future. The concepts he has invented to occupy the worldscape of his latest book, "The Peripheral" are like that; at once outlandish and futuristically weird, but simultaneously familiar, and well before the end of the book you will find yourself accepting the reality of communication between the "then" and "now" of a timestream which originates in an almost-familiar, not-so-distant future as a given. In a presumably late-21st Century/early-22nd Century timeframe, somewhere in the rural South of the United States of America, in a world that is slowly going to hell but in which technology which is now, in the early 21st Century, in its infancy, is commonplace and well advanced from the state in which we know it, Burton, a disabled veteran of a high-tech advanced tactics unit of the U.S. Marine Corps, asks his sister to stand in for him on a job. The job, presumably, is beta-testing an advanced video game, but when Flynnne, on her stand-in shift, witnesses a bizarre and disturbingly achieved murder, their familiar, if dysfunctional, world starts to spin out of control. Gibson drops you into the story with no preamble, and "The Peripheral" is definitely a "keep reading, hang on, and catch up" experience. The relationship to the world of his earlier book, "Mona Lisa Overdrive", struck me early on. The prevalence of advanced cyber-science in the worlds of both books is strikingly similar, and familiar. With its feet in two worlds which are removed from each other in both time and space, "The Peripheral", draws the reader in with the familiarity of the presumably Ozark worldscape where Flynnne and Burton live, while simultaneously challenging your perceptions, and understanding, with the not-too distant future with which the two, and their friends and family, are soon communicating with, being affected by, and virtually inhabiting and interacting with. Because of what she witnessed, Flynnne is the key to a future-time power struggle involving shadowy forces with unimaginable technology at their beck and call, as well as incredible wealth - and the ability to manipulate, from the future, the past-timestream which Flynnne and Burton inhabit. Keeping her feet planted beneath her, figuratively speaking, and her head on straight, Flynnne is a down-home, "nothing fazes me" character who takes the upheaval in her life completely in stride, holding her own as she and Burton, as well as the entire town, indeed the county, they live in becomes ground zero for the financial and political power struggle that has reached back from the future to engulf them. She is the calm center in the eye of the storm, and she and her rural Ozark friends and family are a striking counterpoint to the ultra-sophisticated,

high-tech world of future London with which they are enmeshed. The contrast between the two worlds is the basic thesis of the story, and the matter-of-fact manner in which Flynn and her folk take it in stride while riding a virtual whirlwind of change demonstrates the genius of Gibson's story-telling powers. In a time when a seemingly endless procession of novels recounting variations of dystopian futures are presented to the reading public (especially YA readers), Gibson has demonstrated yet again his unchallenged mastery of the cyber-science future-world genre, and we should all be very thankful to him for his efforts.

In a year that has seen an ample abundance of more or less routine dystopian near future speculative fiction novels - of which the least admirable was a highly touted debut novel about "word viruses" - William Gibson's "The Peripheral" is an exceptional bit of literary fresh air. It represents the long overdue return of not only one of speculative fiction's most important intellectuals, but also, one of the most noteworthy writers of our time, regardless of genre. Reading a William Gibson novel can be a difficult, and challenging, task, and his latest is no exception, since he takes readers on a whirlwind tour into the future twice; the first set approximately three to four decades into the future, and the other, the early 22nd Century. But it is a task well worth taking by the reader, since Gibson has some interesting things to say about time travel, robotics, nanotechnology, and corruption - corporate, financial and government - on a global scale, through a tale that is nearly as dark and depressing as the one recounted in "Neuromancer" - his award-winning debut novel that noted critic and fantasy writer Lev Grossman regards as the most important novel of our time - while relying on literary techniques introduced in "Virtual Light", and especially, "Idoru", and perfected in "Pattern Recognition", "Spook Country" and "Zero History", such as terse, often fragmented, sentences, brief chapters, and realistic dialogue that, for some readers, may be faint literary echoes of the hallucinatory prose written in his early "Sprawl Trilogy" novels "Neuromancer" and "Count Zero". "The Peripheral" is Gibson's best work of speculative fiction since "Idoru". Flynn Fisher lives with her United States Marine Corps veteran brother Burton, a former member of its elite Haptic Recon force, who suffers from neural damage caused by implants he received while serving in it. She volunteers as a substitute for a job she doesn't know he has, beta-testing a virtual reality game, and witnesses a murder in a futuristic London building. (A murder that readers will see Rashomon-like, repeatedly through her eyes.) Contacted digitally from that futuristic London by Wilf Netherton, a down on his luck public relations specialist, Flynn journeys into that future as a "peripheral", hoping that she can help solve that murder. Through her "peripheral", she encounters a decaying far future London ruled by the "klept", the corrupt world government, and one of its cynical

espionage agents, Ainsley Lowbeer, who comes across as a jaded, all knowing, ageless version of Edie Banister, the eccentric ex-spy spinster of Nick Harkaway's "Angelmaker". Unexpectedly, she becomes an important player in an effort by Netherton and others to change the course of history, resulting in a future far more benign than theirs. "The Peripheral" is an unsettling, but brilliant, look into our future, with Gibson writing what must be seen as an exceptional blend of dystopian and time travel speculative fiction, coupled with superb nanotech-driven post-cyberpunk and memorable world building of a kind associated with China Miéville and Neal Stephenson's best recent work. Especially noteworthy is his depiction of quasi time travel, in which his protagonists can only exchange messages digitally, that displays the intelligence and attention to detail seen in the two time travel speculative fiction novels that I regard as the best published so far this century; Charles Yu's "How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe" and Michael Swanwick's "Bones of the Earth". Gibson's conception of peripherals, the flesh and blood biopunk analogues of robots, should be remembered as a most distinguished contribution to robotic speculative fiction. His fictional exploration of the corporate, financial market and government corruption that extends from the recognizably familiar near future of heroine Flynne Fisher's small-town United States to the nightmarish nanotech-dominated London of the early 22nd Century, is an exceedingly well crafted dystopian vision that readers won't find in any recently published dystopian fiction, especially by mainstream literary fiction writers who, like the author of the "word virus" novel, lack the familiarity and understanding of what Gibson has referred repeatedly as the "tool kit of science fiction". These are among the reasons why "The Peripheral" should be seen as one of the most important novels published not only this year, but so far, in this century, reaffirming Gibson's status as one of the most visionary writers of our time.

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