



## **The Peripheral**

*William Gibson*

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# The Peripheral

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**The Peripheral** William Gibson

**William Gibson returns with his first novel since 2010's *New York Times*–bestselling *Zero History*.**

Where Flynn 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 Flynn 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 Flynn 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.

## The Peripheral Details

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ISBN : 9780399158445

Author : William Gibson

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# From Reader Review The Peripheral for online ebook

## John says

Hard to pick the right rating for this one. It's as though I've ordered a chicken parma because I like chicken parmas, and this certainly is a very tasty chicken parma, but somehow I'm disappointed that it tastes like so many other chicken parmas.

Replace chicken parma with "book with a near future settings where some rich people with inscrutable motivations do something via, then for, then ultimately via some spud from the lower social strata which boils down to one pivotal moment of agency close to the end which changes everything" and that's kinda that.

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## Rob says

**Executive Summary:** A good, but not great techno-thriller of sorts. 3.5 Stars.

**Audio book:** I really didn't like Lorelei King at the start. But she grew on me. I'm not sure if she got better as the book went on, or I just needed some distance from my previous book. She's clear and easy to hear. She did a few voices, but they weren't very memorable to me.

I will say I started off pretty confused. I'm not sure if that would have been solved with some rereading of the early chapters, or if I just needed to get my bearings. Once I did though, I found it easier to follow. Audio is probably not the best choice though if you often distracted when doing audio books.

### Full Review

William Gibson is one of those authors I keep meaning to read more of. I'm ashamed to say I've only read Neuromancer, Count Zero, and Burning Chrome. I've had Mona Lisa Overdrive sitting unread on my shelves for a few years now.

So I can't say how this really stacks up against his other works too well. It reminds me more of Daniel Suarez than the stuff of his I have read. If nothing else this book renews my desire to read some more of his work.

This one is hard to categorize. I'd guess techno-thriller is maybe the best? It's also a time travel book. Sort of. The time stuff definitely falls into the Back to the Future 2 category (altering the past forks it to a new future).

I think both protagonists are pretty good, though Flynne is easily the better of the two. She keeps herself together way better than I would under the circumstances she faces. Netherton is much less interesting, and took me a bit to warm up to, but by the end, I enjoyed his chapters almost as much as Flynne's. Though that may simply be due to the amount of overlap of the two.

The world building could have been a little better. There is this mysterious Jackpot, that while explained eventually, wasn't really explained in a lot of detail. I guess it was to move the plot along more than anything. We get glimpses of both Flynne's and Netherton's worlds, though not as much as I'd have liked.

There is a bunch of technology in this one. Some of it looks familiar like tablets and drones. The rest of it sounds familiar like robots, advanced haptic controls, and embedded phones. There is no big dreaming here. Everything Mr. Gibson writes seems feasible, and some of it probably not too far off.

At its core though, this is really just a thriller. There are shady characters and a mysterious murder drives the plot. I probably would have preferred something more cyberpunk, but I have no idea if still writes those kinds of books anymore.

I found it a quick listen, at just over fourteen hours I did most of it over a busy weekend of chores and bike riding. Not a bad choice if you're looking for something shorter to fit in between other reads like I was.

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### Jeff Jackson says

I'm not rating this, partly because it doesn't come out for a while and partly because I'm torn about my overall reaction. The first half of *The Peripheral* contains some of the most visionary writing of William Gibson's career. He returns to science-fiction and offers up detailed versions of the future that feel as prescient and compelling as his work back in the *Neuromancer* days. It's exciting, thought-provoking, and wonderfully dizzying stuff.

Unfortunately, the second half of the novel grows increasingly slack and ponderous, much of it padding for what's already Gibson's longest book. His past few novels have featured excessively happy endings, making sure the main characters come out perfectly unscathed and amply rewarded for playing a part in his narratives. *The Peripheral* amps up this unfortunate tendency to new levels with a conclusion that would make even Steven Spielberg roll his eyes and call for a rewrite. Ultimately I'd say the book is worth reading, but there's a truly excellent novel embedded in here that simply slipped away.

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### Jeffrey Keeten says

**“Eras are conveniences, particularly for those who never experienced them. We carve history from totalities beyond our grasp. Bolt labels on the result. Handles. Then speak of the handles as though they were things in themselves.”**

Thirty years ago *Neuromancer* by William Gibson was published. The award winning novel was a breath of fresh air for a genre that had become too inbred. The new science fiction writers were too like the granddaddies of the genre only paler in complexion and not as bone deep on science. Then the term cyberpunk appeared:

*"Classic cyberpunk characters were marginalized, alienated loners who lived on the edge of society in generally dystopic futures where daily life was impacted by rapid technological change, an ubiquitous datasphere of computerized information, and invasive modification of the human body."* – Lawrence Person

*Neuromancer* fit that definition in spades. What made the *Sprawl* trilogy by Gibson must-read-books for me was the noir aspects that Gibson wrapped around all his plots. The future looked just like the 1940s only with

synthetic clad hackers as the main characters instead of cotton and wool gumshoes. Hackers against megacorporations instead of detectives against governmental forces controlled by rich people. The one thing they have in common they are always outgunned and always outnumbered. We love the underdog.

People who try to read *Neuromancer* today have mixed results. I see a lot of one star and two star reviews and feel more than a mild irritation, but it isn't the reader's fault. Most people do not see novels as history, but they are. In 1985 when I read *Neuromancer* I had never read anything quite like it. I could feel the electric hum (or that could have been the circuitry of my Macintosh computer) of something new in the air and felt excited about a future that looked a lot more interesting than the present. Most readers do not read any background on novels or have any idea of the significance of a novel except the entertainment value it can provide. They may know that *Neuromancer* won some awards and is a "famous" novel, but it is difficult for them to grasp how this novel helped spawn a whole new line of publishing. They have read many of the descendants of *Neuromancer* so the basic concepts are not new to them; in fact, some of *Neuromancer* actually feels dated now. Without a time machine and a strategic mind wipe I can't give them the experience that I had. (I'm working on both concepts, but I've hit some snags.)

So here we are thirty years later, William Gibson is 66 years old, and has just published his eleventh novel although I want to say twelve, but *Burning Chrome* is actually short stories. This is his largest novel. I was a little surprised when it arrived in the mail and didn't have the sleek, modelesque appearance of a usual Gibson novel. He introduces us in this book to two worlds. One is a world in the near future that Daniel Woodrell would feel extremely comfortable in and the other is a world seventy years in the future after the "jackpot" has happened.

*"No comets crashing, nothing you could really call a nuclear war. Just everything else, tangled in the changing climate: droughts, water shortages, crop failures, honeybees gone like they almost were now, collapse of other keystone species, every last alpha predator gone, antibiotics doing even less than they already did, diseases that were never quite the big pandemic but big enough to be historic events in themselves. And all of it around people: how people were, how many of them there were, how they'd changed things just by being there."*

No sexy biological agent escaping from a lab or zombies or a complete climate meltdown, but rather a slow agonizing slide into self-destruction. **Only the very rich survived.** I don't know a more depressing statement than that.

**Daniel Woodrell is probably wondering how in the world he ended up in this review.**

In the Daniel Woodrell World Flynnne has agreed to help her brother Burton out on a project he has already agreed to do. Legal issues that must be cleared up keep him from being available. He and his friend Connor, who came back with psychological difficulties and in the case of Connor missing body parts from an unspecified war, are trying to adjust to a society too crippled to worry about their wounded warriors. Everyone, including Flynnne, earn a living through a variety of short time jobs. Most of the work available is outright illegal or at least in the gray area of bending the rules. Flynnne hates video games, but she happens to be very good at them. She isn't thrilled that Burton has saddled her with test driving this software, but the money is good, maybe too good.

She sees something she isn't supposed to see. Nanobots eat a woman down to the last morsel. It's just a game right...wrong. She has just seen a murder in the future.

Whoa...wait...what?

Yeah, come to find out there is a mysterious server in China that has somehow connected to the future. Data can stream between the two different time eras. There is an economic war going on in that future, a power struggle that spills back into the past as warring factions compete for power. Flynnne becomes a very important pawn.

*“Conspiracy theory’s got to be simple. Sense doesn’t come into it. People are more scared of how complicated shit actually is than they ever are about whatever’s supposed to be behind the conspiracy.”*

Wilf Netherton is a publicist in the future. Well the present for him, and the future for Flynnne. He drinks too much, sleeps with his clients, and generally is on the verge of cratering his career. He might seem like an unlikely candidate to be the representative of the future, but he has one asset that always proves useful, people like him. Flynnne is no exception. They can stream her from the past into what is called a Peripheral, a highly advanced cyberorganism. As Wilf is pulled further and further into the push and pull surrounding Flynnne he finds his powers of deception inhibited by the wholesome honesty, not to be mistaken for naivety, of Flynnne. Those are characteristics so rare in his future that he has very little experience with it.

Human nature does not change and those in power, those consumed with greed, must exploit this new technology to gain leverage or advantages in their quest for more and more power. If they destroy two worlds, two different time lines, then so be it, their competitors won’t have it either.

## **William Gibson**

Gibson is certainly taking on a larger theme for this novel. The first half of the novel had me scrambling to keep up just to understand the two worlds he was presenting. I had several moments, not unusual for a Gibson novel where I wondered if I was smart enough in a black jacket, dark sunglasses, skinny black jeans kind of way to keep up. The second half of the novel starts to bog down (in need of a bit of nanobot tidying) as the plot seems to be held hostage by Gibson while we explore the concept of these Peripherals. We are also introduced to a flurry of characters all integral in some fashion to the grand finale set in a reassembled version of Newgate Prison, *“its granite face, bristling with iron”* in London.

This novel may stretch your brain a bit or if you are a smarty pants it might make the right connections that inspires you to put the finishing touches on your own version of a Peripheral or a Michikoid or a Medicis. For those wanting tips on what to invest in for the future, Cosplay just gets bigger and more elaborate.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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## **Nick says**

Look, I’m not going to be remotely impartial here, okay? I’m a Bill Gibson fan. In addition to which, and to my enduring delight and the bewilderment of my 16 year old self, we’re kinda friends now. I got this book

early direct from the author, it's out in the UK today, and I'm going to go and buy a copy because that's what you do when a book is good.

This book is very, very good.

There are ten thousand people out there right now writing critical exegeses of *The Peripheral*. There's a great interview by Ned Beauman in Sunday's Observer. You want summary, assessment, disquisition? I am not your huckleberry. You need someone else. With a book by a name author the only question is ever whether it's a yes, or a no.

This book is a yes, with honours.

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## **Jim Elkins says**

### A Misunderstanding of Fiction

Gibson occupies an unusual place between literary fiction and the kinds of fantasy and sci-fi that use language as a minimal, transparent vehicle for fantasy. He has been read by any number of critics, including Fred Jameson, as a sign of postmodernism and the digital age; and he has been taken as a kind of cyberworld version of Nostradamus, full of predictions about our future. The implied author of "*The Peripheral*" is clearly engaged in both activities; the book is full of thought experiments about plausible or perfected technologies, and there are some extended meditations on the possible future courses of the world, climate, economics, and culture.

I am not interested in fiction as litmus test or predictor of culture, and that's one reason I don't read much science fiction, fantasy, or genre fiction. But I think there's another, more interesting issue here: it occurs to me there's a sense in which projects like "*The Peripheral*" are made possible by a certain reading of literary fiction that could be described as a misunderstanding.

#### 1. Writing

Gibson is a very good writer, by literary-fiction standards. Most every sentence is crafted. There are only a few passages that can be read at speed, just in order to get a sense of the story: most of the book needs to be read slowly because of what he's doing to language. His observations, dialogue, descriptions, and metaphors are often thoughtful and persuasive. He describes Tasmanian tigers as "carnivorous kangaroos, in wolf outfits with Cubist stripes" (p. 392). There's plenty of sharp-edged writing.

At the same time, however, he seems to feel as if serious writing can often best be achieved by neologisms. Inventive language -- I am thinking of anyone from Flaubert to Eimear McBride -- defamiliarizes. Gibson's does too, but mainly by inventing things that don't exist. "*The Peripheral*" is full of imagined sorts of fashions and fabrics, tattoos that move, walls that are transformed by nanobots, teleportation of all sorts, out-of-body states, future weapons, future gardening with biogenic trees, several different kinds of remotely operated surgical devices, new kinds of encryption involving invented languages... it's a long list. Those are the things that make the language interesting, more than choices of trope or syntax. "Her hair white as the crown Macon had printed in Fabbit" is a good enough example (p. 222). It refers to a teleportation "crown" that had been 3-D printed by a company named Fabbit; the sentence is typical of the way Gibson avoids ordinary description, but leans on imagined things and neologisms.

#### 2. Affect

If I try to imagine this book without the specifics of its plot -- which means subtracting all the hundreds of references to peripherals, sigils, imagined technologies, and time travel -- and ask myself what feelings, what desires or anxieties, drive the plot, then I come to two things in particular:

(a) A fear of the present. No character in this book wants to live in the present (with the telling exception of some romantic moments in moonlight, which are after all about wishing for an impossible ideal). The writing itself doesn't want to be in the present, and there's an ongoing effort to open a space between the writing and every experience we know. Here is an example. A "sigil," in the book, is a kind of logo or icon that appears in a person's visual field and can be expanded into a "video feed" or even into an immersive virtual reality. Gibson often describes sigils the way a person might describe a logo. "An unfamiliar sigil appeared," he writes, "a sort of impacted spiral, tribal blackwork" (p. 236).

Here he's working hard, like an author of literary fiction, to defamiliarize. An "impacted spiral" is an interesting thing to try to picture, and a reader may have to look up "blackwork" to understand what he's conjuring. Imagining both the "impacted spiral" and the blackwork as an icon adds a layer of imaginative work.

The cumulative effect of sentences like this (which amount to maybe half the sentences in the book) is to make it seem that the author feels it's necessary to work continuously to produce even an incremental distance from the present. At the same time the work is fragile, because it's superficial (here he's only adjusting our notions of what an icon might look like). It's as if he feels he needs to pry open a space between the present and the place he wishes to be, as if it constantly needs to be renewed, because the fragile invented future is in danger of collapsing back onto the unbearable present.

(b) A desire to disappear. Characters in "The Peripheral" nearly always prefer dream states, projections, out-of-body experiences, time travel, medication, and dissociative experiences to living where they are. The book must have hundreds of examples of things that help people disappear: robots they can inhabit, toys they can wheel around by remote control, game worlds they can enter, Matrix-style teleportation comas they can enter, walls they can walk through, stand-ins they can program, cars and clothing that can be cloaked, cosplay zones populated with avatars and cyborgs, invisible tables in restaurants (eg, pp. 227-8).

The characters are ostensibly driven by the fairly complex plot, but affectively, in terms of their desires, they all want to vanish. As I read, I often thought of the author, as opposed to his narrative: to write a book like this, I thought, a person needs to want to disappear. The language of "The Peripheral" is a concerted attempt to "cloak" ordinary writing in a veneer of micro-metaphors, translucent to ordinary meaning but safe from it. The technology described in the book is an equally forceful attempt to picture ways that machines might help us dissolve some of our bodily mass and material into a foam of biogenic digital projections. The plot, too, can be understood this way, because it turns on time travel, and there are people in both the "present" (our near future) and "future" (seventy years farther on) who want to disappear, both within their own times, and within the "present"; and the plot is arranged in such a way that there are uncountable "presents," which diverge even as we read. What could be more comforting to someone who wants not to be present?

In a sense this is what's meant by "escapism" in popular fiction and film, except that here it is not only a matter of an invented world, transparently described, but of the act of writing, in a literary sense, put to the same purpose.

In the end, I don't mind the anxious ongoing invention of neologisms, technologies, and time-travel plots. But it is a misunderstanding to think that language itself can't be interesting unless it is injected with nanobots of unfamiliarity. That's one reason I won't be reading any more Gibson -- or, I think, any more genre fiction. The other tunnels under that first one: it's that the desire to escape, to vanish into time or the cyberworld is itself uninteresting because it is relentless and uninterrogated. It's the lack of reflection on the desire itself that puts this book outside the conversations of modernism and postmodernism.

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## Loring Wirbel says

While every Gibson novel carries a bit of cryptic uncertainty from its opening pages, *The Peripheral* is unique in both its overall cryptic nature and its droll, humorous style. Part of this is the result of the nature of the near-future protagonists. Instead of cyberpunk smartasses or Yakuza hired killers, we get punky but endearing hillbilly meth-head equivalents and disabled veterans living in a future rural Southern hill country where illicit drug "building" is the only occupation. Our primary heroine, Flynne, comes across as a hybrid of Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex and Jennifer Lawrence in *Winter's Bone*. Hence, despite the puzzling opening scenes, the reader can easily dive into the book on the strength of the characters, hoping the uncertainties will be answered later.

The brief chapters and fast scene-cuts between Flynne and Wilf Netherton work, for the most part. What is harder to confront is that the book seems to beg at first for an ethereal, cryptic look at why people like Lev in the far future would want to get into continua-hacking as a hobby to begin with. This subject is explored later in the book, but in the meantime, we are subject to a whodunit of a strange, but in some senses, traditional nature, as though a speculative sci-fi novel was placed in a mashup with a private detective murder mystery. Sometimes it is hard to determine how central the question of "Who killed Aelita West?" is to the book.

The supporting actors - Ash, Burton, Lowbeer, Griff, and the multitude of good ol' boys and girls in hillbilly land - make for a lighthearted romp, despite the blood. By the time of the climaxing cocktail party, we feel that Flynne and Netherton are engaged in the sort of swashbuckling one might encounter in Neal Stephenson's Baroque Trilogy. It is odd to see actions taken in the Appalachian hills in developing 3D printer outlets suddenly have the capability to bring down a global economy - but given how a handful of investment banks did the same thing in 2008, should that be a surprise?

If there's a weak spot in the book, it's the subtle feeling that Gibson sometimes throws in the latest tech and social trends without a feeling as to whether they would remain relevant at a future time. How visible and central in the vague period of the 2030s, 2040s would be such elements as 3D printing and assemblers (though Eric Drexler was mentioning the latter in the 1990s), girl gamers and feminism, drones, prosthetics used in warfare, etc.? To be sure, Gibson makes them natural parts of the story, but does the novel try too hard to be trendy?

Gibson's use of slang terms for horrendous realities gives the book an underlying chill similar to *A Clockwork Orange* - "jackpot" as a slow apocalypse, "party time" as a genocidal attack. This sort of thing is the norm for Gibson, but when it is tied to the jocular mood of this particular novel, it is doubly eerie.

There are many questions raised that are not fully explored in the book, such as Lowbeer's dual identity, how stubs and servers might work without changing history, or the way that forked continua in a "many worlds" theory changes the players in a finely-grained sense. But Gibson's strength has always been to be minimal, to say less than is required, and to leave plenty of puzzles for the reader. Consequently, *The Peripheral* may not be his greatest masterpiece, but it's certainly one of his most intriguing and enjoyable works.

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## Bryan Alexander says

Reading a new William Gibson novel is both delightful and exciting. He delights with the cool, sardonic yet imaginative visions of the present and future. He excites with his uncanny glimpses of the future, grounded

in canny selections from our time.

*The Peripheral* offers another pleasure, that of Gibson trying something new. His recent brace of novels looked at the very near future, each following a normal linear path. His classic cyberpunk or Sprawl trilogy envisioned a medium-term future, also tending to thriller linearity.

But in *The Peripheral* we see a very different conceit and narrative structure. This novel relies on two timelines, one in the near-to-medium term future, and one almost a century away. At first we follow these in parallel, trying to infer connections. Then we learn that the further-along future has discovered a form of time travel - well, information exchange with the past, to be precise. The far-future signals the closer-to-us future, and has a proposition. Or two. Then more, which aren't propositions but assassinations.

This dual-track time-travel-ish idea owes much to Gregory Benford's 1980 novel *Timescape*. Other parallels appear; see spoiler section below.

The future-near-to-us characters are also the more sympathetic. They focus on a young, poor Southern woman, Flynn Fisher, and her family. They live in a postwar backwater, where the economy barely exists apart from illegal drug manufacture. Flynn helps her vet brother, Burton, with an online job and witnesses what seems to be a strange murder. In the future-farther-away we see a PR flack, Wilf Netherton, working with a Russian crime family and their staff. Wilf has made an unspecified bad move, and is trying to improve his situation.

To say more will spoil things, so in this paragraph I'll try to sum up what happens next. (view spoiler)

Flynn also learns that by intervening in her time, the far-future team has effectively broken off her world from the stream of time, creating a "stub" which can't affect their future, and avoiding neatly some classic time travel problems.

The plot ratchets up slowly and steadily to climax in a party, where multiple schemes intersect. Some, not all, is revealed, and the Fishers end up alive, very rich, and with a powerful edge on their present. Wilf somehow survives, and ends up in a relationship. This is too brisk and cursory a summary, but will do for now. (hide spoiler)]

I mentioned earlier that *The Peripheral* has links to Benford's *Timescape*. There are more, but they, too, are spoilericious. (view spoiler)

One of the pleasures of reading William Gibson is tracking his experimental words and phrases. These are concentrated projections of a possible future. Let me list some that caught my eye: klepts, artisanal AIs, battle-ready solicitors, court-certified recall, the viz, hate Kegels, autonomic bleedover, continua enthusiasts, drop bears, period trains, neo-primitivist curators, quasi-biological megavolume carbon collectors, heritage diseases, directed swarm weapons, a synthetic bullshit implant, surprise funeral, mofo-ettes, and a neurologer's shop. One near-future treat is the "freshly printed salty caramel cronut".

Some of today's words mutate in these two futures. For example, poor folks don't cook, but *build* drugs. "Homes" refers not to homies or residences, but to Homeland Security. A very bad crisis happened between now and 2025 or so. People afterwards refer to it as the Jackpot.

Some of the language is simply cute. One character has her name changed slightly, and refers to it as

"amputating the last letter of her name." Another speaks of "cleaning up the afterbirth of Christmas ornaments". The Fisher family shops at a Hefty Mart.

In a sense *The Peripheral* is Gibson's gloomiest novel. Like the recent film *Interstellar*, this story begins in a bad situation then gets worse. The Fishers are poor and ill (the brother has seizures, the mother seriously ailing) in a society that clearly doesn't care for them at all. Their story reads like something from a late 19th-century Southern backwater, or like today's worst countryside. Characters have little help for the future. What we learn about the Jackpot not only makes things horrible, but sets up a future that's inhumane. Across all of these times looms the specter of vast economic inequality, of a society caring only for the <1%.

There is a powerful sense that the far-future is a kind of 1% taken to an extreme: a lonely elite, casually breaking off temporal worlds as a hobby, easily committing murders. Our lack of information about the world around London's far-future elite disturbs me, the more I think of it. Conversely, the far-future world is situated in such total surveillance that they see our/Flynn's sense of surveillance as charmingly antique.

How does this gloomy novel end, then? Ah, spoilerizing: (view spoiler)

Worse, the Fishers seem like good folks. But what will keep them (or their inheritors) from becoming klepts, with their vast power and advantages?

So this book ends up as a cautionary tale, a huge warning, and a goad to get us hauling ourselves away from the Jackpot.

(hide spoiler)]

Overall, *The Peripheral* offers solid future thought in an engaging narrative. Recommended.

I didn't read this one, but listened to it on audiobook. Lorelei King was the reader and did a fine job, with the whole file running a touch over 14 hours. King does different nationalities well, which matters in the kind of multinational world Gibson loves. She reads with the right level of cool, too - not a thriller's burning pace, but with a kind of observation acuity that I always associate with Gibson.

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## Tijana says

Periferal je dobar roman, solidan roman, Periferal je odli?an roman, Gibson je verovatno u prvih pet SF autora kad je u pitanju jezgrovitost i funkcionalnost izlaganja, dijalozi su mu britki a svako malo sevne i neka neo?ektivana poetska iskra, likovi su upe?atljivi i nekako instant simpati?ni,\* budu?nost sadrži scene zaslepljuju?e i tu?inske lepote, radnja samo šiba, bojim se da je i dalje dobar prorok (jer ne predvi?a ništa prijatno)... pa šta onda fali? Ništa, samo eto nije remek delo kao što je Neuromanser ili maltene svaka pri?a iz Burning Chrome. (view spoiler)

\*jedan sasvim sporedan lik je žena koja radi "hate Kegels" da bi ostala mirna kad god je neko iznervira, ni kra?e ni ubedljivije karakterizacije.

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## David V. says

Received this as an ARC via my employer Barnes & Noble. I began it today and after 24 pages, I remembered why I didn't like Mr. Gibson's books. If you're not a computer geek or a gamer, then you don't know what the hell he's talking about. The jargon and slang expressions meant nothing to me, and it was difficult to ascertain from the context-----so, unfortunately, I'm giving up and moving on to another book. I'm not going to live long enough to read everything I want to read anyway, so I have to set some priorities, especially if reading is supposed to be fun and interesting. Others find his books to be fascinating. If anyone wants this ARC, I'll be happy to mail it out---I'll even pay postage. First request gets it.

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## Michael says

It was great to experience Gibson back in futuristic mode after a 12-year period of writing contemporary techno-thrillers. As typical of his classic cyberpunk stories, you are thrown in the middle of the action and have to figure out what the characters are up to from context. That includes strange new technologies and odd new terms. It's always a kind of a thrill that you can learn to swim this way. The approach is frustrating and aversive to many, but it seems to be how Gibson inspires a motivation to get actively engaged in the problem solving that is a continual core to his mode of plotting.

The story evolves by alternating between two sets of characters in a myriad of short, punchy chapters. One set work for a company called Haptic Recon, which hires itself for all sorts of information gathering and security missions with a focus on computer hacking and projecting themselves virtually through robot drones. The main characters are two ex-military guys, Burton and his buddy Conner, and Burton's sister Flynnne. Conner has lost limbs in some war and depends on cool equipment and prostheses to get around. Flynnne substitutes for Burton on a job she is told involves beta-testing a new game and witnesses what appears to be a real murder of a wealthy woman in a high-rise by some strange new technology, some kind of molecular disassembler. Soon it appears that witnessing has made her a target by unknown enemies.

The other set of characters also work for a new kind of corporation that mixes publicist work for celebrities, security, and mercenary missions. A woman Rainey and her male boss Netherton are trying to manage a celebrity journalist and performance artist of some sort. She has her tattooed skin replaced periodically and sold to museums. Their client gets in trouble by invading a floating island of recycled plastic where a cult of neoprimitivists have set up a kingdom and riling them up to the point that her defensive drones implement a bloodbath.

Thus, you see the theme of problem solving efforts of hired hands being tapped when the wealthy create messes that get out of control. The two sets of middle-level techs find that their shadowy corporations are larger than they imagine and are engaged in a crisis and conspiracy of a large magnitude. The characters are forced to up the ante by stealing classified technology. In a marvelous projection of today's 3D printing, they can contract fabrication of powerful biological robot drones or drugs that turn people into "homicidal erotomaniacs" To whet potential readers I will share that the premise has something to do with one set of players monitoring and manipulating the activities of another set 70 years in the past. The reader can't escape a powerful quandary of whether to identify more with the folks in recognizable near future world, which is in the middle of a slow apocalypse of disease, famine, extinctions, and corporate scrambling, or with the cool

cats in the more distant and alien future that is more stable due to government by corporate oligarchies that harness nanotechnology, AIs, armed micro-drones, and robotic avatars.

Gibson is often dissed for his sketchy characters that don't lend themselves much to emotional engagement by his readers. For others that same cool detachment is the right stuff in noir traditions and hacker-chic that makes them heroic Davids against the corporate Goliaths (our intrepid Goodreads, Jeffrey Keeten, borrows from Walter Mosley's title to tag Gibson's leads as "always outnumbered, always outgunned"). The characters are created with a few strokes and select revelations of emotion, but it feels pretty masterly to me. They really stick in the mind with their quirks, ambitions, worries, their domestic lives. Often it's hard to pick a lead character in Gibson's tales. Here our omniscient observer hops among the perspectives of ten or so characters, but the two women characters Flynn and Rainey got my empathies for their humanity. Still, the briefer time in the narrative with the real anti-heroes was even more of a pleasure. One wealthy power broker was a star for me in bearing her power in such a charming package. LowBeer is an ancient director of an official MI5-type of state security agency, but she seems to have more world-wide power as a puppetmaster supreme between the two timelines. Her spyware is built into the network everyone uses and gives her powers from all accessible secrets. As evil as that sounds, I homed my hope in the prospect that she would turn out to be one of good guys. The edge of suspicion kept me on my toes, like when she pulls an Orwell when the publicist speaks of terrorism:

*"We prefer not to use that term," said Lowbeer, studying her candle flame with something that looked to Netherton to be regret, "if only because terror should remain the sole prerogative of the state."*

She really gets me worried when she speaks of the impact of tapping communications with the past, using a term that may or may not emphasize how little she might care about the fate of a past that is drifting away from her timeline:

*The act of connection produces a fork in causality, the new branch causally unique. A stub, as we call them.*

Mind boggling and fun is my best summary. Two cautionary futures for the price of one. A lot more angles on the old pleasure meter may be reaped from Jeffrey Keeten's great review.

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## **John says**

### **An Unsettling, But Brilliant, Look at the Future Courtesy of William Gibson**

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 Flynn 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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### **Althea Ann says**

"Eras are conveniences, particularly for those who never experienced them. We carve history from totalities beyond our grasp. Bolt labels on the result. Handles. Then speak of the handles as though they were things in themselves."

Yes... but I just have to say, speaking of eras... WOO-HOO - William Gibson is back in the era of the definitely-pretty-far-in-the-future! Not that I didn't wholly love his recent books that were in the right-around-the-corner-future, but I felt like we were catching up... 'The Peripheral' leaps ahead, again, with

speculation and extrapolation based on today's technological and social concerns, making the book feel every bit as fresh and timely as 'Neuromancer' did in the 80's.

It also has a purely science-fictional premise: a method of contacting alternate realities has been discovered. The exact mechanics of this are hazy, but once an alternate timeline has been contacted, the two remain locked in parallel. It's not possible to physically travel between the two - but information can get through. This means that communication is possible - and, with the creation of 'robot' bodies, a 'virtual' presence can be maintained.

Human nature being what it is, any technology with a potential for abuse probably will be abused.

In a world very much like what our own near-future will probably be like, a group of young adults is caught in a dead-end small-town. The local economy is dependent on illegal drugs. Actual medicines are nearly completely unaffordable for the average person. Veterans of foreign wars are physically and emotionally damaged - and pretty much on their own, with only minimal government benefits. Our protagonist, Flynnne (known online as Easy Ice) and her brother occasionally pick up some cash by playing online games for wealthy players' campaigns. They both assume their latest offer is like previous ones... but it turns out to be something weirder. What they're told is a 'game' is no virtual sci-fi world, but an actual future.

And when Flynnne witnesses something while online that some people wish she hadn't seen, she and her friends find themselves in danger from people whose existence they can't even have imagined, and up past their necks in bizarre power games in which the fate of their world could be at stake.

"People who couldn't imagine themselves capable of evil were at a major disadvantage in dealing with people who didn't need to imagine, because they already were. ... It was always a mistake, to believe those people were different, special, infected with something that was inhuman, subhuman, fundamentally other."

Excellent, excellent book. (As always, from Gibson.) Highly recommended.

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## **Pam ?Because Someone Must Be a Thorn? Tee says**

THE PERIPHERALS is just as frustrating as Gibson's other books. You might as well know that before you dive it. He has this writing style that throws the reader into the shark tank and it's up to you to provide some imagination and to just hang on, muttering all the while, before you are swept up and away.

Which is to say that I really enjoyed this book. THE PERIPHERALS is very much character driven and some how, without paragraph after paragraph of descriptions and explanations, he creates a world that's believable and concrete.

I don't actually remember whether Mona Lisa Overdrive and the other Gibson books I read eons ago were so character driven. But THE PERIPHERALS is. There are characters to like and characters to wonder about. The technology and 'forecasting' is still there and still strong, but different. The world/worlds you have in THE PERIPHERALS are at a different stage of their lives and so the tech is less shocking and trendy.

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THE PERIPHERALS is expansive tale that covers life on two different time fronts. And William works his magic by doing one of the things I think he does best, beside prognosticating; he introduces you to a wide

range of characters in vignettes that leave you scratching your head and thinking how in H- can these people have anything to do with one another. And yet it all comes together in the end. A Good Read. I'm not sure I'm entirely satisfied with the ending. But it's A Good Read.

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## Darwin8u says

*"History had its fascinations, but could be burdensome."*

? William Gibson, *The Peripheral*

Gibson might not always be the most accurate futurist, but he's probably the glossiest, the most polished. I actually really dig Gibson. I don't think he's perfect. Sometimes his schtick gets worn a little thin, but I loved *Neuromancer* and really liked his Blue Ant series (*Pattern Recognition*, *Spook Country*, *Zero History*). *The Peripheral* shares a similar aesthetic with the Blue Ant books, but jumps into the speculative zone that he mastered with the *Sprawl* trilogy (*Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*).

*The Peripheral* is set in two futures. One about 30 years from now, and another about 70 years from now. The novel links these two by imagining that through a server in the far future, there is an ability to communicate with the near future. The near future becomes almost a virtual game to the far future. A place where Russian oligarchs and the elite fight tribal wars because they are bored, super rich, and a bit damaged by their own history.

The novel allows Gibson room to explore his favorite issues: technology, paranoia, tribalism, corporatism, information, and mix it with a far future that possesses the ability to indulge their rich 'continua enthusiasts' with an ability to communicate information (not actual time travel) back and forth with their past (our future). That jump/postulation allows Gibson room to riff on how a window, a thin window between time, allows for the transfer of technology, etc., that can unsettle both economies and nations (duh, but most things that ring true seem almost innately obvious before written down). It also, because it is written by Gibson, lets him verbally play with fabric, fashion, tattoos, and other cultural eccentricities that he seems to always seem to understand a couple decades ahead of the rest of us.

One thing I've noticed about Gibson is his ability to desex his novels. There are both women and men in his novels. Heroes and heroines, but they operate with similar skills and capabilities. They both seem to exist in an androgynous asexual universe that isn't genderless or without sex, but almost seems to exist beyond sex (Postgender?), where gender is almost immaterial; an after thought. Gender exists with Gibson as a hanger to drape a clingy dress or a cashmere coat on and that is about it. Perhaps, this came from his quick uptake on how the cyber world would melt the edges of sexuality. The loss of a body through the Internet or the transference to another body (interacting with the world through a drone or a robot/cyborg) suddenly removes gender all together, or allows for a bunch of different interactions and iterations with gender.

Anyway, if you like speculative fiction, fashion, or just a well-crafted story, you could always do a lot worse than William Gibson. And if his track record is any clue, reading Gibson might just be a window on what ONE stub of our near or far future might look like.



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## Amy says

This book has a 5-star idea, but it was definitely not a 5-star reading experience. I certainly wouldn't have gotten beyond the first couple of chapters if I weren't reading it with a reading group. I suggested it because it's a time travel novel by a well-known sci-fi writer and because so many of the reviews for it have been 5-star reviews. Plus, the premise sounded interesting.

The beginning of the story is set in the near future when using local 3D printing (sometimes with pirated printing plans) is the norm and where the military uses a temporarily-tattooed haptic system to help guide soldiers at war. Burton is a military veteran and makes money from such a 3D printing business as well as from a paid online job where he does security remotely. He's not sure whether he's doing security within a game or whether the game environment is just an overlay for a real location that he's monitoring and defending remotely. However, he doesn't really care since he's getting paid for it either way. He has to be out of town a few nights, and offers to pay his sister, Flynne, to take his online work shift for him. While she's on duty, she witnesses something that sends life as they know it into chaos.

The story is written such that every odd-numbered chapter is written about Flynne and her friends' involvement in the chaos while every even-numbered chapter is written about a man named Wilf and his friends' involvement in the chaos. The writing is extremely dense, and the first 18-23 chapters are slow-going as the reader tries to absorb the changes that have happened in the world of the future, the technology, and the lingo. I had to read many of the paragraphs 2 or 3 times in the beginning to try to wrap my head around what was going on. The author makes the reader work to unravel the mystery of the world he has created, not giving any sort of info dump until well into the novel. Some may find this process of trying to figure out the world of the novel to be enjoyable, but very few of the readers in our group did. The difficulty in understanding of the book is exacerbated by sometimes having difficulty determining who the pronouns are referring to. I got about 80% through the book thinking that one of the male characters was female and that a cousin was a brother. The book is also written such that many of the sentences are sentence fragments rather than complete sentences, more like the way a person would tell the story aloud than the way a book is generally written. The book would have been helped with a glossary. I created one for the book group hoping that it would help those who were late to start reading, but they didn't think that it helped much because the writing was so dense.

Because of what Flynne witnesses online while she is working security for her brother, her life is in danger. A great portion of the book is spent trying to keep her safe and determine who is after her and why. The time travel aspect of the book is achieved through a virtual reality type environment where the person uses a robotic body on the other side of time to interact with people and move around in the environment of the other time. I did find that portion fascinating. However the parts where they're regrouping, going to the bathroom, and eating pork nubbins and sushi are less than interesting. Unfortunately, there's too much of that sort of thing except when Flynne gets temporarily kidnapped.

Finally, the reader reaches the 80% point hoping for a pay off in return for their hard work of figuring out the world of the future and waiting around for things to happen. 90-something% in, the climax feels anti-climatic and the big secret of who is after Flynne turns out to be a let down. All the surviving shallowly-developed characters live happily ever after in Po-Dunk, Alabama, as millionaires who feed themselves silly on pork nubbins. The end.

I hate that I didn't enjoy this book more. I want big ideas to have great follow-throughs. I cannot subscribe to the idea that a book is great simply because it's written by a famous author and because it has a great idea behind it. The characters, the story, the writing, and the parts in between the big ideas need to also be good. I'd love to see a movie version of this with someone else writing the screenplay. However, it would need to be the type of movie that deviates from the main storyline of the book, pulling out a better storyline, a better ending, and more 3-D characters. While I'd give this book 5 stars for the idea behind the book and Gibson's imagining of the future, I'd give the other parts of the book 2 stars. So I'd call this book a 2.5-star book which I've rounded up to 3 stars because of the concept behind it. Read at your own risk.

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### **Thomas Edmund says**

I thought for a long while about how to rate this book. I had been initially intrigued by the premise, and there were a few strong scenes in the first half which while reading gave me hope of an enjoyable read. In the end however I found Gibson's *The Peripheral* disappointing.

My first difficulty with the book was the overdose of concept. Certainly Gibson would have wanted his futuristic novel to have a certain degree of jargon and new technical terms (and no-one wants to bog their book down explaining every one) but I found the book to be overwhelmed with terminology and assumed future concepts that for me did not gel well with a smooth story. I even went so far as to purposefully slow my reading speed down and try and comprehend better what was going on. Honestly the exercise only served to provide evidence that the action and description in this novel were poorly balanced.

Second on my list of justifications - the characters. Aside from their esoteric names, Macon, Wilf, Netherton, I honestly could not tell you anything about the people in this book. I couldn't even tell you who was the protagonist and who were secondary characters. Sure there was a bit of action and drama, I challenge any reader to tell me a personality trait or characteristic of any of the players in this novel, as everyone seemed more present to discuss futuristic politics than have genuine personalities.

My final beef (final I promise) is that the general presentation of the prose was sporadic at best. With chapters ranging from short to very-short the pacing was jerky. The overall one of the novel started as quite serious and dark, and somehow by the end of the novel was almost comedic (particularly the chapter titles). Of course often sci-fi has elements of satire and humor, in this case however it left me wondering whether I was reading a thriller or a black comedy.

It was a shame to not enjoy *The Peripheral*, I respected the concept, and there were some definitely strong scenes in the book. Ultimately I felt like I was reading a draft that needed 3 more editorial sweeps and rewrites before it became marketable.

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### **Kristen Shaw says**

This was a tricky book that I \*mostly\* enjoyed.

Things I liked:

-The protagonist, Flynn, is awesome. Just generally a kickass straightforward independent woman. Gibson writes women really well, in my opinion, and this book is no exception.

-The plot is exciting and makes you want to keep going to figure out what the hell is going on.  
-as with all Gibson books, the glory is in the details. There was obviously a ton of thought put in to fleshing out a believable and intricate alternate world. Highlights include Ash's tattoos - living drawings of animals on her skin that run and hide to her back when encountering strangers (creepy and charming at the same time); the "cosplay zones" and assembled landscape of London, and of course all the cool tech stuff.

Things I didn't like so much:

-it's really tough to keep up with what's going on, especially at the beginning. I stuck with it because I liked Flynne, and I was intrigued about where it was going, but I did have to make a list in the back to keep up with all the characters and neologisms. If your imagination and interest isn't sparked in the first 50 pages I seriously doubt you'll enjoy getting through the rest of this.  
-there are aspects given way too much attention and others that I would have liked to see more fleshed out. The assemblers, the patchers, the cosplay zones, Daedra/Aelita and their family (and the reasons they do the things they do), Hamed, etc. None of these aspects were given enough attention for my liking. This is also a testament to Gibson's ability to carve out cool concepts. If these things/people weren't so interesting and pivotal to the conclusion then I wouldn't complain about their underdevelopment, but they are REALLY cool and end up being REALLY important, so I'm confused as to why more time wasn't spent developing these awesome concepts. If this is another trilogy I'm hoping these aspects are given more time.  
-the conclusion just...happens, really quick, and then you're left kind of confused and given a sweet ending that isn't really congruent with the rest of the book. Anti-climatic to say the least.

It would be cool to see Flynne again. I'm hoping for another book in these worlds.

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## Trish says

William Gibson's storytelling skill is such that we read/listen to him string adjectives, verbs, and nouns together in the places we expect to find them, only to discover 30-40 minutes later that we have no earthly idea what it is he is talking about. Ah, but what does it matter? He is slick, cool, forward-thinking. Surely it will all become clear.

I like several things about his future world—the one that contains Flynn and her brother Burton. Composting toilets are no longer unusual, and virtual reality is commonly used. Coffee and Red Bull are in big demand but only two vegetables (jalapeno & green onion) were mentioned amidst cronuts and pork or chicken nubbins, blinis with caviar & sour cream, sardine panini, shrimp bowls, breakfast burritos, and an unreasonable amount of sushi. You can see where my head was.

Anyway, there's lots of technology, and two time periods--before and after the "jackpot"--can coexist. "That really was a vile period, Flynn's day," one character from the other side comments, and another tells us the jackpot had already begun while Flynn was living pretty rough, close by her veteran brother and his shot-up best buddy, Connor. Humans can travel between these two periods, and effectively change singular outcomes, though not the jackpot. The jackpot, we are told, is multi-causal and devastating to life on earth.

It is also kind of cool that Gibson barely even refers to sex. It's as though women got what they wanted—to be recognized for their minds and their skills rather than their bodies. Some attention is paid to clothing, haircuts, and attractive features, but Flynn is strangely reticent to be seen in a sweatshirt and panties by a

face on a screen, even one some great distance in the future. Curious. It wouldn't have occurred to me to ask the screen to hide its eyes. But the language and thought processes of men and women are oddly similar among everyone except Lowbeer, who has a mind I recognize as feminine. (view spoiler)

I really liked what Gibson did with his worlds. He seems to have taken Naomi Klein's nonfiction book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* to heart and imagined what comes before, during, and after climate change. His later world is filled with people for whom the concept altruism draws surprised comment. Newgate prison in London has been rebuilt because "the klepts thought it a wise and necessary thing." One thing I *didn't* like as well was that he gave his chief villain in the post-jackpot world a Middle Eastern name. One could look at that as divine justice, but for me it was a little too reminiscent of those old films where the bad guy looked Russian and had a German accent. Maybe a little too obvious in a book without much of that.

China has a presence in both worlds, though not too heavily underscored. It was kind of cool, the post-jackpot imaginings...though sans vegetables...Connor, the shot-up veteran who was wheelchair bound, had a chance to bound around in new and different peripherals who accepted his personality and life force. And the very end shows the maturity of Gibson's vision. (view spoiler)

Despite liking the sentiments Gibson shares in this big story, I probably am not going to reach for another sci-fi novel very soon. I read this as a challenge to myself to get out of my comfort zone and see the world(s). However much I finally enjoyed it, it still feels a little too much like play when we have a lot of work to do if we're to change outcomes slightly during our own jackpot.

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## Elizabeth says

I'm not sure how Gibson manages to carve out these visions of the future that just wriggle into your brain and convince you that they're just so very possible and true but he does it every. damn. time.

This tale told in two timelines takes place in futures that are human and horribly, wonderfully, grimly liveable. In one, phone games, 3d printed drugs, and technologically messed up soldiers paint a bleakly recognisable future. In the other, the apocalypse has happened and instead of *Mad Max* it's still celebrities and politics and pushchairs. It's fascinating and intriguing and provides an amazing backdrop for a tense story of political intrigue and human relationships across alternate continua.

But what really keeps this story alive is the characters who are so beautifully drawn, flawed and complex, that you are happy to follow their tale wherever it leads. My only disappointment was the epilogue which was a bit of an unnecessarily saccharine sweet *Harry Potter* ending to an otherwise excellent book.

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