The Extremes

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British-born Teresa Simons returns to England after the death of her husband, an FBI agent, who was killed by an out-of-control gunman while on assignment in Texas. A shocking coincidence has drawn her to the run-down south coast town of Bulverton, where a gunman's massacre has haunting similarities to the murders in Texas. Desperate to unravel the mystery, Teresa turns to the virtual reality world of Extreme Experience, ExEx, now commercially available since she trained on it in the US. The best and worst of human experience can be found in ExEx, and in the extremes of violence Teresa finds that past and present combine.

The Extremes Details

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Author : Christopher Priest
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Amisth says

Though it pains me to put a one-star rating on a book by the author that I love and respect, "The Extremes" was a huge disappointment. I actually enjoyed two-thirds of the book and I hoped that eventually all would come together. But it never did. The book abruptly ends, and there is little explanation. It certainly seems like an unfinished work.

Stephen Thomas says

VIRTUALLY NOTHING

I've read a handful of Priest's novels and this is the first one to disappoint me. The Extremes is like certain types of food: it seems nourishing at first but soon betrays itself as empty calories. Much of the book is concerned with the everyday lives of a couple of people affected by the events that are central to the story. But these characters actually have nothing to say. We learn nothing from them and then, in the final third of the book, they simply vanish, leaving the reader wondering why we met them at all. The same applies to a group of enigmatic employees from a software manufacturer. Priest expends a good deal of energy making them seem mysterious and then as soon as they appear they're gone again, to no purpose and with no explanation.

As for the virtual reality aspect, which is, after all, the fulcrum of the story, Priest seems ill-at-ease with this technology. He fails to understand the concept or its potential, and uses it without finesse.

This book is also poorly written. The prose is weary and leaden, containing many clichés and worn-out characters. There is none of Priest's trademark wistfulness or the wonderful ethereal imagery he produces so well in his better works, such as Inverted World, A Dream of Wessex, or The Affirmation.

I happily recommend the other Priest novels I've mentioned above, but The Extremes is nothing but smoke and mirrors, and is best avoided.

Ty-real says

Whilst certainly not his best work, The Extremes is a solid novel. It is very much typical Priest: we are introduced to a seemingly mundane (as opposed to fantastical) setting and plot, laced with subtle hints that things are not as they seen. Slowly, the very narrative of the plot itself is brought into question. Reality is obviously a big concern for Priest, and this book continues to look at that.

By the high standards Priest set with The Prestige or The Glamour, this book is a bit disappointing. Tantalising hints that should be picked up on are left unexplored, and the melding of tone is not so slick as many of his other works. By the end there is the impression of reading two interlinking novels rather than one mutating one, and the effect is a little jarring. The ambiguity, too, that is so rich in many of the others goes a little too far - most interpretations have to be contrived rather than pieced together.

The ending seems very devisive, but I liked it. Too many authors don't have a sense of climax that books often miss, but this did and delivered beautifully. It's just a pity that it feels so disconnected from the start.

Still, it's a story with complex ideas and structure, drenched in ambiguity and provoking in thought. It side-steps cliches and, once you take it out of context of the author (which any good reviewer or reader should) it is a very accomplished novel.

Andrew says

Every time I read a Christopher Priest book I realise I should read more of his work. Priest deals with complex themes in very straightforward, accessible prose and The Extremes is no exception. I dislike giving plot summaries where the unfolding of the plot is integral to enjoying the novel, so suffice to say the themes of the book are concerned with virtual reality, consensual reality, coming to terms with loss, mass-murder violence, and shifting timelines.

In some respects the novel is sprawling: characters weave in and out, some storylines aren't resolved, the POV gradually shifts between a few characters and becomes focussed on one, and I can imagine for some readers this might be frustrating. Certainly the 'science' underpinning the novel seems to be more theoretical than actual, but this is the kind of book I prefer. Priest takes 'what if' and extrapolates it to the extremes, yet manages to keep a human focus that ensures his characters and their hopes are firmly identifiable. I can't say I was satisfied with the ending, but I was happy with it. Now to seek out more of his work.

Fence says

There were two reasons I picked this up at the shop. First of all I recognised the name Christopher Priest from the film The Prestige and second of all I quite liked the cover. Why a slightly blurry photo of a man pointing a gun at me appealed I'm not sure, but it did. Reading the blurb I wasn't too sure. Virtual reality and police procedures didn't grab my interest, so I opened the first few pages and took a quick skim. That made up my mind.

Full review: http://www.susanhatedliterature.net/2...

Tamsin Elsey says

So much intriguing potential, I kept waiting for the climax, but it always remained illusively just beyond the horizon. Did the author himself not decide on how to end the book? Frustrating though it is not to feel that the plot was fully completed, this book posed a fascinating scenario and the crossover concept itself had merit.

Michael Smith says

This is a rather frustrating book -- generally well written, filled with interesting ideas, but sometimes

inconsistent and sometimes simply unbelievable. Teresa Simmons and her husband are trained FBI field agents in what seems to be our present, except that both were trained with the help of an extremely sophisticated virtual reality system that put them into various roles in a wide range of historically-based "killer" scenarios. Through repeated insertions into each scenario, they had to learn to react appropriately and to survive the situation. (The process seems extremely wasteful of personnel, not to mention impossibly expensive.) Anyway, her husband is killed in the line of duty in a small Texas town and Teresa, trying to cope with her loss, discovers a similar mass killing took place at the same time on the same day in a small town in the south of England. So, naturally, she goes off to Sussex to look around. (Huh?) Then she begins patronizing the local virtual reality provider and discovers a whole new kind of "shareware" virtual experience. (If she's so well trained and informed, why had she never heard of this before?) The overlap between the incidents in Texas and England become more pronounced and Teresa's virtual experiences become more complicated, until everything comes to a head in a scenario within a scenario . . . sort of. The problem is, Priest assumes that a woman experiencing a man's role in virtual reality -- including sexual activity -- won't react any differently than she had as her own self. This seems extremely unlikely.

And he has a very shaky grasp of what West Texas is like, even though he was previously married to Texan author Lisa Tuttle. And nothing is ever really resolved. It's like he was three-quarters of the way through writing and re-writing the book, and just stopped.

Bertrand says

Christopher Priest est un peu le P.K. Dick des temps modernes. Ce présent roman aborde donc les thèmes de la perception de la réalité, de son appropriation par la conscience, ainsi que le deuil, l'amnésie, le refoulement. Il s'agit d'un polar qui flirte discrètement avec la SF, un Alice au pays des merveilles de la réalité virtuelle. Malheureusement on a bien du mal à trouver de l'intérêt aux différents protagonistes, et le puzzle de réalités imbriquées que le roman propose manque sérieusement de cohérence. Reste le thème de la perte d'êtres proches et la réaction du sujet survivant qui est ici intéressante, le reste a un goût d'artificiel et d'à peu près plutôt décevant.

Sara Mazzoni says

Disdetta. Avevo letto *Mondo alla rovescia* di Christopher Priest (1974) e mi aveva entusiasmata. Questo suo romanzo, più recente (1998), parla di cose interessantissime: la percezione della realtà, il confine ambiguo tra reale e virtuale; l'empatia, l'elaborazione del lutto, i traumi collettivi e financo la violenza nella società dei consumi e dell'intrattenimento. Quindi, cosa non va? Per essere breve, il problema è che il libro dopo un po' diventa una palla mostruosa.

È estenuante. C'è una continua ripetizione e sovrapposizione di situazioni e azioni; per un po' si crede che questo abbia una funzione narrativa, che ci sia un rompicapo micidiale da risolvere. Dopo 150 pagine ci si trova con qualche dubbio, perché la storia è andata avanti del 2% e siamo sempre lì. Niente di male, se fosse un espediente raffinato per ragionare sui loop, sulla ripetizione nella nostra vita e nella realtà virtuale, nel videogioco. Il vero problema è che la scrittura non è ha nessuna vocazione letteraria o brillante. In questo libro non c'è la dimensione della lettura per amore della prosa, che può guidare un lettore attraverso le parti più pesanti di libri come *2666* di Roberto Bolaño. Questo è un romanzo scritto come uno che non ha pretese, eppure ne ha parecchie; non ultima, quella di tenere il lettore inchiodato a una vicenda impalugata nella

sabbia mobile.

Un altro problema è che il romanzo sembra proporsi come la classica narrazione rompicapo. Vengono forniti elementi misteriosi e conturbanti: viene dato a intendere che certe storie raccontate forse si sono svolte in un altro modo, sono buttati lì indizi ed elementi che paiono doversi ricomporre. Poi però tutta questa roba semplicemente svanisce. Non serviva a niente. Il discorso è lo stesso di prima, e si può riassumere così: questo non è *Infinite Jest*. Non è un romanzo metaletterario in cui la prosa è talmente forte da rappresentare essa stessa il vero senso dell'esperienza di lettura. È un libro più modesto, con meno forza e complessità, e finisce per risultare noioso.

Le storyline si scollegano, non sembrano nemmeno pensate per esistere insieme, come se Priest avesse scritto le parti di Theresa in un altro momento e poi avesse deciso di innestarle in una struttura più grande, che però non le riesce ad assimilare con coerenza. Pure il mindfuck si perde, annacquato dalla verbosità del racconto, dell'accumularsi delle pagine. Sembra la bozza di un altro romanzo, non la versione definitiva. Ho il sospetto che la storia originale fosse una novella di un centinaio di pagine, dove Theresa vive l'esperienza delle realtà incrociate (in sostanza, la seconda metà del libro), a cui siano state aggiunte 130 pagine di altra roba senza una finalità precisa (la storia della coppia inglese), che viene completamente abbandonata a metà romanzo.

Se fosse stato scritto meglio, avrei detto che Christopher Nolan si era ispirato a questo romanzo per costruire la storia di *Inception*, ma non è il caso.

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lunaticprophet says

*** Interesting story and plot, good sci-fi.. ending could've been better.

Michael O. says

The only reason I give this two stars is that the prose is competently written. However, the book is a complete waste of time. Every possible plot thread is unresolved, which could be part of the point if the vast majority of the book did not cohere so well. The point is pointlessness, unreality, connections so numerous that they become meaningless. Sorry, Mr. Priest, but it doesn't take 350 pages to teach nothing; it takes 0.

Oleg says

I liked it at the beginning, however totally changed my mind in the end.

The book is not boring, author want to make a mystery of the supertechnology, but even given that XX exists, the things described couldn't happen. Scenarios just couldn't intersect because they were separated by time. It looks like "Inception" movie, but the potential of the XX is not discovered.

P.S. "Linearity becomes a matrix.." - WTF is thatabout?

Jean Clume says

Hard to read sometimes, but you can really get into it and feel it

Ben De Bono says

The Extremes might not be top tier Priest, but it seems to me that it's very underrated. While it has plenty of Priest's signature exploration of reality, at its heart it's really an exploration of violent tragedy: how it affects us, how we react to it, how it can even become an inseparable part of who we are. No, the book does end with everything wrapped up neatly, but I can't think of a single Priest novel that does. The Extremes deserves far more credit than it gets. It's not a perfect novel, but it is a very good one

Anubhav says

Not one of his best works. At times irritating.

Phillip Ramm says

As others have said, not his best, but I still found it a low-key page-turner. Low-key despite the plot of serial-killers and hyper-real virtual games. FBI agents now study for dangerous violent situations like robberies and hostage situation using an extremely detailed virtual reality reconstruction of genuine historical situations which are generated from the memories of witnesses and participants. The ExEx machine puts the agent into the mind of a participant who was there. Big corporations develop and sell these scenarios and they guard their memory collection very tightly and they pay well.

Priest's usual themes of twins or doubles, coincidences and correspondences and alternative realities continue here. And like many of his other novels, the end is ambiguous and uncertain.

If Kathryn Bigelow's Strange Days or David Cronenberg's existenZ had not come out around the same time this book might have been a more of a cult-shock success. It seems to borrow heavily from them, but I suspect it might be the other way around. Priest consulted on existenZ apparently.

Carol Kerry-green says

An uneasy read in many respects. It wasn't the ending I was expecting (I thought they would all be acting out a scenario in ExEx), but it was a sort of solution.

Randal says

An interesting premise and the start of a probing look at the role of violence in our society ... but then the plot takes a strange right turn (William Gibson lite) and goes off somewhere else. Still a decent read, but the first 2/3rds offered so very much more.

Olethros says

-Sensaciones de lo real y lo virtual.-

Género. Ciencia-Ficción.

Lo que nos cuenta. Teresa es una niña estadounidense de siete años que vive con sus padres en una base militar del noroeste del Reino Unido. Poco antes de volver a los USA, perderá a su amiga imaginaria Megan, a la que ve en un espejo. Con 43 años, Teresa trabaja para el FBI adscrita al Departamento de Justicia, ha enviudado recientemente, es experta en el uso de los sistemas de experiencias extremas para entrenamiento que usa el FBI (y que otros individuos usan con intenciones recreativas) y vuelve a Inglaterra por razones de trabajo, residiendo en un pueblo llamado Bulverton en el que hubo unos tiroteos el mismo día y a la misma hora que el tiroteo que terminó con la vida de su marido, agente especial del FBI, en acto de servicio.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...

Ubik 2.0 says

Ai confini della realtà (virtuale)

"Esperienze estreme" (The Extremes) è un romanzo misconosciuto di un autore poco noto, benchè Christopher Priest abbia al suo attivo almeno un ottimo precedente ("Il mondo alla rovescia") ed un curriculum di rilievo in campo cinematografico: da suoi romanzi sono tratti "The Prestige" ed "eXistenZ", quest'ultimo molto vicino alle tematiche di The Extremes.

Si tratta di un'opera ascrivibile all'ambito della fantascienza, ma quella per così dire "umanistica", piuttosto tipica degli autori inglesi: niente alieni, niente astronavi, niente galassie lontane ma un'ambiente vicino a noi fisicamente (costa meridionale dell'Inghilterra) e temporalmente: un mondo simile a quello che conosciamo ad eccezione dell'enorme sviluppo assunto dalla realtà virtuale in scenari preconfezionati a partire dalla scannerizzazione dei ricordi delle persone gestiti da potenti multinazionali ed erogati in una rete di esercizi simili ad internet point un po' più sofisticati.

Detto questo, evito di inoltrarmi nella trama vera e propria del romanzo, non solo per la sua complessità ma perché alcuni dei numerosi fili narrativi restano (o almeno a me sono restati) piuttosto incomprensibili e dal finale di dubbia interpretazione.

Il grande pregio di "Esperienze estreme" è tuttavia l'eccezionale ricchezza di materiali narrativi in poco più di 300 pagine, innumerevoli spunti che avrebbero potuto dare vita a diversi romanzi o racconti: in questi anni in cui la SF in crisi lamenta un respiro asfittico, concentrato in opere ipertecnologiche e monotematiche o artificialmente dilatato in saghe fantasy prive di qualsiasi originalità, suscita notevole interesse la poliforme fantasia di Priest che in qualche modo mi ha richiamato, e qui mi sbilancio, certi caratteri del sommo Philip Dick.

Chi ha vissuto la nascita e la rapida evoluzione di videogames e scenari di simulazione sempre più sofisticati e realistici non può restare indifferente di fronte alla suggestione delle infinite potenzialità suggerite dalla narrazione di Esperienze estreme: cosa c'è oltre i confini dello scenario, cosa succede a trasgredirne le regole, ad aprire porte secondarie o imboccare strade che escono dai margini della scena?