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The compelling story of a couple living in the wake of a personal tragedy. She is a star employee of an online dating company, while he is a physicist, performing experiments that, if ever successful, may have unintended consequences, altering the nature of their lives—and perhaps of reality itself.

Rebecca Wright has gotten her life back, finding her way out of grief and depression following a personal tragedy years ago. She spends her days working in customer support for the Internet dating site where she first met her husband. However, she has a persistent, strange sense that everything around her is somewhat off-kilter: she constantly feels as if she has walked into a room and forgotten what she intended to do there; on TV, the President seems to be the wrong person in the wrong place; and each night she has disquieting dreams that may or may not be related to her husband Philip's pet project. Philip's decade-long dedication to the causality violation device (which he would greatly prefer you do not call a "time machine") has effectively stalled his career and made him a laughingstock in the physics community. But he may be closer to success than either of them knows or imagines . . .

Version Control Details

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From Reader Review Version Control for online ebook

Snotchocheez says

4.5 stars

 UPDATE 3/13/17 I still don't have a coherent review formulated for this one, but Tournament of Books fans: In a huuuuuge opening-round upset (okay not so huge, as I really didn't much care for Ms. Strout's near-novella-in-length posing as a meaningful sadness treatise), **Version Control** beats out *My Name is Lucy Barton*. (Sorry, Strout fans, but *Version Control* is a really wonderful example of speculative fiction done right, and I could not not be happier for its advance in the ToB '17. I'd love to see this make it to the Final Four, or farther.

http://themorningnews.org/tob/

Review to come (hopefully; a book this criminally under-read needs some attention)

Carrie says

Version Control is a book I really wanted to love, but didn't. I'm a time travel sci-fi junkie, and so thought it would be a perfect fit for me. Unfortunately, I think Palmer took too much time before he got to his point. There was a lot of character development and events that didn't seem to really have a lot to do with the overall plot - almost like he couldn't decide if he was writing sci fi or literary fiction. I kept thinking, "Okay, okay, let's move things along!" I almost quit reading halfway through, but ultimately the desire to find out how it all ended won out. If I could give half stars, I would probably have given this one 2 1/2, but I erred on the side of generosity.

Jessica Woodbury says

Every now and then when I'm reading a novel I think, "I want to hold on to this. This is a special experience." I had that thought while reading VERSION CONTROL. I wanted it to last longer, I wanted to read it for a month.

It's not just that I love the way little bits of science-fiction and magical realism suddenly show up in this story, it's also how it manages to be so clearly intelligent and so emotionally wise. If I was on a first date with this book, I'd immediately be trying to figure out if it was into me because I would be desperate for this book to be my partner.

Oh, the joys of this book. There are the things I related to: the world of online dating, a lab full of scientists, the strange back and forth of a marriage in decline. There was also much I didn't: groups of girlfriends on the town, the lethargy of millennial 20-somethings, life after the loss of a child. But every single second of it felt so true and so fully realized that I would have to remind myself that the author was not a scientist, not a

millennial woman, and not living in the very-near-future where this book is set. It's very strange to get a book that so fully understands so many aspects of the human condition, that is full of lines you want to read aloud to the person sitting next to you, and is also so bitingly satirical and so right-on with its sci-fi aspects.

I would definitely pair this book with Lauren Groff's FATES AND FURIES, very different characters and stories but definitely structural similarities and emotionally resonant in similar ways.

I did find the Coda (and some of the second part) not quite as strong as the first half of the book, though much of it was due to the fact that both sections required extensive exposition which pulled me out of the book's rhythm a bit.

Almost every year I read a book in the fall that's due for a January release that I know will end up on my best books list (2015: Welcome to Braggsville, 2014: The Weirdness) and that does in fact end up there. This is the one for 2016.

Kevin Kelsey says

An absolute masterpiece of literature, SF or otherwise.

Sarah says

4.5 stars because DUDE, this was one totally awesome book!

Rebecca's husband is working on a causality violation device, which is called a "time machine" to the dismay of the scientists, while Rebecca goes through life feeling that things are slightly *off* in everyday life. It seemed like the ultimate deja vu.

We spend quite a bit of time getting to know the characters and the machine but it never becomes dry because there's a good deal of humor throughout. There are also some mind-boggling moments. I will never look at an issue of Marie Claire the same way. Once things really begin to pick up speed it's just so fascinating!

There was also a lot of interesting side comments about racism and sexism. It was worked into the characters and story so it wasn't in any way preachy. I couldn't believe the number of times someone would say something awful and then say "But I'm not racist!" Right, because that comment about black people being born with a desire for BBQ and watermelon wasn't racist *at all*. This whole aspect of the story was done in a really interesting way.

It's really hard to talk about this book without talking about some of the surprises along the way so that's all I'm going to say. I will say that it was absolutely unputdownable and I cranked through the 19 hour audio in two days. Super cool story :)

Suzanne says

When trying to articulate my thoughts on Version Control, one of my favorite lines from Vonnegut comes to mind - "Of all the words of mice and men, the saddest are, It might have been."

To say this is a "time travel novel" (don't call it time travel!) feels crazy reductive. To attempt to describe this novel in any few words feels reductive. It's many things at once, and the biggest surprise is that it succeeds thoroughly at being all of them. This is my first time reading Dexter Palmer, and I'm glad I picked this one up on a whim. Version Control is, quite simply, an intelligent, one of a kind masterpiece for the tech savvy, social networking, online dating, post-Matrix generation.

It goes from being a philosophical sort of diatribe against the extremes of technology (the dangers, the way it separates us; but also conversely, the way it joins and forms us), to downright laugh out loud funny to reaching for the nearest box of Kleenex within a matter of pages. I can't remember the last time I was this affected by a book.

Philip Steiner, joke among his peers (or is he?), is a physicist who has devoted his life to the invention of a Causality Violation Device (very specifically "NOT A TIME MACHINE"). The thing is, nobody knows if the device works or more problematically, how it might work. The more interesting character here is Philip's wife, Rebecca Wright. It's an amusing yet highly believable scenario of opposites attracting. These two shouldn't work together, but they meet through the magic of online dating, and sparks ignite, for better or worse. This marriage is every bit as complex and captivating as something out of a Gillian Flynn novel. Philip and Rebecca are combustible and fascinating together: he the obsessed, almost married to his work mad scientist; she the sad alcoholic mother to a deceased son and star worker for a shady online dating service called Lovability.

There's something all too relatable about Rebecca: how she talks about her unemployed "blackout periods" after college, her myriad contradictions, the degrees of deception and loyalty she contains, the things she does for love and family. She's the heart and soul of this story.

But every character here is well-developed and essential to the narrative, from Rebecca's minister father to the tough as nails, brilliant and impenetrable Alicia, Philip's younger colleague at his lab. Palmer makes the reader invested in every single one of them.

It's been days since I've finished reading this, and I still can't stop thinking about it. Far and away my best of 2016 so far. If you like stories about time travel, and you want something entirely unique, and you just read one book this year - read this one. You won't be disappointed.

Gertie says

"Terence. Hey Terence! Put that book down for a minute and help me *bullshit*!"

This book was an unexpected treat. I listened to it in audiobook format (I would recommend audio format for this one), and the narrator did an excellent job with the various characters' voices. Coming up with a good quote from every other page of this book wouldn't even be a challenge.

If you go into this expecting, oh... a time travel action-adventure, you're going to be disappointed. This is a sloooow book, however it kept my interest throughout. It is not just an entertaining story, **it is social commentary**. **The strengths of this book lie in its ability to observe our world and recount it in such an observant and insightful manner.**

I literally laughed out loud quite a few times. There are moments that are just so satisfying or amusing because they have a touch of cynical comedy to them, or they simply ring true, and **it's a pleasure to see that someone has observed something so ephemeral or elusive, and managed to put it into words.**

There were really only a few parts that I had trouble with, mainly some of the relationships. For example, what did Rebecca see in Philip in the first place? Most of the time it seemed like she was trying to convince herself he cared more than he actually did. Why did no one tell Alicia to shut the fuck up? Also, the scientists were all so formal. While I imagine that the field does have a concentration of certain types of minds, I would have liked for Carlson to at least have diverged a bit more from the likes of Philip and Alicia.

Rebecca

> "And so each of the last guests sat down next to Rebecca, one at a time, to toss their confessions into the bottomless pool of her alcohol-addled mind. *I shouldn't tell you this*, but..."

Phillip, this guy... he's practically a robot. We get a closer look at him later, but frankly, it's not much better. He shows he cares, *a little*, but mostly he is a golem made of arrogant, narcissistic moving parts and an obsession with science. There is a scene about flowers that is a perfect representation of what he is like as a husband, and in some ways, as a scientist. Oh, and the watch!

> "I already have plenty of ways to tell time." Philip said. "I usually carry a phone. And I can't help but be near a computer during most of my day. It's hard for me *not* to have an idea of what time it is. And Rebecca, this looks unnecessarily expensive; especially given its probable lack of accuracy relative to a quartz watch, which would have cost you next to nothing—"

Alicia. Oh Alicia. What drove me nuts about her was that no one calls her out on being a bitch. Oh, she's cute and little... so. fucking. what. She's still a bitch. Generally everyone just accepts it, or makes excuses for her. If she had been a plain, plump woman who wore frumpy clothes, what then, hmm? The best scene with her in it was by far the, uh... let's call it the "Marie Claire bashing". I mean, the **balls** on this woman. It's not just nerves, which I could respect; it's arrogance, which I cannot. I really, *really* wanted to punch her in the face. "Good for office morale?" How the heck is that even possible?

> "Don't you have any *decency*?" Alicia yelled at Rebecca. "Do you just (view spoiler)? Are you out of your mind?"

Carson is hard not to like. He was a bit uptight and formal like Phillip, but he seemed to have an actual beating heart. He didn't have to force himself to try to care, unlike Philip.

> "But most people don't want to—don't laugh—most people don't want to *change the world*,

right? They might, you know, go out and vote or something, but for the most part they're happy to live in the world like it is. And there's nothing wrong with that. But stupid me—I have *ideals*."

Kate... oh man, I loved this character. Kate is not perfect; but she is just so, so straightforward. I love that about her, especially when she is surrounded by characters who keep their cards too close to their vests. Just SPIT IT OUT PEOPLE. No need to though, Kate'll take care of that for you.

"But he's so fucking *weird*, honey. He's *so* fucking weird."

Spivey — I gotta say, this guy was hilarious. I laughed every time he tried to get Terence to bullshit with him. His theories on time travel, his anecdotes about his sister, he total obliviousness to how others perceive him; it's all part of what makes him interesting. He's a pretty clever guy, which is easily masked by his abrasiveness/friendliness.

"Science fiction," Spivey said, with faint distaste. Then: "Black woman?" 'Yeah." "I figured. Otherwise they wouldn't have bothered to put a picture of a black woman on the front." He handed the book back."

GERTIE GAUGE:
Thinking about book while not reading it: Heck yeah.
Characters worth rooting for: Yes, flawed as they were.
Suspension of disbelief: You'll need your suspenders for this one.
Emotional engagement: Yes, though I wouldn't have minded if it had been slightly more emotional and less about observing and reporting.
Mental engagement: Definitely. Really phenomenol job of getting the mental gears turning.
Memorability factor: 9/10 I will remember the experience, though I may lost some of the details.
Quality of writing: Wonderful.
Elevator one-liner: "It's a time travel book, but really more about relationships and perspectives than adventure."
Laugh/cry/react: Laughter for sure, and some anger at characters.
Something I'd change: Just the emotional aspect - needs to connect to our hearts more, not just our minds. Oh, one more thing... more variety in the scientists.
Cliffhanger: Nope, it's a single book.
Romance good, bad, n/a?: This one's tough. There are plenty of relationships in the book, but it gets a big convoluted. The book takes the view that you can fall in love more than once. Sort of.
Errors: N/A, audiobook.
Okay with rec'ing to a friend?: I REALLY want some of my friends to read this one.
Follow this author? Yes.

I hope the author eventually gets the recognition he deserves for being able to put out such compelling storywriting.

Joachim Stoop says

I'm afraid Mr. Palmer will never get the cheer and attention he deserves for this novel. I guess because it's too SF for the Literature with capital L-lovers and too literary and 'normal' for the die hard SF-lovers. The thing is: this book is sooo good. The absolute fun I felt reading this is actually quite rare. It contains an avalanche of cool ideas, nerdy views, philosophical and scientific thinking of a level you wouldn't expect to encounter in this genre. The story is totally accomplished, everything is incredibly real in the incredible. It contains the technological dystopian warnings of Eggers The circle, Adichie's insights on everyday 'accidental' racism, intertwining storylines as in the better crime novel, hard hitting metaphors etc.

Highly recommended! This is and will remain one of my best books of 2016

Btw. try to get your hands on the audiobook. It is perfect
btw. I give it 4,75 because it needed just a bit of editing

Tudor Vlad says

A hidden gem, this is the best way to describe this book. I honestly didn't think this would be so compelling and smart. It is science fiction but it's also extremely character-driven, slow and grounded. Sure, there are some ideas in it that are pure science-fiction but most of the ideas explored are already a part of our lives, focusing a lot on what it means to be alive during the information age. It is scary just how relatable it is.

I said that this is a slow book and while that is true, it isn't necessarily a bad thing. When I first started this and saw the pace I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to finish it but it does pick up and the more you get to know the characters, the more compelling it becomes.

If the first part of this book is great, the second part is insane. Not in the sense of action, but of the ideas that are introduced and the way in which they are explored. Even when the more science-fiction ideas come into play, they're always grounded into the characters and what they mean for them. This is what made *Version Control* an unforgettable and moving experience for me, not necessarily the ideas which on their own would have still made me like the book, but how the ideas and the characters come together to form something that left me in awe.

I highly recommended *Version Control* for fans of science fiction and even for readers that aren't really into science-fiction, because for me this isn't just that. I see it as a part literary fiction and science-fiction/speculative-fiction. A book that deserves to be read.

Book Riot Community says

Almost from the moment I picked it up, I was completely caught up in this book about a woman named Rebecca whose husband is building a causality violation device (not a time machine!). The early chapters of the book read like a typical relationship drama, but it's set in the near future, and Rebecca gets these occasional feelings that something about the world just isn't right. Then, everything changes, but no one

seems to know it. What's interesting is that even when circumstances change drastically, essential aspects of the characters remain the same. As you'd expect from a time travel causality violation novel, the plot gets kind of loopy, but the mind-bending qualities make the human story even more interesting. I had a great time reading this.

— Teresa Preston

from The Best Books We Read In February 2017: http://bookriot.com/2017/02/28/riot-r...

Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

Causality Violation SF: "Version Control" by Dexter Palmer

"For months now, Rebecca had felt what she could only describe as a certain subtle wrongness – not within herself, but in the world. She found it impossible to place its source, for the fault in the nature of things seemed to reside both everywhere and nowhere. Countless things just felt a little off to her."

In "Version Control" by Dexter Palmer

A lot of the debate around this book must be surely undermined by the lack of a clear definition of time.

The idea of time 'moving forwards or backwards' is just a metaphor that people adopt because it's easy to identify with physical objects that move and since time is a dimension- a dimension of space-time, the continuum in which everything has its being. Time itself doesn't 'move' or 'pass' any more than length can pass or move. However, everything moves, or occupies a series of different points, in space-time. I also suspect that our perception of time as a progression in one direction, with a remembered past and a future of multiple unrealized possibilities, is a 'fiction' or mental construction that allows us to make sense of cause and effect. If we could imagine a being outside of space-time, whether God, or Vonnegut's Tralfamadoreans, that being would see all those points simultaneously. As we do when we remember someone's life.

Robyn says

3.5 stars that I'm rounding up based on the crisp, clean writing. This is a subtle SF book, that for my tastes was a bit too slow. Elegant plotting, wonderful use of physics.

Carol (Bookaria) says

"Isn't that the fantasy? If I go back in time, knowing what people back then didn't know, then I can

change history! But history made you what you are. And it's bigger than any one man."
? Dexter Palmer, Version Control

This book tells the story of Rebecca whose husband Phillip is a scientist. Phillip works in a lab that is building a **"Casuality violation device"**. Many people refer to this machine as a **"time machine"** but he would prefer that you do not call it so! This is where the story starts but what it reveals is much deeper than that.

The book is narrated mainly by Rebecca. Rebecca has this ongoing feeling that there is something wrong with the present, she can't put her finger on what but there is definitely something off.

There are other characters in the story and they are very insightful on matters related to online dating, automated business processes, scientists, casual racism, technology, and much more. This book completely surprised me, first, I cannot believe it escaped my radar last year when it came out and, second, it is so insightful.

You read this book because of the characters' revelations and ideas, although the plot is interesting what takes it to the next level is its wisdom. This book is amazing.

Overall **I loved this book** and highly recommend it.

Review also posted on link: blog

About the author:
Website
Twitter

Lata says

4.5 stars. This was fantastic. I loved the writing and the characterization, and the love of science running through this story. (I was reminded of The Unseen World for the science love.) The characters, particularly Rebecca, grabbed me right away, and I liked the way the author considered race, too, through a variety of perspectives. I liked the near future setting, with a logical development of certain technologies (e.g., self-driving cars, even more ruthless use of data science). I also really liked how the author demonstrated how version control works with his characters.

Andrew Smith says

This is a clever story of time travel. This is a long discourse on physics and on scientific minutiae I found hard to track and impossible to fully comprehend. This is a funny story of online dating featuring a future population who live their lives online and seldom meet face to face. This is all of these things. Does it work? Well, sort of… but it is a really strange mix.

Set in the near future, a group of physicists are working to develop a machine they call a Causality Violation Device. The team is led by Philip Steiner, a no doubt bright and honest man but one with no visible sense of humour and very little (if any) self awareness. His wife, Rebecca, works for the online dating company through which they met. Philip works long hours and Rebecca drinks. The actual nature of 'the machine' is shrouded in obscure scientific gibberish, but the uninformed sometimes refer to it as a time machine. Not in Philip's hearing though, he'd be likely to administer capital punishment for such a heinous crime.

Two things become clear. Firstly, the machine doesn't seem to work and the scientists have no clear path to changing this state. Secondly, at some stage in the past few years Philip and Rebecca have lost their only son, Sean. In time it becomes clear that the death was a result of a car accident; the car was an auto-drive vehicle (as are almost all cars in this new world) and as warnings sounded inside the vehicle Rebecca had grabbed the steering wheel, thereby assuming control of it's last vital movement. This movement caused a catastrophic collision to the passenger side, the side carrying Sean. Understandably, Rebecca has always blamed herself for her son's death. At this point I thought I knew where this one was going, but the story turned out to be much cleverer than I gave it credit for.

The story is told from multiple points of view and switches, unnervingly, between the elements I mentioned at the start of this review. In consequence I sometimes struggled to get a handle on things, although it does all come out in the wash and the very well thought out time travel element eventually delivers brilliantly. As for the physics, well it felt to me that this was just a way of trying to combat the natural reluctance of readers to believe such a machine could exist. Maybe the science made some kind of sense – I have no idea. And the dating stuff? Well this was just weird! I'm not sure it added anything to the plot and some of the technological advances featured here and in the broader side-story narrative felt unlikely in the extreme.

So how to rate this book? It's probably a three star offering, for me, but if it had been trimmed of the dating stuff I'd have rated it higher. An inventive and well thought out piece of science fiction let down by some blatant over-egging of the pudding.