



Interface

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There's no way William A. Cozzano can lose the upcoming presidential election. He's a likable midwestern governor with one insidious advantage. An advantage provided by a shadowy group of backers. A biochip in his head hardwires him to a computerized polling system. The mood of the electorate is channeled directly into his brain. Forget issues. Forget policy. He's more than the perfect candidate - he's a special effect.

Interface Details

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Susan says

I like all the things about this that I liked about Stephenson's Cryptonomicon and Reamde, and, in addition, I appreciated the lack of so much "infodump." This is just straight story-line the whole way through. Perhaps that's why it could fit in barely over 600 pages, rather than 1000+. The wry humor here is a bit different from that in Reamde: nothing really seemed implausible, but now and then, I'd find myself smiling at what had just happened or what someone said.

Most of the characters were fairly straightforward, not that complex. But I enjoyed watching them puzzle out the situation they found themselves in and figure out what to do about it. Floyd Wayne Vishniak was an exception, simply fascinating.

And the primary premise? Frighteningly, it takes only a tiny leap of imagination to believe it could all happen.

Pamela says

To all those who knocked stars off of their ratings because the technology in this book is too out-of-date: Congratulations! You've managed to focus on something that really doesn't have a bearing on the story at all! This is called Missing the Point, and you win!

To all those who bemoan the lack of Stephenson's rather trademark convoluted and crammed-with-science-y-stuff style: Sorry! This is not one of those books! The last time I checked, it is neither illegal nor immoral for an author to write something unlike his or her usual stuff.

If you like Stephenson's books (like me--wait, I love his books!) but feel a bit exhausted by the pages of super-detailed mathematical proofs or essays on 17th century economics, you're going to love this one. You know how a lot of so-called techno-thrillers nowadays have blurbs on their covers proclaiming them to be "smart!" and "full of intrigue!" and "masterful!" Well, this one lives up to the hype. This is how it's done, y'all.

I can't possibly start to summarize the book, because the authors (Stephenson and his uncle, apparently) create portraits of many different characters and follow them all through an unprecedented Presidential campaign. I knew this was a good one when I started plotting to read it during all of my meals. I would have read it in the shower, but as this is a library book, I resisted the urge.

Track it down--I heartily recommend it.

Max Nemtsov says

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DomoKete says

Did not start. This is a casualty of my loss of enjoyment for Neal Stephenson's books. My original enjoyment of his books came from a shared fetish for science and technology. The techno-utopian view of the scientist/engineer prevailing with technology against a political/bureaucratic organisation is an easy sell to young people interested in technology. I no longer hold this kind of fetish and so a Neal Stephenson book to me now is just an intellectual adventure story with a simplistic world view. Nothing wrong with that, but it is not something I want to read much anymore.

Ytje says

A riveting, comical and biting read. If people in power -in reality- could get away with rigging the game in this enormous way, they probably would. This book has not dated one bit.

The only problem I have with this book is that it contains an embarrassing amount of spelling- and type errors. Where was the editor??

Juan Hovez says

Started out great, with a fantastic premise and engaging characters. Went out on a bit of a whimper.

That said, I am still gorging my belly on the Neal Stephenson Kool-Aid and know the man can do no wrong. Except, apparently, when he collaborates with relatives.

San Dimas High School Football rules!

Brittany says

This is a wonderful political adventure novel, with a thin vein of science fiction running through it. If all political thrillers were this smart, snappy, funny, and thought-provoking, I would read a lot more of them. Or perhaps Clancy is a real knee-slapper and I just don't remember. But *Interface* follows an electoral campaign and along the way manages to ask some very profound, fundamental questions about the ethics of self-improvement and the nature of identity and life itself, all while being an enjoyable romp of a novel. The characters are well-developed and interesting (though from this and *Reamde*, we now know never to be a weaselly man with a problem with alcoholism who is ungallant toward women in a Stephenson novel), the story is well-paced, the plot is fiendishly clever, and the action is well-done. All this along with prose that occasionally made me chuckle out loud.

Books like these make me wonder why Stephenson's novels have not already been made into sensationally popular blockbuster movies. The bones are all there: charismatic characters, adventure, special effects, and a joyous buoyancy that doesn't worry too much about being overly pedantic. Maybe people have offered and Stephenson is just being picky, which is laudable, but this would make a *phenomenal* movie, one I'd love to see, and maybe it would get more people reading Stephenson. Which can only be a good thing. I recommend this book to those who already love Stephenson, and to those who don't yet know they could.

Paul says

I've read a number of Neal Stephenson novels. All have been deep and fascinating. All feature self-contained worlds science fiction fans can get lost in.

"Interface" is an older novel, written with a co-author a couple of years after "Snow Crash." It's science fiction set in a contemporaneous world, based on the social, political, and technological realities of its era, the mid-1990s. Some readers may scratch their heads over the novel's pre-internet technology; those of us who embraced that technology in the mid-1990s remember how exciting and promising it was, and won't have a problem with the extrapolations Stephenson bases his novel upon.

The plot is simple: a popular politician, William Cozzano, suffers a stroke; experimental tech in the form of an embedded chip helps his brain forge new pathways, allowing him to regain speech and motion, and he enters the presidential race. Ah, but there are forces behind Cozzano's recovery and campaign, and it turns out the chip is being used to control him.

We learn about these forces through different characters involved in helping Cozzano recover, because each one of them is a part of The Network, the shadowy organization behind what turns out to be an even deeper conspiracy. These characters multiply like guppies, to the point where the reader can barely differentiate between individuals, and ultimately we learn there is an even more shadowy ... and ancient ... force behind The Network. But our plucky politician, helped by his daughter and a few trusted pals ... well, I'd better not give away the store, so I'll stop there.

Neal Stephenson is a windy bastard, and this is perhaps the windiest of his novels. There are far too many characters: every one of them gets pages and pages to show us what makes them tick, and many of them are

just full of folksy observations and humor. It's really too much: the novel would have been tighter and more popular if background characters stayed in the background, but no, every one of them gets a lengthy solo, padding the story to the point where the reader starts flipping pages in search of action.

The villains in "Interface" are basically decent people who think they're doing good. Many of these basically decent people are campaign workers who, while nominally working for Cozzano, are in fact controlling him on behalf of The Network. In reality, decent people are few and far between in the political world: those drawn to political campaigns are venal, spiteful, petty, small, confused, incapable of working for any purpose higher than their own aggrandizement. As Stephenson peeled back the layers of his vast worldwide conspiracy, I couldn't suspend disbelief. I started talking to the book in my lap: "this could never happen" "no way Jose," "that's bullshit."

Despite the novel's windiness and the far-fetched political conspiracy at the heart of the plot, I think parts of this novel will stay with me. Overall, an interesting if sometimes frustrating read.

Marty Fried says

I thought this was very entertaining all the way, although not suspenseful - but that's not surprising for this author. However, it was less technical than many of his books, so that normally puts you off, don't let it in this case, although it is slightly technical. But I thought there were some truly interesting characters, with a lot of humor throughout. Unfortunately, the most interesting character was one of the bad guys. I liked him and wasn't sure whether he was a good guy or a bad guy until the end; actually, I'm still not really sure he was such a bad guy.

Some might think the premise isn't likely or believable, but I would answer with "Are you sure?" I think perhaps the Trump fake news and misinformation coming from Washington might make this a lot more likely. Fake news rules in this story, although it was written long before the recent elections. But likely or not, it's a fun read. For those complaining that it's not on par with other Neal Stephenson books, I say "so what" and "who says?"

Choko says

I think this was much more of a political intrigue than I ever really want to read - too close to reality, too relevant to political currents from which I would like to run away and hide, even though I know that it is impossible... I am very sadly reminded of how things that were considered relevant to a political campaign in 94, even if in fictional form, are still the same today, 21 years later, and SP even mentions were points of discussion during elections 100 years before that... What does it say about us as "foreword thinking" or actually achieving any of our idealistic goals? No mater, long ago I decided that my books should have nothing in common with the politics of today and this was just a bit too-close for comfort.

Apart from my personal reservations, it was another great book by SP. He is smart and witty as always, although the book was a bit slow in development and a tad choppy. Not his best, but even in his worst SP is better than the rest of the field :)

A.J. says

I loved this book and am surprised that it hasn't been made into a movie yet. It's a well-written, gripping combination of media manipulation, abuse of power and the fight of a small band of decent people trying to overcome the big guys. With a side order of intelligent humour. I had a hard time putting it down in the last two days.

Patrick says

This was an exciting story, entirely plausible. It's about how to use implant technology to help stroke victims. I don't think the technology is quite there yet, but I suspect it's not that far off. Once it is here, this book talks about the essential problem of whether that technology can be used to control the person its implanted in. There are some interesting ideas here. See if you agree with them, or not.

Otis Chandler says

Neal Stephenson is one of my favorite authors (snow crash, cryptonomicon), but he didn't deliver in this one. Maybe because it was co-authored. The premise was interesting, and the first half of the book was actually pretty good, but then it just skipped ahead and I didn't love the ending...

Robert says

The other collaboration between these two authors, Cobweb, was a thriller with a message: the US government doesn't work anymore. "Ordinary" folks are the only people who get things done, usually despite the government.

Interface is also a thriller with a message: Elections don't work anymore, either. This is because of television. It takes a similar technical and stylistic approach; "ordinary" folks turn out to be really important, humour that people will recognise from Stephenson's solo novels, though less extreme or outlandish, perhaps. Unfortunately it also shares some of the weaknesses of those giant later works, e.g. too many characters, lack of urgency or narrative drive and, crucially, not much tension until exceedingly near the end. This is disappointing, since Cobweb evades most of these problems and delivers a tense final act. Even more disappointing, in that Zodiac demonstrates that at one time Stephenson could write taught, exciting fiction as well as make a point, without help from anybody else - but we're not likely to see another book from him that is less than 400p long, are we? And I just can't be bothered with another of his 1000p tomes.

Reading this book is a healthy reminder of how such manipulation is conducted, on a practical level but readers are not offered much by way of a solution to the problems of media manipulation of/by politicians in this book. I offer one idea as a way of mitigating the problem to some limited extent: don't watch TV news, ever. Listen to talk radio news, instead - by which I mean the BBC or (second best) NPR.

Jason Byrne says

An intriguing read - both for the science and the politics. The science came off as believable, but where this book shines is the dead right tone it gives the politics in the book. I've been working in politics and campaigns for three decades and the window this gives into that world, while not factually correct at all times, is definitely correct in capturing the essence.

And like with all Stephenson books, this delivers memorable characters and settings. There seems to be a bit more humor in this book than Stephenson usually delivers (and thus reminded me much more of Bruce Sterling).

As a DC-area native, I especially found the inclusion and description of this area to be well done and accurate for the most part.

In summary, this book provides a chilling what-if on what the confluence of technology and politics might bring about, and it does it with some humor, great characters, and a story that winds its way through many subplots while never losing sight of the goal. The descriptions of locations in the book I am familiar with were dead on, as were the descriptions of electoral politics and life within the bubble of Washington DC.

Note on the author:

I got an older copy of this from a friend and for the author it listed "Stephen Bury" and then had a little sticker on it that said "With Neal Stephenson!". So going in, I'd known Stephenson had some influence on it and it wasn't until after I finished the book that I looked up the author and saw it was a collective pseudonym for Stephenson and his uncle.

Wasn't really much of a surprise as while I was reading I ran across numerous passages where I said to myself "Man, Stephenson must have written this entire passage!" Especially for this era of Stephenson's career, this is very much true to his writing style then (first part of the '90s_.
