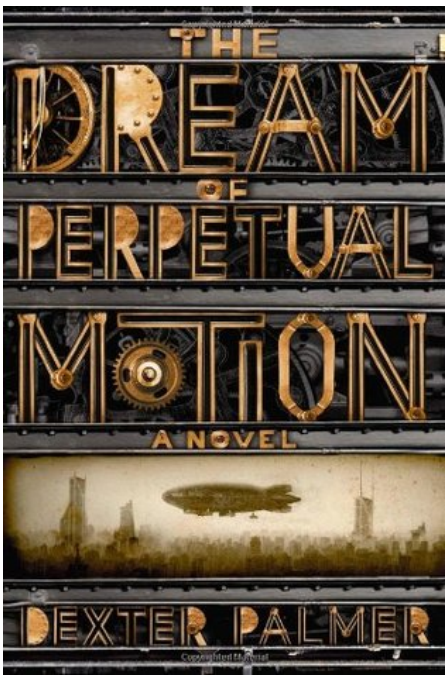

The Dream of Perpetual Motion

Dexter Palmer

The Dream of Perpetual Motion

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The Dream of Perpetual Motion Dexter Palmer
A debut so magical… so extraordinary… it has to be read to be believed….

Imprisoned for life aboard a zeppelin that floats high above a fantastic metropolis, the greeting-card writer Harold Winslow pens his memoirs. His only companions are the disembodied voice of Miranda Taligent, the only woman he has ever loved, and the cryogenically frozen body of her father Prospero, the genius and industrial magnate who drove her insane.

The tale of Harold's life is also one of an alternate reality, a lucid waking dream in which the well-heeled have mechanical men for servants, where the realms of fairy tales can be built from scratch, where replicas of deserted islands exist within skyscrapers.. As Harold's childhood infatuation with Miranda changes over twenty years to love and then to obsession, the visionary inventions of her father also change Harold's entire world, transforming it from a place of music and miracles to one of machines and noise. And as Harold heads toward a last desperate confrontation with Prospero to save Miranda's life, he finds himself an unwitting participant in the creation of the greatest invention of them all: the perpetual motion machine.

Beautifully written, stunningly imagined, and wickedly funny, The Dream of Perpetual Motion is a heartfelt meditation on the place of love in a world dominated by technology.

The Dream of Perpetual Motion Details

Date	:	Published March 2nd 2010 by St. Martin's Press (first published February 27th 2010)
ISBN	:	9780312558154
Author	:	Dexter Palmer
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Genre	:	Science Fiction, Steampunk, Fiction, Fantasy

From Reader Review The Dream of Perpetual Motion for online ebook

Samantha says

The Dream of Perpetual Motion is an interesting, unusual novel. Dexter Palmer's debut is a rich and innovative work. It draws inspiration from *The Tempest*, which I haven't read, so I can attest that you can enjoy this novel if you're not familiar with the play.

The Dream of Perpetual Motion is the tale of Harold Winslow. He's writing his memoirs as the prisoner of a zeppelin that is supposed to be aloft forever, as it's powered by a perpetual motion machine. The mad inventor, Prospero Taligent, who invented the machine is cryogenically frozen aboard the airship. The only other person aboard is Miranda Taligent, Prospero's daughter. But Harold is simply haunted by Miranda's disembodied voice, and cannot find her anywhere on the vast aircraft.

Harold recounts the story of his life before his imprisonment. He lived in Xeroville, an alternate twentieth century steampunk city, teeming with mechanical men, flying cars, and the noise of hundreds of machines. As a young boy, Harold met Miranda Taligent, and played with her in the deserted island that was somehow housed within her father's skyscraper. Over the next twenty years, Harold would fall in love with and grow obsessed with Miranda, and long to free her from her father's suffocating clutches.

In *The Dream of Perpetual Motion*, Palmer is inventive and imaginative in his world-building, premise, and narrative structure. The book boasts a variety of perspectives. As Harold writes, "It seems strange and inaccurate when writing of what oneself once was, to speak of oneself as I, especially when I find it difficult to own up to some of the actions performed by the people I once was." So throughout, the story is told in the third-person, in the first person, sometimes with other characters recounting a story within the story. Sometimes Palmer uses an ambitious stream of consciousness style or newspaper articles or diary entries. All these different perspectives and formats are employed to best serve the story at any given time. Palmer handles this structural complexity with aplomb.

The theme of this work that really stood out to me was the meaningless of life due to technology. This may be science fiction/fantasy, but that same idea resonates in the real world. *The Dream of Perpetual Motion* depicts the death of emotion, meaning, and faith as people fake their way through the modern age. The characters of the novel have become jaded and disillusioned from all their technology and progress. Real human connection has fallen by the wayside and effectively isolated everyone from each other, particularly Harold from the rest of the world.

The story of *Perpetual Motion* is certainly strange. Palmer executes it in elegant, often beautiful writing. His use of foreshadowing is on point, and kept me eager to find out the truth. I especially enjoyed the vivid imagery and symbolism of the numerous dreams that are described. At a certain point I was feeling like Miranda (a central character) isn't fully characterized, but then I realized this makes perfect sense. Miranda is an object of obsession for Harold and Prospero and every other man she encounters. She's an ideal, a dream of a woman, and through the lens of the male gaze, she's not a flesh and blood human being but whatever they imagine her to be. It makes sense that she's not a fully fleshed out character. It illustrates the men's limited grasp of her, and how none of them ever bothered to get to know her.

Palmer is an exciting, unique voice in fiction. *The Dream of Perpetual Motion* is a very good, highly original novel.

Lizz says

It can’t be un-read. Dexter Palmer’s _The Dream of Perpetual Motion_ promised, on the back cover, to be “beautifully written, stunningly imagined, and wickedly funny… a heartfelt meditation on the place of love in a world dominated by technology,” not to mention “gorgeously surreal… exhilarating, passionate, enthralling… constantly turning, giving off more energy than it receives, its movement at once beautiful and counterintuitive.”

I should have known that was too many adjectives. It turned out to be a lengthy but shallow coming-of-age/damsel-in-distress tale about Harold Winslow, an always-disappointing greeting card writer imprisoned for eternity on a zeppelin with the cryogenically frozen body of an exceptionally mad scientist, Prospero Taligent, and the disembodied voice of his daughter Miranda, who Harold claims to love even though he hardly knows the girl, having experienced only 3 or 4 brief encounters with her in the span of 30 years.

Indeed, Palmer’s story is riddled with contradiction and severely misogynistic, both in the development (or lack thereof) of the female characters themselves as well as the way male characters act upon them, rather than allowing or acknowledging any amount of free will or intelligence. That part alone is exhausting.

The time frame is absolutely impossible to place. There are mechanical men and flying cars and Prospero, in a matter of hours, is inventing all sorts of ridiculous tools that can shave granite like a block of cheddar cheese, and yet there are no airplanes or televisions and the populace has clearly experienced some sociological setbacks from the 2010 world Palmer was writing from. I found it more confusing that surreal.

Also, literary references are sort of haphazardly wedged into the narrative in way that feels entirely meaningless and unhelpful. Prospero, Miranda, and Ferdinand (who shovels coal), among other things, make it reasonably obvious that Palmer is putting a surrealist twist on _The Tempest_, mixing it around with post-modern philosophy and sociological critique, but it feels more like he ran over the Shakespeare with a Steampunk engine (or maybe a Zamboni) and took it spiraling down a really sinister, increasingly depressing rabbit hole. He took the easiest route of connecting his narrative to _The Tempest_ – stealing the names – and I just think it deserves a little more effort.

Palmer also makes an M. Night Shyamalan-style appearance at a party about half way through, which was just downright unnecessary. Also, if I wasn’t thinking it already at that point, the character Palmer, along with the annoying, pseudo-intellectual, post-modern feminist Charmaine St. Claire, certainly called my attention to the fact that I was reading a whole lot of words and very little substance. I found Charmaine’s presence as the sole depiction of feminism in Palmer’s novel incredibly upsetting and a really gross exaggeration of a bad stereotype.

That said, a few salvageable bits of the philosophy and sociology shine through as you hurdle past the blatant contradiction and somewhat pretentious nature of Palmer’s writing style. I enjoyed several passages, and found it pretty easy to detach them from the droning plot. Some of them are actually quite beautiful. Here is one:

"This is the time of night just before sunrise, the time that no one owns, and if you have found yourself

awake and alone during this time, out in the city, outside the safety of the walls you call your own, then you know me, and you have felt what I have felt. This is the hour of the night it’s best to sleep through, for if it catches you awake then it will force you to face what is true. This is when you look into the half-dead eyes of those who are either wishing for sleep or shaking off its final remnants, and you see the signs of twilight in which your own mind is suspended.
At any other time it’s better. You can do the things you feel you should; you’re an expert at going through the motions. Your handshakes with strangers are firm and your gaze never wavers; you think of steel and diamonds when you stare. In a monotone you repeat the legendary words of long-dead lovers to those you claim to love; you take them into bed with you, and you mimic the rhythmic motions you’ve read of in manuals. When protocol demands it you dutifully drop to your knees and pray to a god that no longer exists. But in this hour you must admit to yourself that this is not enough, that you are not good enough. And when you knock your fist against your chest you hear a hollow ringing echo, and all your thoughts are accompanied by the ticks of clockwork spinning behind your eyes, and everything you eat and drink has the aftertaste of rust." (248)

Clearly, I can’t exactly recommend that anyone read this book, but it can’t be un-read and whether Palmer intended it or not, his writing did get me thinking in ways that could very well be useful for me to think. You never know when something will come in handy. So I’m glad I read it.

My best advice if you start reading this book is that if you’re not just positively enthralled after 60 or 70 pages, you should probably stop. I can never bring myself to do so, and that is how I know that it doesn't go uphill from there at all.

Emily Park says

http://em-and-emm.blogspot.com/2011/0...

If you were to get a giant literary blender, combine equal parts from Shakespeare's The Tempest with the steampunk genre, add in a little Jules Verne, a little Franz Kafka, and the tiniest dash of Ovid, you'd get something that roughly approximates this novel. Probably one of the more unusual books I have ever read, The Dream of Perpetual Motion is probably also one of the most lyrically elegiac novels I have ever read.

The story primarily focuses on three characters. Harold Winslow is the son of a hard-working, underpaid man. He is semi-arbitrarily chosen to be the companion to the reclusive Miranda Taligent, the daughter of billionaire genius inventor Prospero Taligent. Set in an alternate 20th century, this is a world of mechanical marvels, including mechanical men, zeppelins, and more. Prospero Taligent is the inventor of many of these marvels, and he and his company ushered in "the age of Machines", following after "the age of Miracles". The story follows a series of events that each take place a decade apart. First, at the age of 10, Harold is invited to a birthday party for Miranda's 10th birthday. At the party, Prospero tells each of the 100 children in attendance that at some point in their lives, he will grant them their heart's desire. At age 10, Harold's greatest wish is to be a storyteller. Harold becomes Miranda's only childhood companion, playing with her in the fake tropical island that Prospero has built on a floor of his 150-story tower. Later, we see a set of events that take place when Harold and Miranda are roughly 20 years old, when Harold has ceased to be a child and Miranda has finally escaped from her gilded prison in her father's tower. Finally, we reach the events that take place when Harold and Miranda are roughly 30, when Prospero's madness has finally reached a peak and Harold feels compelled to rescue Miranda from the terrible fate that Prospero has in mind for her.

Underlying the whole story is Prospero's obsession with making Miranda into the perfect woman, and finally achieving his dream of creating the perpetual motion machine. (For those of you unfamiliar with the perpetual motion machine, it's a theoretical machine that pops up a lot in sci-fi and old science writing from the 1600s through the early 1900s. It's a machine that never stops working; in short, energy ouput > energy input. Nice idea, but technically impossible.)

This is an astonishingly poor summary of the plot of this book, as this is a story told in many small fragments, with a wide cast of supporting characters. Palmer borrowed liberally from many other literary works. Besides Prospero and Miranda, other characters from The Tempest make an appearance, including Ferdinand and Caliban. Gods and goddesses from Greek mythology make their appearances, as do characters that are reminiscent of characters you might find in Jules Verne's work, or in other works by Shakespeare. The plot and side-plots all take place against an astonishingly complex cultural background.

Dexter Palmer, who holds a PhD in English literature, is clearly an author who believes that the flow and texture of the story as a whole deserves to be a character unto itself. Probably he has a background in poetry himself; a great deal of the prose in this novel reads like poetry. Flowing, eloquent, and rife with meanings-within-meanings, he clearly put a great deal of thought into the composition of every single sentence. None of the characters are easily quantifiable as particular "types"; there is no obvious hero, no obvious villain. Harold tries to be a hero, but he's really quite cowardly most of the time. Miranda vacillates between being the unattainable virgin queen and being a fallen angel who manipulates to get what she wants. Prospero is both the mad genius who does unspeakably terrible things to his daughter, but only because he utterly, truly loves her, to the point of insanity. Quite a welcome departure from the normal mass-market paperbacks you typically find today, and definitely a refreshing change of pace from standard speculative fiction, where you have the same archetypes and the same plots recycled over and over and over.

One particular thing that must be noted is that this is not a book to read because you just love its characters. I did not find any of the characters to be especially likable; I actually kind of disliked most of them. However, they were complex characters, with complex feelings and motivations, so they certainly felt three-dimensional and their story arcs were all compelling. At the risk of sounding like a high school English teacher, this is a book to be read for its themes and motifs. Some of the major recurring themes:

~Love, in all its incarnations. Parental love, obsessive love, romantic love, childhood love, familial sibling love, Arthurian love.
~Age of Miracles vs Age of Machines. Wonder and beauty and music against science and automation and noise. Human connection in an age of technology.
~The nature of art; what makes something "art", and where does art fit in in a world of mechanics and machines?

I think that the whole book can be summed up nicely in this passage:

Two moral forces shaped how we think and live in this shining twentieth century: the Virgin, and the Dynamo. The Dynamo represents the desire to know; the Virgin represents the freedom not to know.

What's the Virgin made of? Things that we think are silly, mostly. The peculiar logic of dreams, or the inexplicable stirring we feel when we look on someone that's beautiful not in a way that we all agree is beautiful, but the unique way in which a single person is. The Virgin is faith and mysticism; miracle and instinct; art and randomness.

On the other hand, you have the Dynamo: the unstoppable engine. It finds the logic behind a seeming

miracle and explains that miracle away; it finds the order in randomness to which we're blind; it takes a caliper to a young woman's head and quantifies her beauty in terms of pleasing mathematical ratios; it accounts for the secret stirring you felt by discoursing at length on the nervous systems of animals.

These forces aren't diametrically opposed, and it's not correct tos ay that one's good and the other's evil, despite the prejudices we might have toward one or the other. When we're at our best, both the Virgin and the Dynamo govern what we think and what we do. But the fear that we felt standing in the Hall of Dynamos stemmed from the certainty that the Virgin was in trouble, and that we needed her, just as much as we needed and even wanted the Dynamo. p 186.

In the end, despite this being a beautiful and unusual book, I would hesitate to recommend it to everyone. It is probably too unusual for a lot of readers, and if you require a book that is character or action driven, then this is not the book for you, as this is definitely 100% a concept-driven book.

Laurie says

I finished this book five days ago and still cannot quite figure out how I feel about it. I've written and deleted things three times now.

It's not what I expected- the cover promised an airship (which was provided, sure enough), mechanical men (ditto) and an alternate, Steampunk-ish history (once again, provided). I expected adventure from this, but this was not provided.

It's not an adventure novel at all; it's part reworking of 'The Tempest', part philosophy, and part sociology all with a thin skin of sci-fi over it. Set in the early 1900s, protagonist (I cannot call him a hero) Harold Winslow is trapped in an airship powered by a supposed perpetual motion machine, his only fellow passengers are mechanical men, the corpse of Prospero Taligent, and the disembodied voice of Miranda Taligent. Prospero Taligent was the crazed genius who invented the mechanical men that changed society, along with many other technological wonders. He was also obsessed with keeping his adopted daughter Miranda a pure child instead of allowing her to grow up, going so far as to bind down her breasts and keep her from almost all human contact.

Chance intervenes and Winslow is invited to Miranda's 10th birthday party; for whatever reason Taligent decides that Winslow would be an appropriate companion for Miranda. This decision is quickly changed when he thinks the two children have been having sex. Miranda and Winslow do not see each other for 10 years, when Winslow is forced into rescuing her. Then another 10 years passes before he is asked to rescue her again… despite their relationship supposing to be the core of the story, they really have no real relationship.

None of the characters are very likable. Miranda comes closest to being someone that a reader can sympathize with, but she, like Winslow, seems to have no interests, no passions, no motivating force. The story drags on, seeming to take much longer to tell than it should have.

And yet I could not stop reading it. There are some passages that are so beautifully written that they are like dreams. Yes, some of those dreams are terrifying (in particular the way Winslow's artist sister, Astrid, dies), but they are still mesmerizing.

My final decision? There is a great core of work here, but it could have used some editing.

Jonathan Hawpe says

For fans of the literary fantastic, I can't recommend this book highly enough. Just beware: it is both VERY literary and VERY fantastical. By that, I mean the writing and structure of the story is subtle and complex, sometimes with a dreamy feeling and bits that the reader has to think about to fully figure out. And the story is a full-on explosion of strange landscapes, odd technologies and futuristic social customs that fully immerse the reader in a world that is most definitely not our own. Palmer uses Shakespeare's Tempest as the jumping off point and backbone for the characters and structure, but spins this inspiration off into something wholly original. The last book I found so unique, strange & thrilling was China Mieville's The City And The City. Fans of Mieville or Margaret Atwood's Scifi stuff should dig on this.

Roxane says

I'm giving up on this one. Besides, I was mostly reading it for work (note that it's in the agency-author shelf, yes this is a newly created shelf for those books I'm reading because/thanks to work! These will be advance reading copies or manuscript mostly).

The book in and of it self is not bad really, it's just in terrible need of some serious editing which, my understanding is, it's not going to get...

I will only say that this book will probably appeal more to mainstream readers. If you're a science fiction reader or a steampunk fan, there's not much in there for you. The themes and issues debated in the book have already long since been treated in the genre and, from the perspective of a genre reader, the book will probably appear simplistic and very unoriginal.

The story does have this fairy tale like feel going for it but, more often than, it seems to give the author an excuse to lose the main thread of the narration and dwell into things that are of no real interest to the reader. I'm fairly certain this is intended, to give a more authentic feel to the reading experience. These are afterall the main character's memoirs so I guess that it makes sense that said character would lose himself in his past and wander around more than necessary. Maybe I just wasn't receptive.

Again, I'm not saying this is all bad. Publishers Weekly has the most wonderful things to say about this title. I just really don't think this is a book for genre fans or readers. Definitely more up mainstream readers' alley. It might even be a great introduction to steampunk for some.

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edifanob says

Some people will love it and other will find it annoying.

For me it is like three books in one. A bit too ambitious. I could not read more than 30 pages per day.

Read my full review

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jordan says

Other reviewers have already offered excellent overviews of this novel, so I won't be redundant by repeating their efforts. In Dexter Palmer's debut novel an alternate 20th century rises beneath the shadow of the singular genius, Prospero Taligent, whose "metal men" serve as servants as workers. Yet it is not from Prospero's perspective that we hear the tale, but largely from Harold Winslow who as a child was fortunate enough to be among the 100 lucky kids invited to the birthday party of Taligent's daughter, Miranda. From there his life takes twists and turns, always linked to the mercurial Miranda and her father who bordered on madness.

Structurally, this novel shifts in time and perspective, beginning near the apparent end with an adult Harold trapped on Prospero's airship, Chrysalis, powered by his "greatest" invention, a perpetual motion machine. Palmer at time tells the story in scenes, at others in diaries, and on occasion shifts into monologues, in a structure and style that owe as much to Neal Stephenson as they do to Thomas Pynchon. As a prose writer of thrilling imagination, Palmer's talent shines on the page, though at times he seems to grow almost lost in the labyrinthine plot, as if trying to beguile the reader but barely holding the reigns of his tale. As a result the novel is not wholly successful and drags somewhat at the end. Nonetheless, I found it a fine fun read, filled with interesting characters and layers of allusions (the ones that are painfully obvious, such as to "The Tempest" are only those just on the surface).

Dexter Palmer's gifts will doubtless mature and ripen with age, a fine thrilling trip for any reader for which they should get aboard and enjoy this maiden flight.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com:]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

As I've mentioned here before, one of my favorites of all the new subgenres to emerge in the arts in the early 2000s is the so-called "New Weird," perhaps made most famous by Jeff VanderMeer in his now legendary anthology on the subject; it's essentially a catch-all term for the growing amount of post-9/11 speculative novels that don't really fit the narrow definitions of such existing genres as science-fiction, fantasy, horror, crime, supernatural and more. (And indeed, this is a particularly appropriate term for such books, being directly based as it is on the old "Weird" category of fiction from the 1800s, what the Victorians essentially called any speculative novel until the split into contemporary genres during the Modernist decades of the 1930s, '40s and '50s.) As can be expected, the quality of New Weird books in general can be real hit-and-miss; but definitely one of the "hits" right now is Dexter Palmer's stunning but literally unclassifiable literary debut earlier this year, *The Dream of Perpetual Motion*, which I just got a chance to read myself this weekend. Because when I say "unclassifiable," I really mean it; just going through my notes after finishing, for example, I found references to Willy Wonka, Frankenstein and other mad-scientist tales, steampunk, 21st Century alt-history, the Grimm Brothers, and even the complex verbal poetry we usually associate with more academic writers. (In fact, I think it no coincidence that Palmer received a PhD from Princeton in English

Lit, and that his dissertation was on no less than comparing the work of James Joyce and Thomas Pynchon, which makes my head hurt just thinking about it; and I also think it no coincidence that this was published by the intellectual's friend St. Martin's Press, not exactly known for their sci-fi actioners.)

But of course, this leads us to the very first thing you absolutely must know about this book in order to have even a chance of enjoying it -- that despite the cover and all its marketing material, *it's not a steampunk story*, at least not in the way we conventionally define the genre, but is rather set in an alt-history version of our own times in the late 20th century, a speculative Earth that didn't see the Industrial Revolution catch on until long after it took place in reality, and with its innovations mostly being the work of a single individual, the brilliant but mysterious Prospero Taligent who's the very definition of crazed scientist (including living alone in a mammoth obsidian skyscraper in the middle of the New-York-like "Xeroville" metropolis where our story takes place). This then makes the development of technology progress in a profoundly different way in this alt-Earth, which like Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* actually creates a mix of steampunkish elements with contemporary touchstones -- it's a world where people now take for granted the ornate mechanical servants that dot the city, but where the idea of a machine that can do math by itself is still a miraculous wonder, a world where people still have telephone answering machines but where the messages are literally etched onto wax cylinders, and with the owner having to hand-crank it when they get home to hear what it says.

Knowing, then, that the book is deliberately supposed to be a cross-genre fairytale, deliberately told in a highly stylized way (think Steven Spielberg's *AI: Artificial Intelligence*...in fact, your reaction to that will largely inform what you think of this novel as well), it's easier to get into the spirit of the actual story being told -- the story of sad-sack greeting-card writer Harold Winslow, that is, who as the book opens is imprisoned on a cutting-edge zeppelin perpetually orbiting Xeroville (powered by the fabled perpetual-motion engine of the book's title), apparently as punishment for killing Prospero, with the rest of the novel basically a giant flashback to all the events that led to this moment. And it's this flashback story that is the main reason to read this book, for Palmer's extra-creative imagination and the thousands of stunning images he is able to conjure up -- genetically modified unicorns, handcrafted metal dolls, personal flying vehicles shaped like smoke-belching demons, the list just goes on and on and on. But like I said, the other main reason to read this book is for the exquisite language on display, a dense and formal style that sometimes reads more like poetry instead of prose, and will be just the ticket for you more academic literary fans who usually can't stand the pedestrian nature of most genre works.

Like I said, this book is most definitely not for everyone, as the rash of bad user reviews at Goodreads attests; if you're never able to get into the spirit of what Palmer is trying to do here, for example, or have no interest in the first place in reading this kind of story, there will be absolutely no way for you to salvage anything redeeming from your experience with the book, something that should be kept in mind before picking it up, and why today it's receiving a score that thoroughly acknowledges its genreriffic nature. But if you do happen to be a fan of these kinds of books (think China Mieville, the aforementioned Thomas Pynchon, and perhaps the most obtuse work of Charles Stross), it's almost guaranteed that you'll love *The Dream of Perpetual Motion*, the exact kind of complicated work that's made so many of us so excited this decade about the state of post-9/11 science-fiction. Caution should be exercised, but it comes highly recommended to those who think they might enjoy it, a good example of why such cutting-edge literary honors like the Philip K Dick Award were invented in the first place.

Out of 10: **8.5**, or **9.5** for fans of challenging science-fiction

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Daniella says

A hypocritical, boring, and deeply misogynistic critique of post-modernism, this dreamy novel has poorly developed characters, a shallow plot, and unimaginative setting. If I could un-read this book, I would.

BEWARE! There are spoilers in this review, because I cannot express how wrong this book is without revealing critical details.

1. Hypocrisy:
Palmer weaves elements of Shakespeare's _The Tempest_ into the book, but in a nonsensical, non-meaningful way. Prospero, Miranda, and Ferdinand all show up in _The Dream of Perpetual Motion_, but in a different and fragmented way that does not add to the story at all. In this way, Palmer's use of _The Tempest_ is post-modern in itself, while the book repeatedly critiques post-modernism.

2. Boring:
This is a 352 page-long coming of age story about two motherless children who are too weak and feeble to be the Authors of their own lives. There is little action, and the "hero" of the story, Harold, recounts three distinct phases of his life in third person. Miranda has little voice of her own, save a few nights when she surreptitiously broadcasts her thoughts to a sleeping city via radio. Most of the book is stuffed full of Harold's dreams, musings, and thoughts, none of which are particularly interesting or profound. Palmer tries to bring in some Pynchon-esque structure by dividing the novel into five Parts, with each part divided into numbered segments. Also includes a Prologue, an Epilogue, and four Interludes. But, it falls flat.

3. Misogyny:
The Dream has two major female characters - Miranda and Astrid, with a number of supporting female characters like Astrid's feminist friend Charmaine Saint Claire and a woman that Harold meets in a bar.

3A. Miranda:
Prospero is an inventor - mimicking Shakespeare's Prospero, Palmer's Prospero is described as a logical and scientific man who appears to perform miracles to "the populace." His daughter, Miranda, is essentially held captive with him in his corporate tower in Xeroville. Harold, the main character, is Miranda's sole childhood companion for a short period of time, and through Prospero's machinations, Miranda and Harold briefly spent time together in the three distinct phases of Harold's life. The circumstances through which Harold meets with Miranda define these three phases - when he first meets Miranda at her 10th birthday party, when he rescues Miranda after she runs away from Prospero, and when Harold becomes trapped with Miranda on a perpetual-motion zeppelin.

Palmer paints Miranda as a crazy, broken, and weak thing, asserting that Prospero eventually drives Miranda mad. Instead it is actually Prospero who is mad, having become increasingly irrational since he found Miranda kissing Harold when they were 10 and since Miranda's first period.

Both Prospero and Harold leave no room for agency in Miranda's life. Miranda lacks formal education and friends her age; she is no socialized. Her education takes the form of wandering around in a staged and fictitious environment, encountering "problems" elaborately devised by her father.In Harold's dreams, Miranda is dancing on the edge of a building, about to jump off, in scenes that recall _The Red Shoes_. When Miranda runs away, Prospero lets it happen and then punishes her by staging her kidnapping. For some reason Prospero involves Harold to "save" her even though Harold is too cowardly to save her without help. When Miranda returns, Prospero performs an 8-month long surgery on Miranda, literally

deconstructing her body to find her essence and turn her into a (flawed) perpetual motion machine. The worst part is that Prospero commits this horrific and unforgivable act out of "love"!

3B. Astrid:
As a child, Harold falls out of love with his sister, Astrid, after their trip to a carnival. Fourteen year-old Astrid leaves young Harry alone in the carnival to meet with college-aged youth who had given her money to kiss their ugly, virgin friend. The bet goes awry, and Astrid is sexually assaulted. Astrid takes her grief out on Harold and blames him for killing their mother in labour; however, as the book progresses and Astrid/Harold's father, Allen, grows older, we never do find out what happened to their mother, though it seems that she grew tired of Allen and left.

Astrid is described in unfavourable terms. She talks to much, has too many boyfriends and cheats on them. She's an artist, but not a good one. She can't hold her life together, and she is scarred by her assault. Palmer paints Astrid as crazy, broken, and weak.

3C. Charmaine Saint Claire:
Ms. Saint Claire is described in photorealism, causing the reader to wonder whether the author knew a woman like her in his own life as a Ph.D. at Princeton. Charmaine is a third-wave feminist who speaks in a diarrhea of post-modernism about patriarchy, deconstructionism, and Astrid's subversion of the masculine. The male characters in the novel cannot stand Charmaine. The police interrogation after Astrid's suicide/murder indicate that Charmaine is delusional and in fact murdered Astrid.

3D. M....A (unnamed woman at a bar):
Harold meets an unnamed woman at a bar. While unattracted to her, in fact even disgusted by her, Harold gets wasted with the intent to take her home and have sex with her. Harold, however, is saved from this unfortunate fate by the bar's sudden disintegration. The unnamed woman falls through the floor to be mauled by robots, and Harold makes no attempt to even help.

The women in _The Dream_ are portrayed as frail,crazy, and irredeemably broken and dirty things. They are acted upon, but have no agency in their lives. For a book written in 2010, I find this to be deeply disturbing.

An underlying theme in the novel is entropy - time decays and destroys. The male characters in the novel, notably the dads (Prospero and Astrid), wish that their daughters would stay "pure" and "untouched," denying the girls a chance to grow, blossom, and become. While Astrid is driven by patriarchy in one way or another to literally become static (either Astrid is killed by her patriarchy-obsessed friend, or she is still reeling from her assault and kills herself by building a machine to dip her into molten bronze, turning her into a frozen, screaming statue), Miranda is literally deconstructed against her will by her father to be turned into a perpetual motion machine.

While this could be a statement in itself about misogyny, perhaps casting a more favorable light on Palmer, Palmer instead chooses to describe the Miranda-powered zeppelin as failing - her crops do not grow, her altitude is dropping, and her machinery is failing. To put it another way, Palmer descries the age of machines in _The Dream_ as a masculine age of dynamos that perhaps need a feminine touch to make whole. (Side note: On the zeppelin's blue print, Miranda's location is marked by a triangle - often used to symbolize the "sacred feminine" in art and used in _The Dream_ to stand for Miranda in one of Harold's dreams.) But, putting woman and machine together does not work. Why? It is hard to tell what Palmer means to say, but the narrative suggests that it is because Miranda is spoiled, not a virgin / because women are put up on pedestals that they do not deserve / because the feminine is better as an idea than actually manifested in a

person.

I understand that part of what Palmer is trying to do is talk about human relationships and how people fall in love with the idea of someone else - not that person's true self.`But this does not work. Palmer assumes that there is such thing as a true self, and describes the true self as negative and horrible - selfish, unloving, etc. None of Palmer's characters fall in love with a flawed person and love them more over time as additional "flaws" or true self is revealed. Why? And why do Palmer's characters do horrible things to each other in the name of love? Prospero mutilates his daughter. Astrid kills herself (or is murdered) because she was blamed for her assault and no one helped her deal with the trauma. Harold leaves an unnamed woman to be beaten (or worse) by robots, when seconds ago he was planning to "make love" to her. Harold doesn't even like spending time with his sister, and he leaves his father to die alone in filth.

I think this story is depressing, shallow, and disturbing and would not recommend that anyone read it.

Debut Authors Blog says

I've been putting off reviewing The Dream of Perpetual Motion for a few days. Honestly, it is because I don't know if I can do Dexter Palmer's work of art justice. But, since the really nice marketing people over at St. Martin's Press sent me a copy of this book, I feel that I probably should give it a whirl.

This steam-punk novel is narrated by Harold Winslow, a writer for a greeting-card company. The story alternates between the first and third person as Harold writes to his imaginary reader in his journal. He knows that no one will ever read his work because he has been imprisoned on the zeppelin Chrysalis, which is equipped with a perpetual motion machine. His only companions are a host of mechanical men, the voice of the woman he loves, Miranda Taligent, and the body of her dead father Prospero.

Harold's journal covers more than two decades; the writing of it spans the first year he is imprisoned upon the Chrysalis. The bulk of the journal is written in third person, which is odd seeing that it is written in a journal by the main character. It will leave you a little confused at first, but I urge you to let that go. When Palmer reveals why it has been written like that, or you figure it out from the text, the story will fall into place.

The novel follows Harold's life and the events which lead to his imprisonment on the ship. The most important of these was his meeting Prospero Taligent and his daughter Miranda. Prospero is the genius who invented most of the machines that exist in Palmer's alternate reality.

Palmer creates a dream-like reality for his readers, full of mechanical men, "shrink cabs", and flying cars. His captivating prose draws you in as he uses his universe to examine love's place in our increasingly chaotic world. One of my favorite images in the novel is that of phase interference, the idea that there is so much noise in the world that every possible sound is being made. Therefore every sound wave has its opposite, one that is exactly 180 degrees out of phase, effectively canceling each other out, leaving the world in silence.

Palmer's world will draw you in, keep you turning the page, and leaving you begging for more at the end. Harold's heart-wrenching and disturbing tale will leave you questioning your own reality. When I finished this strange but enthralling debut novel, I found myself unable to fully grasp what I had just read. The only answer I could come up with was to read it again.

Alan says

> "Silly boy {...} You were trying to rescue the *monster*." (p. 119)

The Dream of Perpetual Motion is stylish, full of lush imagery and ornate phrases, and—yes—it does partake of that most currently modish of styles, its peculiarly backward and timeless sidewise milieu bearing the unmistakable whiff of leather and brass, of zeppelins and pneumatic tubes and the occasional Camera Obscura... yes, the very stench of Steam-Punk. But for all that it's still at heart a boy's own adventure story, told with a patent love of storytelling, and a mordant work of introspection told with a wordsmith's love of words.

> "What human on this earth has the power to change a tin man back to flesh?" (p. 171).

This in spite, or perhaps because, of sentiments expressed by the villain of the piece, one Prospero Taligent, upon being confronted with young Harry Winslow's ambition:

> "Have you thought about trying to tell a tale in a crowded room, where everyone is shouting to be heard?
>
> "Storytelling—that's not the future. The future, I'm afraid, is flashes and impulses. It's made up of moments and fragments, and stories won't survive." (p. 97)

There are indications that this is a first novel, parts possibly written in a rush... The kind of thing I notice: one sentence early on (p. 25) says "I am writing this at a desk in the airship's observation room made from a single obsidian slab," a textbook example of a dangling modifier that really shouldn't have passed the proofreading stage, unless the observation room really was made from a single obsidian slab. Which it wasn't.

But fortunately such jarring notes are few and far between; for the most part the language of The Dream of Perpetual Motion slips smoothly from sentence to sentence—he likes to play with words, as it happens, even inserting himself (or at least a character named Dexter Palmer) into the story at one point, in a really rather well-managed self-deprecating way. Palmer manages, too, to communicate the niceties of this skewed 20th Century to us without interrupting the story overmuch, or feeling the need to justify every detail.

One central motif, or recurring theme: the loss of silence. The rise of constant mechanical noise, the clanks and wheezes of the Industrial Revolution, coincides with the disappearance of magic from the world, the end of the age of miracles and angels. I can understand this nostalgia; as I write this paragraph, I hear a jet overhead; traffic on the street; a gasoline engine—a small generator or air compressor, perhaps—two or three houses away. Computer fans running. Lawn mowers. The clamor that mockingbirds now learn, drowning out the wind through the leaves of the trees, the birds on their branches. Palmer's surreal society certainly differs from ours in many ways, but this we share, and it is to Palmer's credit that he keeps us reading while he points it out.

Neil says

This is a great book with some serious flaws that shouldn't stop you from giving it a whirl.

The story is told from the point of view of Harold Winslow, a greeting card writer who narrates the story while trapped with only the company of himself, a voice, and his memories while floating through the sky in a perpetual motion flying machine that may or may not be working. From this vantage he tells the story of his family (a mildly inventive, but largely inneffectual toy-making father and his angry, sexually aware artist sister) and how they, and especially he, became involved with the Taligents.

Prospero Taligent is an inventor and industrialist, a kind of god in the book's steampunk world. His mechanical men and other inventions have literally driven miracles from the world that debut author Palmer imagines. Now working from a huge skyscraper which he rarely leaves, Prospero is driven by two things, the desire to create ever more powerful and intricate machines and his doting love for his daughter Miranda. Unfortunately, this obsessive love for his daughter degenerates further and further as the novel progresses. I won't spoil, but the forms it takes are truly creepy. There's also a Caliban is this Tempest-derived story, a "son" who has no contact with the world but listens in obsessively.

Harold becomes involved with Prospero and Miranda as a boy, when his meanderings in an amusement park lead to an invitation to Miranda's birthday party. Each of the 100 boys and girls who attend the party will be rewarded their heart's desire in future years by Prospero, but Harold's "gift" is the greatest of all, as he captures Miranda's attention the most.

Strong points: the books is clever and inventive, with lots of interesting metaphysical philosophies about the relationship of technology and belief. The worldbuilding is powerful, perhaps the most fully realized steampunk settings I've encountered. Allusions to The Tempest are intriguing. There are many beautiful, yet frightening images (the children being carried to the party by flying mechanical angels and demons; a desert island on the skyscraper's 101st floor; Harold's sister Astrid's artwork made from competing sounds played by blaring Victrolas). There are many darkly funny riffs of humor as well.

Weaknesses: the author indulges too many of these riffs, especially annoying metareferences (introducing himself briefly as a character to no real effect; an acid-throwing maniac; Harold's work at the greeting card factory; and many more), that ultimately just don't have much to do with his story. I found Harold's relationships with his father and sister more emotionally involving than his interaction with the Taligents, but these seem unfinished in the end. The characters are sympathetic but not too likable, which ultimately makes it hard to care about their fates. The business about the perpetual motion machine and its final flight, in particular, is just not as interesting as Harold's youthful interactions with his family and Miranda. The stories of the coal shoveling foreman and the portraitmaker provide a lot of insight but come too late in the book.

If Palmer learns how to connect the emotions generated by his book to the ideas in it, he will be formidable. He's definitely an author I will watch. If you like literary fantasy and science fiction like I do, then you'll enjoy this book thoroughly and think about it a great deal, even though some of the flaws are obvious. Read it: It will annoy the heck out of you at times, but it's images will stick and the ideas will keep percolating.

Richard Thomas says

This book was somewhat inconsistent. At times I found my mind wandering, in fact, almost gave up on it about 40 pages in, but it finally hooked me. Then, other times, it was riveting, brilliant prose, and really emotional. I liked it a lot, but can't say I LOVED it, and wish I could. There is a lot in here to be fascinated with, it does go a bit dark, Willy Wonka if he'd done crack, a nice child's POV early on, and in the end it is really rather devastating and hits you hard, but in a good way. I'll keep an eye on Mr. Palmer, and see what he does next. Overall, a solid book, and it gave me good look at what "steampunk" can be, at least one variation. Good stuff.

Sarah says

I have to say that I didn't care for this book but I really admire the writing. It was a complicated book and the author has to have put a lot of work in it. Amazing writing.

The story itself is really odd. It starts with a 30 year old guy named Harold who is stuck on a zeppelin with someone named Miranda. He decides to write his story and it slips back and forth in time to the ages of 10, 20, and 30. There's no linear reason for the jumping around. Each time we get some information about his experiences with Miranda, and the circumstances that led up to his current predicament.

And there are a whole lot of weird moments in this. Almost like dream sequences? So not only was it jumping around in time but it wasn't necessarily making sense as far as what was happening. Sometimes he would tell the story and then say "but it didn't happen like that" and then he'd do it again. Or what was happening was definitely not within the bounds of reality but it was told like it was real.

With characters named Prospero, Miranda, and Caliban, it's pretty obvious that there's some influence from The Tempest. There were a lot of other things that came up, too, but he worked it into his own story very fluidly.

This really needs a brain that is less linear to really appreciate it. I feel like it was actually a really good book but a poor fit for my particular brain. The writing amazed me because of the complexity of the plot and the dexterity that he showed in manipulating the multiple timelines. There was also a moment of humor when the author cast himself into the book as one of those annoying artistic types who never stops talking about their work. I can't remember how he actually worded it but it was quite funny.
