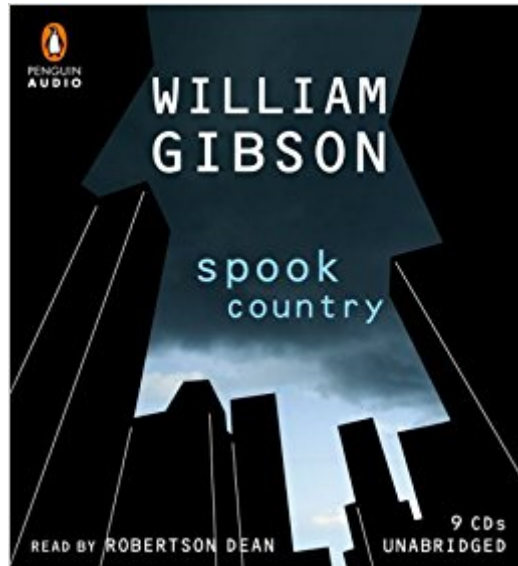




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# Spook Country



## Synopsis

William Gibson's first new book in four years-like the bestselling *Pattern Recognition*, a contemporary novel with international implications.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Now that the present has caught up with William Gibson's vision of the future, which made him the most influential science fiction writer of the past quarter century, he has started writing about a time--our time--in which everyday life feels like science fiction. With his previous novel, *Pattern Recognition*, the challenge of writing about the present-day world drove him to create perhaps his best novel yet, and in *Spook Country* he remains at the top of his game. It's a stripped-down thriller that reads like the best DeLillo (or the best Gibson), with the lives of a half-dozen evocative characters connected by a tightly converging plot and by the general senses of unease and wonder in our networked, post-9/11 time. *Across the Border to Spook Country* For the last few decades, William Gibson, who grew up in Virginia and elsewhere in the United States, has lived in Vancouver, British Columbia, just across the border from .com's Seattle headquarters, which made for a short drive for a lunchtime interview before the release of *Spook Country*. We met just a few miles from where the storylines of the new novel, in a rare scene set in Gibson's own city, converge. You can read the full transcript of the interview, in which we discussed, among other things, writing in the age of Google, visiting the Second Life virtual world, the possibilities of science fiction in an age of rapid change, and his original proposal for *Spook Country*, which we have available for viewing on our

site. Here are a few excerpts from the interview: .com: Could you start by telling us a little bit about the scenario of the new book? William Gibson: It's a book in which shadowy and mysterious characters are using New York's smallest crime family, a sort of boutique operation of smugglers and so-called illegal facilitators, to get something into North America. And you have to hang around to the end of the book to find out what they're doing. So I guess it's a caper novel in that regard.

.com: The line on your last book, *Pattern Recognition* was that the present had caught up with William Gibson's future. So many of the things you imagined have come true that in a way it seems like we're all living in science fiction now. Is that the way you felt when you came to write that book, that the real world had caught up with your ideas? Gibson: Well, I thought that writing about the world today as I perceive it would probably be more challenging, in the real sense of science fiction, than continuing just to make things up. And I found that to absolutely be the case. If I'm going to write fiction set in an imaginary future now, I'm going to need a yardstick that gives me some accurate sense of how weird things are now. 'Cause I'm going to have to go beyond that. And I think over the course of these last two books--I don't think I'm done yet--I've been getting a yardstick together. But I don't know if I'll be able to do it again. I don't know if I'll be able to make up an imaginary future in the same way. In the '80s and '90s--as strange as it may seem to say this--we had such luxury of stability. Things weren't changing quite so quickly in the '80s and '90s. And when things are changing too quickly, as one of the characters in *Pattern Recognition* says, you don't have any place to stand from which to imagine a very elaborate future. .com: Now that you're writing about the present, do you consider yourself a science fiction writer these days? Because the marketplace still does. Gibson: I never really believed in the separation. But science fiction is definitely where I'm from. Science fiction is my native literary culture. It's what I started reading, and I think the thing that actually makes me a bit different than some of the science fiction writers I've met who are my own age is that I discovered Edgar Rice Burroughs and William Burroughs in the same week. And I started reading Beat poets a year later, and got that in the mix. That really changed the direction. But it seems like such an old-fashioned way of looking at things. And it's better not to be pinned down. It's a matter of where you're allowed to park. If you can park in the science fiction bookstore, that's good. If you can park in the other bookstore, that's really good. If people come and buy it at , that's really good. I'm sure I must have readers from 20 years ago who are just despairing of the absence of cyberstuff, or girls with bionic fingernails. But that just the way it is. All of that stuff reads so differently now. I think nothing dates more quickly than science fiction. Nothing dates more quickly than an imaginary future. It's acquiring a patina of quaintness even before you've got it in the envelope to send to the publisher. .com: So do you think that's your own

career path, that you're less interested in imagining a future, or do you think that the world is changing? Gibson: I think it's actually both. Until fairly recently, I had assumed that it was me, me being drawn to use this toolkit I'd acquired when I was a teenager, and using my old SF toolkit in some kind of attempt at naturalism, 21st-century naturalistic fiction. But over the last five to six years it's started to seem to me that there's something else going on as well, that maybe we're in what the characters in my novel *Idoru* call a "nodal point," or a series of them. We're in a place where things could just go anywhere. A couple of weeks ago I happened to read Charlie Stross's argument as to why he believes that there will never, ever be any manned space travel. It's not going to happen. We're not going to colonize Mars. All of that is just a big fantasy. And it's so convincing. I read that and I'm like, "My god, there goes so much of the fiction I read as a child." --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Robertson Dean's deep, soothing tones anchor this post-9/11 thriller, a follow-up to *Pattern Recognition*. Told from three third-person perspectives, the story concerns a journalist backed by a mysterious Belgian industrialist, a young Cuban-Chinese go-to guy from a secretive clan of criminals, and a junkie fluent in Russian, who get caught up in a search for a mysterious shipping container. Gibson reinvents the concept he made famous in his landmark SF novel, *Neuromancer*—i.e., cyberspace—creating a more nuanced and up-to-date relationship between the virtual and the real. For Gibson, the nature of the quest object is almost beside the point; it merely serves as a spark for a series of cleverly orchestrated confrontations and interesting meditations about the world and where it's headed. In a novel that's light on dialogue and heavy on narration and interior monologue, Dean doesn't need to create distinct, accented voices. He provides reflective calm for Gibson's musings, and clarity to detailed, complex action scenes. Although there are a few strange mispronunciations, this is, on the whole, a smooth, intelligent recording of an intriguing and gripping book. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

I can return to Spook Country again and again, and I have, though this is my first time reading on Kindle. In this second book of the "Blue Ant" trilogy, we're introduced to Milgrim and Hollis Henry. Milgrim is probably one of my all time favourite fictional characters, though he, and Hollis, continue to develop through the next book "Zero History". Gibson re-invented his style for the Blue Ant books, and while richly visual it is less intrusive, smoother and more accomplished than his earlier works. The technical topics - GPS and augmented reality - are now deeply lacking in novelty, and returning

to the book now, it has a certain old fashioned feel, like returning to Vonnegut or Azimov, though different by a degree. If you've read the preceding *Pattern Recognition*, then reading this book is a no-brainer choice, unless you hated *Pattern Recognition*, you should be perfectly satisfied. Of course, if haven't read *Pattern Recognition*, it would make a lot more sense to begin there. My wife grumbles that Gibson's female characters are lacking realism, or at least their internal narrative doesn't ring true. Perhaps that's the case, or perhaps it's fairer to say that Gibson chooses to write about people who are not ordinary. Whatever the case, I think it's less evident here than in *Pattern Recognition*, where the solo female protagonist is a bit of an odd-ball to begin with and reveals more of herself than Hollis Henry, who has a knack of remaining private, even from herself.

Once in a great while a book comes along that transcends the events written about and explains something of deep and cosmic importance. I was stunned by the real story, uncoiling like an invisible serpent of stars, behind the "on the page" story of a woman hired to possibly write for a new magazine, and a parallel story of intrigue amongst a motley collection of spies. These stories coil around each other like a DNA helix to create a new being, a glimpse into a future that could go so wrong or incredibly right. This is Hollis in *Wonderland* as told by Gibson, a sci-fi cyber punk writer of epic proportions. I am practically obsessed with this book, both in print and the audio read in an intimate and engaging way by the incomparable Robertson Dean. The story is interdimensional, with so many levels to explore I can get lost in a single sentence like a maze that opens doors in my own mind. I didn't just read this book, I experienced it like a psychedelic trip down a white Lego lined rabbit hole.

A tapestry of unique intriguing characters are woven together in this fascinating tale. Though Gibson is probably best known as a science-fiction writer this is a book that should appeal to those not particular fountains of the genre. And if you haven't read Gibson before you are in for quite a treat.

It was a pleasure to read this novel again after a number of years. The musician references and fictional goth band were fun to meet again. I intended to read the third in the trilogy, but read the second again instead as I could recall so little detail. The geolocation virtual art is no doubt in beta stage too with the imminent arrival of Oculus Rift and rivals. The cryptography topic has become more relevant in the wake of the Snowden revelations. The contemporary near future still felt fresh and despite having bought *The Peripheral* last week, I may end up reading the final installment of the Bigend trilogy.

If there is a new Gibson book out, I read it. Unfortunately, this is one of his weakest. The main plot device (a lost Dutchman shipping container) just doesn't really work for me. Also, the characters seemed "forced together" and it wasn't clear why some of them would be involved at all. Once you start thinking like this, it's clear that the old "suspension of disbelief" wasn't working like in Gibson's other works. The futuristic parts of this are pretty weak too - most of this could be done today. Overall, if you are a true fan you will read this anyway. If you are new to Gibson, read anything else he wrote.

This was a book for bookgroup or I would not have finished it. I found it very difficult to become engaged and never did. What put me off is that the character development is very superficial, and, I wasn't remotely interested in any of the characters. They seemed like randomly generated one dimensional people (maybe this is part of Gibson's message, which is clearly something to do with technology and its advancement). That brings me to the second issue that made the book not enjoyable for me. I couldn't really figure out if it had any point, meaning or even a theme except for perhaps general confusion in this chaotic, technological world. There is a goal the characters are working towards (well, some of them). I don't think I should state the goal though because it is kind of the main center of the plot and would give it away (I think. . .). Other characters motives and drives seem largely enigmatic. Lots of questions raised about the nature of reality, but I wasn't quite sure what the questions were or what the novel had to say about them. My confusion could just be a lack of knowledge about technology and computers and their insidious insinuation into our lives (which is also a theme, I think).

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