



Destructive Interference

Martin Skogsbeck

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In his debut novel, Martin Skogsbeck combines medical science with romantic obsession and melodrama to create an engaging and educational story. French neurologist Redan “Red” Palleago narrates this book as an overt plea to find his friend Gustav Soderstrom, a Swedish neurosurgeon who transfers his memories to Red via technology developed in a secret Harvard University laboratory. Unfortunately, the technology works too well, leaving Red with an obsessive love of Gustav’s deceased girlfriend, Julia, and Gustav bereft of the only things he had left of his beloved—memories. It is only through the “destructive interference” of the book’s title that the situation can be reversed.

Readers will immediately notice that Skogsbeck’s old-world prose lends a charming antique cadence to the story that, along with his use of British English, gives the book an almost fairy-tale ambiance. The first half of the story is dedicated to alternating chapters of Red and Gustav’s personal histories, from childhood through the beginnings of their careers. While both men are fascinated by the human brain, Red becomes obsessed with questions of truth and deceit. Gustav, once established as a brain surgeon, now spends more time with his musical and sport-skating pursuits with the “perfect woman,” Julia, whom he somehow fails to marry.

The second half of the book finds Gustav and Red joining forces to create a machine that can transfer memories from one human brain to another. Lectures by Red and Gustav are interspersed throughout the book; they cover topics such as the nature and value of truth and lies, the performance of a Japanese tea ceremony, classical music, Swedish ice-skating tours, and the chemistry of the human brain. Skogsbeck’s educational passages tend to slow the plot, though the author defines his medical terminology and does his best to make it interesting to the reader.

The characters, though well drawn, can be somewhat stereotypical, with Red being self-assured to the point of arrogance, and Gustav easily manipulated by those he loves because he’s overly emotional and weak. Meanwhile, the brilliant and gorgeous Julia manages to sully her perfect image by having an affair, which inadvertently leads to her untimely demise while on a skating trip with Gustav, her one true love.

Written with exacting detail and often overwrought emotions worthy of a pulp romance, *Destructive Interference* leaves the reader both yearning for a resolution for Gustav and wondering if he will return in a sequel to retrieve his memories.

The book has a small problem with incorrectly placed punctuation marks, missing words, and some typographical errors, but these are minor and do not ruin the dense narrative.

Despite its shortcomings, *Destructive Interference* is a spicy tale of intrigue and love.

DEANN ROSSETTI (September 13, 2012)

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