



Redshift, Blueshift

Jordan Silversmith

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The dystopian novel Redshift, Blueshift focuses on a man who's alone in a cell, where his sense of reality fractures.

Jordan Silversmith's dystopian novel *Redshift, Blueshift* is narrated by an unreliable detainee from a gulag-like prison in a remote, unidentified landscape.

The book's nameless narrator identifies himself as prisoner in solitary confinement for a political crime. He doesn't know what he was accused of, doesn't recall how long he's been held, and doesn't know when he might be released. He's permitted sporadic walks and lives in a state of mental and sensory deprivation.

He claims that he has one treasure: papers on which he recorded memories of his former life. But the papers were taken from him. Without them, he finds that his sense of self has vanished, taking with it all but a vague awareness of having lived at all.

For reasons unknown, he's allowed to have pens and a grudging amount of paper, on which he tries to resurrect his memories. The papers become the written record of these efforts: a tangle of memory fragments, stream of consciousness, and growing delusions.

But the story shifts without warning when the narrator begins writing a biography of a character he calls Dee. This goes on for some pages before the narrator says he can no longer remember inventing Dee, or what he was going to say about him. Then, focus returns to the search for his lost memories.

The narrator's efforts to recover fragments of his childhood farm, memories of a stolen library book, and a sense of certainty about having had parents are persistent and lengthy. Eventually, he recalls the day he met his wife; later, recollections of a son and a daughter arise. Yet these memories are depersonalized and hollow, bringing him neither relief nor contentment.

There is no sense of warmth or personal connection in the narrator's story: his wife is remembered only for her physical beauty and the narrator's jealousy, without any hint of the woman beneath the skin. Indeed, his most detailed memories are of the exhaustive interrogations he was subjected to at the hands of polite guards; they come to coerce a signed confession from him to a never-explained charge. The confession brings neither release nor more punishment, just continued stasis that echoes the narrator's plight.

As the book moves into its second half, the narrator's paranoia and mental instability becomes more pronounced. His efforts to retrieve and record memories give way to pages filled with repetitive lines; he begins to suspect that the incomplete fragments he recovered are not his memories at all. He delivers a final, emotive soliloquy just before a provocative plot twist is revealed.

Capturing the befuddlement of sustained imprisonment, the dystopian novel *Redshift, Blueshift* focuses on a man who's alone in a cell, and who becomes a prism through which to explore multiple interpretations of reality.

SUSAN WAGGONER (May 16, 2021)

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