

State of Union: Book Two of the God Head Trilogy

Sven Michael Davison

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A strong plot drives this cyberpunk thriller and its warning of the dangers inherent in man's merger with technology.

One of the best cyberpunk novels of the millennium, Sven Michael Davison's *State of Union* pushes the subgenre's boundaries and explores the darkest possibilities of what can happen when humanity and technology begin to merge. By showing, rather than only telling, where unchecked technological advances may lead, Davison creates a believable world on the edge of annihilation. As the death toll rises and hope fades, the palpable tension makes it impossible not to become fully drawn into this novel.

When ex-cop Jake Travissi returns to the real world after spending half a decade at sea, he finds civilization unraveling. Maxwell, a rapidly spreading nanovirus, has killed millions of people around the world and is infecting millions more. The only known cure, a Personal Chip implanted at the base of the brain stem, leaves people susceptible to becoming pinheads, mindless puppets controlled by hackers.

As panic and sickness spread and governments begin implementing mandatory chipping programs, new threats appear. Maxwell 2 begins as a virus but forms a chip that can override any Personal Chip when triggered. And the entire world is holding its breath as the first AI is announced. With no shortage of villains, schemers, and power players, it's up to Jake to find out who's calling the shots before the bad guys take over the entire world.

Set a mere thirty years in the future, *State of Union* exists in a believable world wrestling with climate change and other major problems. Davison rarely indulges in world building for the sake of world building. Each aspect of *State of Union's* setting is based on an extrapolation of modern trends and supports a strong plot. For example, anticipatory fears seen in 2003 regarding an avian flu pandemic are echoed in scenes about the spread of the nanovirus. By using a real-world model and pushing it further, the distant and abstract idea of a nanotechnology-based illness is transformed into something very near, very familiar, and very scary.

Davison is at his best when ambushing his characters. A dangerous gambit, it can be challenging to find the line between gratuitous violence and true tension-building, action-adventure conflict. But when Travissi and his family are trapped in a van surrounded by crazed dogs, Davison not only avoids getting overly gory, he uses the moment to advance a key plot point: "Jake grabbed Cochise's knife and cut into the space between the skull and the neck of the Dane. He found a tiny hard flake and pulled it out. It came with several long bloody filaments attached, the thickness of human hair. Chipped. Gordon sighed. 'Other countries experiment with animals, but it's illegal in the States.'"

The simple exchange opens the door for a whole new level of villainy to enter the story. Through the technological corruption of animals, specifically man's best friend, Davison removes humanity's last shred of innocence.

The book contains a sprinkling of typos, mostly inconsistent comma usage and the occasional missed space. Still, the writing is engaging, the story well-paced, and the characters dynamic and well developed.

The second book of the God Head Trilogy, *State of Union* hits the perfect balance between providing enough

background information for readers who haven't read the first book and telling the story at hand. Whether one is reading the trilogy in order or just happened to see *State of Union* on a shelf, the novel stands on its own.

JOSEPH THOMPSON (October 8, 2013)

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