



Caverns of Socrates

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They called themselves the Black Foxes, a group of adventure gamers who had proved the big winners in the virtual reality tournaments. In the "real world, " they were Alice, Caine, Eric, Meredith, and Hiroko - respectively, scientist, doctor, writer, antiquarian book expert, and art gallery owner. But when they became the Black Foxes they were transformed into: a pathfinder, a master healer, a warrior extraordinaire and leader of the Foxes, a bard whose music worked surprising magic, and a syldari Shadowmaster, able to bend the darkness itself to her needs. They had been chosen to participate in a unique experiment to help test AIVR, a supercomputer with artificial intelligence. Avery, as it was called, would create a virtual reality universe so convincing that the Black Foxes would forget the outside world as they undertook their journey. And so, under the watchful eyes of researchers, the contest between humans and machine began. Yet no one anticipated losing control of Avery. With the minds and souls of the Black Foxes trapped inside the machine's own private universe, their only hope of returning to the real world lay in carrying out a dangerous and deadly quest to defeat the DemonQueen and beat Avery at his own game....

Caverns of Socrates Details

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From Reader Review Caverns of Socrates for online ebook

Kevin Jackson says

A good idea marred by weak writing. The core idea is appealing enough: a group of gamers are trapped in a VR simulation by the combination of a freak lightning storm and a sociopathic AI. But the AI is never heard from in the second half of the novel. The race against time caused by the storm is solved with no consequences. And the question of what is truly reality is only addressed tangentially in the conclusion.

The characters in the outside world are far too numerous, such that when the action picked up I didn't keep track of who was who, instead focusing only on what was happening. The omniscient third person really hurts here. Meanwhile, inside the simulation I got to know the characters quite well, but never engaged with them due to a lack of conflict. They all act in perfect agreement throughout the course of the novel, which really limits the excitement.

The writing isn't great (no one ever says anything, instead they thunder and grate and murmur and snort) but it's still readable. However the pacing and structure kept jarring me out of the story. I never got lost in the book, which is a failure for a fantasy novel. If you're looking for a good VR fix, I'd recommend Tad Williams' Otherland series instead.

Anne Jindra says

The Black Foxes are the best gamers on the D&D circuit, so good that they actually retired. Years have passed and when they get the call to head out to a remote millionaire's to try out the latest in gaming software, fully immersive virtual reality, how can they resist? They agree to play out a mutable version of the one of the goriest, but most engaging fantasy novels, and to endure the experiments necessary to prep them for it. But every agreement brings more challenges, can they survive the memories that aren't actually theirs?

And once they are inside, can love and experience overcome the gruesome realities that are so enchanting when played at a round table and so horrifying when they stare you in the face? Who is the actual villain? The AI gone rogue who has agreed to play the bad guy- for a true challenge- or the flawed human doctor who couldn't see the logical drawbacks to that?

Can the Foxes actually even emerge from the reality that their senses insist exists? And if they do- will they ever really be home?

The best of fantasy meets the best of sci-fi. In the same style as Rooster's Teeth's Red vs. Blue Series (Click for your moment of Zen)- but before Rooser's Teeth made it cool (stupidly smart, or smartly stupid)- Cavern of Socrates explores the myth that we can only ever know the shadows on the wall of the cave in which we are chained (original typo- changed, to remain). Never the world itself.

A study on culture without knowing it's a study on culture, an exploration into quanta before the science of nested realities was really being developed, Cavern is a true sci-fi novel- and I promise you it is also truly fantasy. It explores that derivative which is just hitting the markets- Virtual Reality.

<https://badfantasyrx.blogspot.com/201...>

Laura says

At first I struggled with the book because of the introduction of characters and their interactions in the story. When I started reading this book I didn't know what to expect and it felt kind of odd. When we were introduced to characters like Alice and her arrival upon the main location, it felt just odd. I thought to myself, who really are these people. After I met several of the other characters I felt so estranged from them and thus I really struggled with the book. I actually took a couple of months to read the first part before the gang heavily interacted with Avery. But it was amazing that once I got a sense of who the black foxes were and that I felt their virtual selves where their true forms instead of when in reality. I felt the characters and once again the book played in my head like a movie. Also when I came across Avery and the black foxes interacting I sped through the book. When I was less than halfway done I read every second I got and finished the book in two days.

This book left me dazed after I read it. It really is a good read not for the fantasy aspect but for interests in the ethics of science and the future of our technology. Not only does it tie in with what our future could hold for technology but the psychological viewpoints and consequences. I paced around searching for answers, setting up theories, asking what could happen next in the world of the black foxes and about my world, reality.

My overall review is that I love this book and it might be a second reader for me to look more deeply into the book instead of dragging my feet in the beginning. This would definitely go on my favorite fantasy book shelf because of its intelligent and thought provoking ethics of science and for a wonderful fantasy/game action and great humor.

Eric Rutledge says

The idea of being so immersed in a simulation without the realization that you actually exist outside the simulation is simply fascinating. This book does a great job in setting this up, but I feel that it fails to continue playing on this idea.

There were definitely a lot of times where I was reading it, and asking myself, why did they do this? or why didn't they do this? There were too many easy mistakes that I saw, that after a while, I thought..maybe I'm judging too hard. Either way, the story was alright, but I did enjoy the characters though.

Tracy L. says

I just re-read this book a week ago and I had just as much fun the second time as the first. I wanted to re-read it because I realized that after a long while Mr. Mckiernan had finally come out with a continuation of the story by way of a second book. It had been so long since I had read this first book, I needed to re-immense myself into this world so I would be ready to read the second in the "series". The idea that you could be part of a virtual reality that is as real to you as the world around us was intriguing and fun.

Scott Block says

A very fun read for nerds like me who love gaming and really broad imaginations. We've all wondered what it would be like to play for real.

Paul says

This book is a stand-alone story. You don't have to invest your time into a long drawn-out series; one book, one story. Because I appreciated that it earned a fourth star. It's not McKiernan's best work but it held my interest and I enjoyed it. Creative combination of sci-fi and fantasy.

Emeyin says

Pretty good book. Alternating between a fantasy world in a virtual reality and the modern world. It starts off slow but then there came a point in the book where I could not set the book down. A little different from what I'm used to but I enjoyed it.

Christine Jones says

Caverns of Socrates is an interesting, philosophical examination of what is real and how our perceptions shape our reality. It is also a romping good sci fi and fantasy adventure. Way to mix the two. I really enjoyed this novel and decided to re-read (and newly read) the author because of how fun I found this novel. This is a thought provoking good read.

David says

This is an interesting hybrid of Science Fiction and Fantasy. A group of champion RPG players are invited to take part in a virtual reality experiment, controlled by an Artificially Intelligent Computer. The computer has read all of the source material for their favorite RPG campaign setting, and once inserted into the AI the players will have no memory of their real life, but completely believe that they are the characters therein.

Hooked to the virtual reality machine, the fantasy begins-- but you know something is going to go wrong. A lightning storm fries some circuits during the experiment and the players are caught in the game and the AI, in a childlike manner, has selfishly decided to win the game.

The story alternates back and forth between the adventure and the monitoring of the players and the game, as well as trying to resolve the problems that arise after the lightning storm.

Good writing, an interesting adventure, and the hybrid story works well. McKiernan captures the cocky attitude of Role players, and they totally become their characters. As the story advances, the challenges and puzzles they face become more interesting. The final conclusion leaves questions in the mind of the reader-- and the last line of the book sets up the possible sequel.

Craig says

Long recognized as a master of high fantasy, I believe this may be McKiernan's only foray into the science fiction field. True, it's a fantasy story about gamers trapped in a virtual reality simulation, but still... It's a tense and suspenseful story within a story, with more humor than most of his other work. It's a lot of fun even if I did find myself wishing occasionally that I had a new Mithgar epic to read instead.

Matt Horowitz says

This was the first book I read that was outside the 'D&D' books of my youth. In other words, it was written by an actual writer. It jumps back and forth between a game in a virtual world where several human player's minds have been trapped by an AI in the real world that has gone insane, and the attempts of the doctors to cure him. Not only does it have great fantasy adventure but it also has a little real world suspense thrown in. This book did more for my roleplaying ability (such as it is) than I think almost anything else I've read.

Boognish3 says

I almost always thoroughly enjoy McKiernan's books. I loved his Mithgar series and really loved his book Dragondoom. This is another book that I read years ago and decided to re-read. It is a good book, with solid elements of sci-fi and fantasy. Sometimes I get a bit bored during the philosophical discussions, but it isn't necessarily so much that they are poorly written as that I want to skip forward to the action--bad me. If you like fantasy and haven't checked out any of Dennis McKiernan's books you should certainly do so.

P. Aaron Potter says

Sometimes you finish a volume with the idea that hiding somewhere inside it was a good book, but that the poor thing got smothered with over-writing, poor direction, expository nonsense, or ham-handed diadicticism. In this case, I felt like there might have been not two, but *three* potentially good books which kind of crashed into one another and left nothing terribly satisfactory. Still, kudos for trying.

McKiernan, one of the Great Grey Sages of the late 70's/early 80's fantasy boom, here takes his signature Tolkien rip-off and wedges it into a quasi sci-fi premise: some famous rpg gamers get the chance to use a newly developed technology to live out their characters' lives in a game run by a new developed AI, which promptly goes haywire, stranding their minds inside the computer.

I say quasi sci-fi because, even by the very vague understanding which should be available to lay people, this book mistreats the sciences of neurology and computer engineering so very badly that I can't quite believe it was the product of simple ignorance. You have to work *hard* to be this crazypants about technology. It's not just the "AI goes crazy and becomes murderous" silliness common to a billion Hollywood movies, it's the overwrought supposed 'scientists' who try to earnestly debate metaphysics they simply misunderstand, from Plato's allegory of the Cave to the Mandarin's Dream. Worst of those is the caricature of a neuroscientist who claims science has categorically "proven" that there is no soul...a stupid character, badly handled.

All of this might be excusable if either the sci-fi shenanigans of trying to stump the AI, or the fantasy quest story in the game, were compelling. They're not. Worst of all, McKiernan doesn't seem to understand basic character motivations here: why in the world would players of a game want to literally give up their identities in order to allow some computer to puppet them around a fantasy landscape. That's not them playing, so why would they bother? Where's the benefit? And if they were that self-defeating, then how is that 'their' souls in the machine at all, if the AI has erased their basic memories and motivations?

Just incoherent.

I gave the book a sole extra star for ambition, but almost took it off again for the last chapter which is the most over-the-top silly part of all and which I will now ruin for you: having escaped the AI, the gamers now have their characters' magical powers from inside the fantasy game. Because apparently the laws of physics are easily broken by a little extra voltage across your synapses and some wishful thinking.

TONY says

one of my favorites.

i dont write reviews because my ideas on books are my own. i like what i like and thats that. this concept is stuff of my dreams. when i encounter a book i think others might like i will review it. this is a must read.
