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Review: The Babel Apocalypse by Vyvyan Evans



Jennifer R. Povey · [Follow](#)

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Feeling as if the internet is making everyone dumb? I think that sentiment just may be shared by Vyvyan Evans, who has woven a cyberpunk tale in the tradition of Neal Stephenson. (Not as good, but who is?)

In her future, nobody learns language any more. Instead, babies are implanted with translation chips and “stream” language. Any language they choose.

It should have built a utopia. But, of course, it places language itself under the control of a few corporations who stream language down from their satellites. Languages they can't make money from are now extinct...ironically this includes British English (I don't quite buy this), which has been completely subsumed into the American version. Oh, and regional accents will cost you. And it's illegal not to have a language chip. So-called “nates” are almost unknown.

This is an inherently cyberpunk concept and of course builds a dystopia.

Then somebody attacks the language satellites.

This is a book that is about over-dependence on technology. When the satellites are attacked some people (from the cheapest service) lose their language chips altogether and become out-soc, unable to communicate...or use any technologies. Others become feral, temporarily cut off from language. And yet a third group are stuck speaking a random language.

Emyr Morgan, our protagonist, is protected from this. As a Europol agent he, of course, is connected to a premium, private service not impacted by the outages. Which are blamed on the Russians.

Spoiler: It's not the Russians.

This is a very, very well-written book. I question some of the author's assumptions. For example, I found it hard to believe that when Wales breaks off from England everyone there *stops speaking English*. Teaching Cymry as a first language, yes. Not talking the most useful trade tongue on the planet? No. With the last name “Evans,” I have to assume this is wishful thinking on the author's part. He's from Chester, which is in England, but Evans is a Welsh name. (Yes, this is a male Vyvyan).

But people becoming dependent on language streaming as a general concept is scarily plausible...and could easily have been prevented, of course, by only chipping people when they reach the age of, say, twelve. But that wouldn't have given the corporations control over language.

(Similar concepts exist in A.I. Jiang's wonderful short story “Give Me English”).

I enjoyed this book. If you are into cyberpunk dystopias, this is a well written take on the topic. If you love technology, you might find Evans' take just a little too anti-internet.

It's the first book in a series, so I forgive the otherwise...iffy...ending. (It's not as bleak as the last book I read, but it's bleak). If something happens after that then it's not as...well, let's just say some really bad things happen to poor Emyr.

Recommended for cyberpunk fans.

Disclaimer: I received a free copy of this book for review and award consideration purposes.

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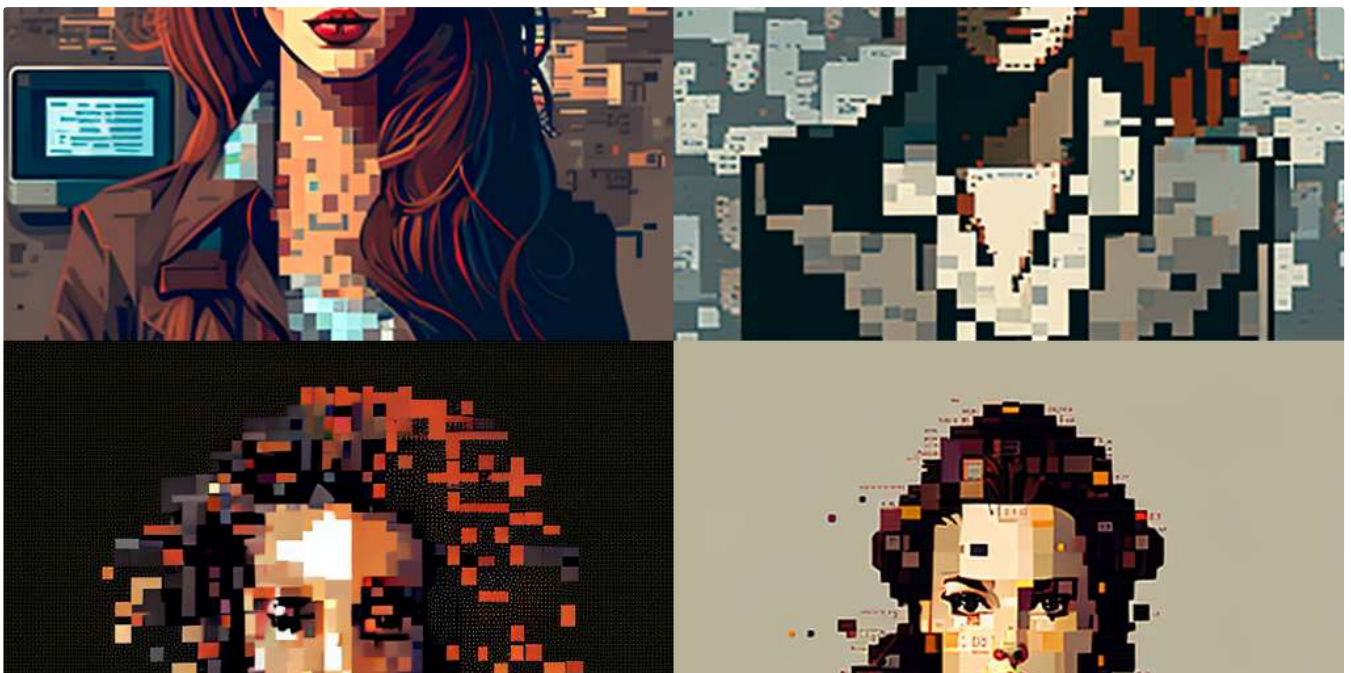
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