

Virtual Destiny

R. J. Reiber

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In the postapocalyptic novel Virtual Destiny, massive global challenges cannot disrupt a scientist's pursuit of her lifelong goal.

In R. J. Reiber's science fiction novel *Virtual Destiny*, a scientist survives an apocalyptic event and helps usher humanity into a new era.

Born with a spinal defect, Kaylee uses a wheelchair. Filled with rage, which she channels as energy, she studies hard and becomes a reputable scientist. She works in secret on a project to correct her spine. While she's experimenting on herself, though, a massive solar flare strikes Earth, disrupting the power and causing worldwide destruction.

Kaylee isn't the only survivor: in a hopeful turn of events, people stumble across an abandoned project to construct domed cities as havens from environmental destruction. Then, a massive leap in technology makes it possible to upload human consciousnesses into a virtual reality construct. But some are eager to disrupt such advances; indeed, a group of terrorists forms, so desperate to shuck off the new technology that they'll resort to violence. In the process, Kaylee and others are torn between science and using force to protect themselves.

Kaylee is a flawed, ambitious heroine whose single-minded devotion to "fixing" herself sometimes renders her heedless of the world around her. Though she survives her own tests—and the apocalypse—Kaylee strives to recover and resume her research. But she also helps out with building the domed cities; plays a pivotal role in creating a new VR version of Earth; and faces down the threats of violence and terror with determination. Indeed, her persistence makes her seem superhuman at times—including when her drive to find a personal cure, which directed so much of her early life, is eclipsed by her desire to help others using her mind.

The book introduces its futuristic concepts with concision and care; Kaylee discusses her research in clear terms, and the technology behind the virtual world is well explained. Still, it moves through its story with incredible speed, its chapters short and steady as it ushers Kaylee's world from an apocalypse to social rebirth and new threats. It pauses only to round out other members of the cast somewhat, explain some concepts, and introduce instances of harrowing action. Throughout it all, people endure.

Ending with hints at a potential continuation of its story, the postapocalyptic novel *Virtual Destiny* follows a scientist's dogged pursuit of her lifelong goal, even in the face of massive global challenges.

JOHN M. MURRAY (April 5, 2023)

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