



Blackout

Connie Willis

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Blackout

Connie Willis

Blackout Connie Willis

Oxford in 2060 is a chaotic place, with scores of time-traveling historians being sent into the past. Michael Davies is prepping to go to Pearl Harbor. Merope Ward is coping with a bunch of bratty 1940 evacuees and trying to talk her thesis adviser into letting her go to VE-Day. Polly Churchill's next assignment will be as a shopgirl in the middle of London's Blitz. But now the time-travel lab is suddenly canceling assignments and switching around everyone's schedules. And when Michael, Merope, and Polly finally get to World War II, things just get worse. For there they face air raids, blackouts, and dive-bombing Stukas--to say nothing of a growing feeling that not only their assignments but the war and history itself are spiraling out of control. Because suddenly the once-reliable mechanisms of time travel are showing significant glitches, and our heroes are beginning to question their most firmly held belief: that no historian can possibly change the past.

Blackout Details

Date : Published February 11th 2010 by Spectra Books

ISBN : 9780553803198

Author : Connie Willis

Format : Paperback 610 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Time Travel, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction

 [Download Blackout ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Blackout ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Blackout Connie Willis

From Reader Review Blackout for online ebook

Althea Ann says

Blackout/All Clear.

The two books are really one novel (thanks, publishers, for getting me to pay double!) so there's no reason to talk about them separately.

They're also part of Willis' time travel series, although they're not advertised as such. I really wouldn't recommend starting with these books; I feel that a lot of the questions and criticism of these books that I see in other reviews stems from the likelihood that readers haven't read the other books in the series: *The Doomsday Book*, *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, and *Fire Watch*. At the very least, you **MUST** read *Fire Watch* before reading these books.

That said, the books are excellent. *Blackout* starts slowly, but Willis does a great job of gradually but surely building the tension and intensity of the story, working from trivial humor up to tragedy... (and the tragedy that can spring from the trivial) although it never gets as intense as *The Doomsday Book*. The pacing is the main reason why I feel that the book should not have been split in two. The end revelations also came dangerously close to getting too sentimental/religious for me... but I think they fall on the OK side of that line...

I found the representation of London during the Blitz to be completely convincing and memorable - I found myself saying, "wow, I didn't know...." And I've also decided that it is virtually incomprehensible that I've been to London over a dozen times, and I don't think that I've ever been inside St. Paul's cathedral. I'm sure Willis would think that was sad and horrifically neglectful.

For another depiction of the Blitz, which also focuses on its effect on ordinary individuals, I'd highly recommend Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch*.

Elizabeth says

"The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." -- L. P. Hartley

"Say GRRRRR: it helps soothe the pain." --S. Gatland

GRRRRRRR.

I have to give *Blackout* a very mixed review. Wonderful as it was to read, it's either supremely naïve or grandly arrogant to assume you don't have to introduce PLOT to a "thriller" until page 254. It is true that I enjoyed reading the first 90,000 words or so (that's a decent novel's worth of words), I enjoyed the characters and the premise and all the little unrelated incidents--enough to keep reading at a good clip until I got to the twisty bit. But I wasn't *hooked* until the defining moment on page 254 when Polly realizes things really are not as they should be. And I wish I hadn't had to spend 90,000 words being annoyed at the historians' smug asides and dopey preconceptions and wishing something intriguing would happen. Eileen taking care of the measly evacuees... entertaining, yes, but terribly *Doomsday Book*. I kind of felt like I was watching a re-run.

But then, page 254 and onward for a bit. Polly's night under fire, waiting for the drop that never opens, really swallowed me (and I do appreciate that the effectiveness of this scene is due in part to the 90,000 word build-up of her complacency about being able to get home). I loved her falling apart, the chaos was vivid, and I really felt the gulf of time--of being both stuck and damned, with the possibility of death and the unknown looming ahead--curious, and ironic, and of course planned, that the FUTURE is what becomes the terrible unknown. Love it. And then Eileen watching the dogfight between the Me-109 and the Spitfires, and suddenly realizing that she is *watching the Battle of Britain*. It is wonderful.

So then I expected the Plot to begin, and I was decidedly disappointed 100 pages later when I realized that in fact the plot had been going on for a while and was simply, "Please sort my schedule out. Oh noes, I am stuck here, when are you going to rescue me?" Because for some reason, *everything* I'd heard about this book led me to believe that there was *intrigue* involved (and possibly romance. And I have to say, if Mike is going to be the romance, better Polly or Merope than me. I would have to smack him in the head 20 times a day.) I feel kind of cheated, and a little baffled, that the total intrigue of this "thriller" amounts to three totally unprepared historians hunting for a way out of their chosen field of study. I was REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE INTRIGUE.

Also -- my God -- didn't the Oxford tech team learn ANYTHING from their previous trips? How can each historian be equipped with ONE DROP only? How is the ONLY WAY back, if a drop doesn't work, dependent on a whole damn retrieval team going in, like the Marines? Why is there not a permanent safety drop somewhere in Northumbria, or a fixed communication point for people who might be visiting the same time period? (I'm thinking a LETTERBOX. Quite simple, really.) Why are the historians so TOTALLY unprepared for the possibility they might be stuck in their fieldwork a little longer than expected, to the point where they don't know ****ANYTHING**** about the events immediately preceding and following their highly esoteric 3 days' worth of specialization? Why does NO ONE have a contingency plan? They are RESEARCHERS, not TOURISTS, and they have chosen to go into a WAR ZONE. They are like reporters in Gaza. They MUST know they might get stuck there, or fired on, or kidnapped, or whatever.

Blimey, I wish one of them HAD been kidnapped. Now THAT would be a PLOT.

There are a lot of little Americanisms that make me smile. Granted Mike has got an language & accent implant, but that shouldn't make him not know what a cryptic crossword is, or think that the shot-down aircraft stats printed in the paper are like "baseball scores." A camp bed isn't called a cot here, a hole in your stocking isn't called a run. The hats are trilbies, not fedoras. Maybe as an American writer living in the UK I am more aware of these things. I suffered a bit as an amateur historian, too -- I know too many curious little factoids that kept making me doubt Willis's historical accuracy OVERALL. The Battle of Britain did not end the moment the Blitz began. Margerie saying that it was "dark by half past three in the afternoon" because of the blackout (on page 341) makes no sense at all -- except between 19 Nov. '39 and 25 Feb. '40, Britain actually set its clocks an hour *ahead* to save on daylight, 2 hours ahead in the summer, and anyway Margerie lives in London, not in Scotland (where it DOES get dark at half past three, but only in the dead of winter). Leslie Howard did not become an RAF pilot; he was a passenger aboard a commercial flight, a BOAC/KLM DC-3, which was shot down by the Luftwaffe under shady circumstances. ET CETERA. They are *tiny* flaws but they jar me.

The *Washington Post* reviewer who gushes that this book is "as vivid an evocation of England during World War II as anyone has ever written" has obviously never read any Robert Westall. But Willis does capture something atmospheric and unidentifiable that makes it feel *real*--riddled with inaccuracy and yet TRUE (and now I realize I'm kind of quoting someone else here, which comes as a surprise, and I suppose it's a compliment). If you take Willis's detailing with a grain of salt and skip over the ponderous air raid schedules (some of Polly's catalogues of safe underground shelters and train times read like Five Red Herrings and make me LOSE THE WILL TO LIVE)--still--*Blackout* is gripping and evocative in its own right. I think Willis rather aspires to Sayersdom, and I suppose she succeeds in that I can read her and adore her books

despite their flaws, quite an achievement for any writer now that I have become so incredibly hypercritical in my jaundiced old age. I am psyched to have rediscovered this wonderful writer nearly 20 years after my own memorable fieldwork experience in Oxford's score of bell towers (and yeah, I remember, her grasp of bell ringing and ringers was flawed too. But we still love *Doomsday Book*).

So, I'm off to order *All Clear* . Can I just point out that these could easily have been ONE BOOK if Willis and her editor had cooperated a wee bit more closely and left out all the dithering, the train schedules, the interminable lists of air raid shelters, and the tour of every department store in London. And the relentless repetition on every other page (for the reader's benefit I suppose, lest we forget), of someone wailing, "But this is *time travel!*"

Stacey says

Blithering idiots.
Read rage.
That is all.

Felicia says

UGH i dunno guys. I know it won the Hugo but I'm ok to have a differing opinion, right? I will definitely give credit, the book is IMPECCABLY researched. So much time and detail into WWII England, just...bravo for the research ALONE it deserved an award.

But I mean, bar none, this book does NOT feel like a stand-alone. From my investigations the publisher split the plot in two, and it's so clunky with the ending it shows. The book could TOTALLY have stood an edit pass that took out tomes of unnecessary info and just compiled the two books into one.

Ok, BARRING THAT, I am a HUGE Connie Willis fan. "To Say Nothing of the Dog" is one of my all time FAVORITE books, so I'm into her time travel world and setup. Unfortunately, this book really just felt static to me, I mean the whole point of it is that people are traveling back in time and know EXACTLY WHATS GOING TO HAPPEN and then it kind of seems like it's not gonna go like they think it's supposed to...and then it does. ugh.

And then most of the OTHER part of the book is basically, "Will X get to Y or will their paths never cross?!" And THEN I feel like the main characters...I mean seriously they are all so plain, you could have switched each character out of their plot and into another and it felt like they would have acted the same. Could one of them had no scruples, or one of them have sex with someone? Or be a bully? Or anything other than just going along with the plot? I dunno, there were parts I was SO INTO but the verbosity and lack of character just compel me to post a bit critically which I often don't do, but I felt that there were people who might love this book, so feel free to try it. I'm not sorry I read it for sure, just a few frustrating aspects that make me reluctant to finish the second installment.

Kaethe says

2016 July 14

I love these books so much. Stories about women in wartime are catnip to me. But this book, in which the daily struggle to keep calm and carry on is so hard for Britons: it gives me all the feels, but also hope for humanity.

2013 January 1

2010 March 14

It was everything I could do not to start this so far ahead of its proper turn in the stack. Just saying.

My, what a big book. But such an enormous pleasure. Much of the time, after turning the last page on a 500 page book, and discovering a note saying: hey, you'll have to read the next book to find out what happens, I'd be slightly vexed. Here, the only disappointment is that I'll have to wait six months.

Willis uses the device of time-travel so effectively, she's made it her own. It enables her to address modern sensibilities and issues, as well as to enter into the mindset of a given period. In fact, time travel exists in order to permit her characters to really understand a time, and the people who lived through it, as fully human. The historians start out with some information, but with a great deal of distance. She won't let them leave until they really become an active part of the time they're visiting.

In this book she sends historians back to Britain in WWII. One guy is a jerk, the other isn't, the gals are pretty nearly indistinguishable. But trapped in their assignments they become Britons fighting the war, and they become distinct individuals as well.

I've said before that Willis is the master of writing bureaucratic muddle. She can turn it to comic effect, as in *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, or she can use it to heighten the drama and add poignancy, as in *Passage*. Here, she does both. And the net effect is to take the accounts of survivors and pull them together into an engrossing and coherent narrative. *Blackout*, together with *All Clear*, is going to be one of the most memorable novels of WWII that I've ever read.

Carol. says

Oh, I'm such a liar. This wasn't three stars, it was two. While I love some of Connie's other works, this one doesn't work for me. Logically inept, grossly meandering and strongly in need of some editing. While I liked pieces of the storyline, as a whole it lacked enough coherence to be enjoyable.

Lisa Vegan says

A warning: This book has no proper ending. It was meant to be the first half of a book but the publisher divided it into two books and *Blackout* is the first half. *All Clear* is the second book/second half of the book. Definitely have *All Clear* on hand to read immediately after this book. I finished this book and started the next the same day and that's the way to do it. I deliberately read this slowly so there wouldn't be a gap before I could read the next book.

I was completely enthralled! This book is so much fun to read.

I can't believe that this is my first Connie Willis time travel book, and it's very rare that I don't read series, even loose series, in order. This is book four in the Oxford time travel books, although it is the first of two of the All Clear books. I could tell that at least two characters had made prior appearances in other books, and normally that would bother me, but I was so engaged with this book that I truly didn't care. I felt perfectly content to go back and, after I read All Clear, I'll in the near future read Doomsday Book and the other two books. I don't mind going backward to read them, quite appropriate for time travel books, which I do love. I am a bit embarrassed that I haven't read this author's books given that her books are exactly my cup of tea.

I was in heaven: historical fiction where I really learned so much about what it was like to be a civilian in London and evacuation areas and other parts of England during WWII, speculative fiction which is one of my favorite genres, and time travel for which I have a particular penchant, and even a favorite-time-travel-books shelf here at Goodreads.

I like that it's a character named Ira Feldman, a Jewish man, who invented time travel, and that his parents seem to have lived during WWII. That fact is mentioned just in passing, but I definitely noted it.

I enjoyed all the main characters: Polly, Merope/Eileen, Mike, and also many others in 2060 and 1940. They're characters that I cared about and they all seemed completely authentic. I was starting to list a few memorable characters but there were too many so I'll just say that and leave readers to meet and get to know them when they read this book. There was a bunch of repetition during the book, particularly the long last part, but it worked for me because it's the kind of obsessive and repetitive thinking and worrying I would do in those circumstances, and having the characters in the book do it gave the events such a feeling of immediacy. Most of the action takes place in 1940 and thereabouts but the world of Oxford in 2060 was also fascinating. I love the way the time traveler historians from 2060 have to learn the ways of 1940, such as how to drive a gasoline powered car of the time.

Willis was already a well known and published author so I was somewhat surprised by the many spelling, grammatical, etc. errors, especially in the beginning of the book, but I also caught a couple of mistakes at the end of the book as well.

However, the story and characters are so riveting, and the premise is so creative, that while not perfect, this was a wonderful 5 star book for me. It was a rollicking ride and a perfect comfort read. I will shelve it at the Comfort Reads group, if another member hasn't already done that. It was just a blast for me to read. I'm about to happily dive into All Clear.

Megan Baxter says

I am, in general, a big fan of Connie Willis. Not every book has struck me exactly right, but I do enjoy them. And this series of time travel books tend to be enjoyable, although they vary wildly, from a door-slamming farce to wrench-your-heart-out, leave-you-in-tears Black Death Romps. So I was excited to start the first of two books that won the Hugo a few years ago.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the recent changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

Kemper says

Warning: This review will be lengthy due to pure hatred.

Did I ever tell you that I've got a time machine? There was a freak accident where my laptop and my lawn mower got fused together following a lightning strike, and now I can use it to travel in time. It's a long story. Anyhow, when I have a chance, I take the occasional trip through history. Recently, I popped into London in 1940 during the Blitz to take a look around. It's a fascinating time with England hanging on by its fingernails during nightly bombings and waiting for a German invasion that seemed certain.

I was getting ready to return to 2010, and started firing up the time-mower when suddenly three people, two women and a man, ran up excitedly and started wildly shouting questions at me.

"Are you from the retrieval team?"

"Where is your drop?"

"What took you so long?"

After a few minutes they finally calmed down enough to introduce themselves. They were Polly, Eileen and Mike. They saw me with the time-mower and figured out I was from the future. They demanded to know from when.

"My name's Kemper. I'm from 2010," I told them.

"Oh, no," Polly wailed. "You're not from Oxford?"

"Uh, no. I'm from Kansas," I replied.

"So you're not a historian from 2060 like us?" Mike demanded.

"Nope. You guys are from 2060? That's incredible, what's it like?" I asked.

"Well, it used to be grand. We got assignments to go back and observe points in history by going undercover to live and work during these times," Eileen said.

"That sounds like it would be a really exciting adventure," I said.

"No, it's awful," Eileen said. "You see, something terrible has happened. We each had different assignments. I was working with evacuated children in the country, Mike was supposed to observe the ships returning from the rescue of the British army at Dunkirk, and Polly was going to work as a shop girl at one of the department stores."

"What happened?"

"Well, first, my assignment was terrible. The English lady I worked for made us do all this extra war work while she wouldn't lift a finger, and I had to deal with all these children. There was this brother and sister, Alf and Binnie, that were always getting into mischief and causing me problems. Then there was measles outbreak so I was quarantined for months with the kids so I was long overdue. When the quarantine finally lifted, my drop wasn't working. You see, the drops are the spots where we can go back to Oxford in 2060," Eileen said.

“Yes, and my drop isn’t work either. I got a job at a department store, just as planned, but when I tried to check in, it isn’t working,” Polly said.

“Is your drop not working?” I asked Mike.

“We’re not sure. See, I was supposed to arrive in Dover, but there was slippage. That’s when we don’t arrive exactly when and where we were supposed to. So I ended up 30 miles away in this little village and three days late. A lot of stuff happened after I met Commodore Harold, and it was months before I got back to my drop, and now there are always people around it. They won’t open if anyone from this time frame can see it,” Mike said.

“Who is Commodore Harold?”

“He was this old man at the village. I was trying to get him to take me in his boat to Dover because I had already missed part of the evacuation. But he wouldn’t listen to me and kept insisting that he was going to Dunkirk. Then I fell asleep on his boat, and he took me there. Which was terrible because I probably changed history and now we’ll lose the war,” Mike said. Tears came out of the corners of his eyes.

“We can’t change history,” Polly said.

“Yes, we can. I did,” Mike cried.

“You don’t know that,” Eileen said.

“Yes, I do. It’s all my fault,” he said and sobbed harder.

“Well, if you think you had it bad, I had a terrible time getting a black skirt,” Polly said.

“A black skirt?” I asked in confusion.

“Yes, shop girls must wear a black skirt and everything was confused at Oxford when we were leaving because of schedule changes so wardrobe could only get me a dark blue one. I got the job but the woman in charge would fire me if I didn’t get a black skirt. And I kept trying to get back to the drop so I could go back to Oxford and get one, but I kept getting delayed. When I finally got there, the drop wasn’t working. Plus, I couldn’t wrap the packages properly so I had to spend ever so much time practicing it,” Polly said. Her lip quivered slightly as she remembered the horror of wrapping packages.

“Uh, didn’t they give you any money when you came to the past?” I asked.

“Oh, yes. Tons of it,” Polly said.

“And you were working in a department store?” I said.

“Yes.”

“So why didn’t you just buy a black skirt there instead of spending all that effort trying to time travel to go home and get one?” I said. Polly only looked at me blankly.

“I had problems, too. I tried and tried to get out of the quarantine and sneak back to the drop, but Mr. Samuels locked the doors,” Eileen said.

“Who is Mr. Samuels? A cop or doctor?” I asked.

“No, just the old gardener at the estate,” she said.

“I had a lot of bother getting a newspaper,” Mike volunteered.

“A newspaper?” I asked.

“Yes, I had to spend some time in a hospital, and I wanted to see the war news to see what I had changed. But the nurses thought it was making me too upset. So I had to pretend that I wanted to do the crosswords so they’d leave me the paper,” Mike said proudly.

“OK, forget about the skirt, and the quarantine and the newspaper. Don’t you people have some kind of back-up plan if something went wrong and you couldn’t get to your drops?” I asked.

“Yes, the retrieval teams!” they shouted in unison.

“I was sure that you were with the retrieval team,” Polly said.

“I’ve spent so many hours wondering what was keeping my retrieval team,” Eileen said.

“I’m sure that my retrieval team hasn’t been able to locate me,” Mike said.

“Where, oh where, could our retrieval teams be?” Polly said.

“I thought Mike and Polly were my retrieval team when they found me,” Eileen said.

“And I thought Mike was my retrieval team,” Polly said.

“I know that you two are women and all that, but the next person to say ‘retrieval team’ is getting punched in the throat,” I said. “OK, so those retrieval teams... Er, people were supposed to come and get you if something went wrong, but they haven’t shown. So what was your Plan B?”

“Plan B?” Eileen said.

“Yeah, for if something really went wrong and they couldn’t find you or whatever? Didn’t you have a pre-determined spot to meet out some time later? Or since all you people were running around this time, did they set up some kind of safe-house you could go to in case of emergency?”

“That’s a good idea,” Polly said.

“We’ll have to tell Mr. Dunworthy that we should do that after the retrieval team... OW!... takes us back,” Mike said.

“So no plan other than just sitting around fretting and speculating about what happened? Since you’re worried that they can’t find you, have you put an ad in the paper or anything?” I asked

“Oh, I checked the personals to see if the retrieval team..OW!..placed an ad trying to find us. I thought about putting an ad in so that they could find me, but haven’t done it yet,” Mike said proudly.

“Uh.. You guys do research in the future before you go into the past, right?”

“Of course.” Polly said.

“That would include reading newspapers?”

“Yes, we get a lot of information from newspapers,” Eileen said.

“And it’s never occurred to any of you that if you put a message in that says something like, ‘Hey, Oxford 2060, come pick me up at noon outside Buckingham Palace on Oct. 1?’ that they might see it and meet you there then?” I asked.

“That’s another good idea,” Eileen said. “You’ve got a knack for this, Kemper.”

“Are you kidding me? You’re goddamn time travelers, and you never thought of doing that? Or leaving a letter with a lawyer for delivery to Oxford in 2060? Haven’t you ever seen the *Back to the Future* movies? Or that episode of *Quantum Leap* where Sam and Al switched places?” I said.

“Well, I’m not sure that it’s a matter of Oxford not being able to find us. I think something went wrong and that they can’t come back for some reason,” Polly said.

“It’s my fault!” Mike shrieked.

“Oh, do shut up,” Polly snapped. “Even before we left, something was going on. Mr. Dunworthy was changing assignments like mad, and they were having a terrible time finding drop sites. And they were very worried about us reporting any slippage.”

“That’s true,” Mike said. “Mr. Dunworthy changed my assignment from Pearl Harbor to Dunkirk so I had almost no time to prepare. And Polly couldn’t get the right clothes, and Eileen had a hard time getting the driving lessons she needed.”

“So this Mr. Dunworthy is a douche bag that sends you guys into the past with no preparation?” I said.

“Oh, no! He cares about us ever so much. He sets very strict rules about where we can live and work in the past, and if there’s so much of a hint of danger, he’ll pull us right off an assignment. He’d send a retrieval team ...OW!...in a second if he knew we were in trouble,” Eileen said confidently.

I sighed and rubbed my temples for a couple of minutes. Then I took a deep breath.

“Let me see, I’ve got this straight. You’re all historians from 2060 at Oxford who work for a guy named Dunworthy who is supposedly very strict about your safety. Yet, he did a last minute change of schedule with no explanation that left people going to England in 1940 unprepared and ill-equipped for the assignment. You were stupid enough to come anyhow, and you’re all seemingly incapable of dealing with anything as mundane as unruly children or overbearing people. Plus, the simplest task like obtaining a black skirt or a newspaper turns into a major undertaking for you. Even outwitting a senile boat captain or a gardner was beyond your abilities. Now something has gone wrong, and your only plan is to sit around whining about your ‘retrieval teams’. Is that about it?” I said.

“Yes, that’s about the size of it,” Mike said.

“Please, Kemper. We really need your help,” Polly said.

“Well, you all may be morons, but it’s your lucky day because a guy with a time-mower showed up. I guess I can’t leave you here,” I said.

“That’s wonderful! So you’ll take a message to Oxford?” Eileen said.

“A message?” I asked.

“Yes. We’ll write a message to Mr. Dunworthy and you can take it to him. Then he’ll send a retrieval team...OW!...back for us,” Polly said.

They just kept grinning and smiling at me as I looked at them in disbelief.

“Guy with a working time machine standing right here,” I said slowly.

They nodded.

“And all you want me to do is to take a message to the future for you?”

They nodded.

“Not, you know, just take you to Oxford in 2060?”

“Oh, no,” Mike said. “What if we left and the retrieval team...OW!...shows up?”

“Changed my mind. Not doing shit for you. Sit here and wait. Hopefully, the Germans will drop a bomb on your stupid, wussy, worthless, whining asses. See ya in hell,” I said as I fired up the time-mower and started to fade away.

The last thing I heard before leaving 1940 was, “When do you think the retrieval team will arrive?”

In Summary of a Shitty Book

I have never been subjected to such painful characters in my life. All three of the major players are exactly the same. Almost the entire book is their inner dialogues which consist solely of fretting about stupid trivial crap, wild speculation that turns out to be completely wrong and repeatedly asking, “Oh, when will the retrieval team arrive?”

You’d think that time travelers should be hardy adventurers with the ability to improvise and adapt to problems. These dumbasses can’t complete the simplest of tasks without it becoming a story of epic proportions. Seriously, the first chapter of this book is a guy trying to find Dunworthy at Oxford and having all these internal discussions with himself about where he might be, where he should look for him, what his secretary will say, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, someone please shoot me. The rest of the book consists of characters doing pretty much the same thing.

Even worse, this is the first of two books so even after reading all this drivel, you don’t get any resolution to the story.

When I’m on my deathbed, I’ll be cursing the name of Connie Willis for writing this piece of shit and tricking me into wasting precious hours of my life.

Tim Hicks says

I have a very short list of authors whose work I eagerly await. Connie Willis just stepped off that list with this turkey. This book cuts off abruptly with a promo for the second book, but if it had been decently edited

the whole mess would have fit in one volume.

Three incompetent characters are dropped into WW2 London by obviously incompetent staffers. Before they even left I was thinking that I wouldn't let these dingbats put me on a bus, much less a time machine.

These folks are supposed to check in regularly with their home time. After each of them is stymied by implausible coincidences, they can't connect. It's not hard for the reader to figure out that something's wrong, but our heroes are each stuck in a loop of optimism, and keep trying, unable to even consider the possibility of a problem. It's like watching Homer Simpson stick his finger in an electrical socket over and over again.

OK, the descriptions of life in the Blitz are very good. But two of the lead characters are dithering wimps, and even brave-in-action Mike is channeling moany-groany Thomas Covenant the rest of the time. The characters around them are mixed, some cardboard, some ludicrously exaggerated, and a few believable. Alf, Binnie and Mrs. Rickett are right out of Dickens, and Terry Pratchett could probably place them in Ankh-Morpork, but they're just too unsubtle for this book.

In the first 50 pages we're introduced to the mysterious Head Guy through his many arbitrary decisions, and to a teenager who makes Mickey Rooney look unenthusiastic. 500 pages later we haven't seen the slightest hint of them.

I don't know if I can stand another 500 pages of this mucilage, or another 217 descriptions of the exact date and time when a particular building was bombed, or what time a siren went off.

Willis's Doomsday Book was excellent, but this just isn't. It's not even good. If you want time travel go read Kage Baker.

Joe Valdez says

Colin is upset. It's 2060 and the lad skips class to search the Oxford campus desperately for Mr. Dunsworthy. The porter, Mr. Purdy, tells Colin that the professor is in research. The professor's secretary Eddritch is much more closed lipped, but when Colin tries the lab, the director Badri and the tech Linna are far too busy sending researchers through time.

At least, they're supposed to be doing this. Schedules are being reshuffled at the last minute, you see. Michael has trained to be sent back to Pearl Harbor in 1941 but his orders are rewritten and he's notified he's to be sent to Dunkirk for the British evacuation, which requires serious prep he has no time for.

Meanwhile, his roommate Charles is headed to Singapore and learning how to play tennis in order to fit in. Eileen has already been sent back in time to observe Operation Pied Piper during the London Blitz. She's upset because her mistress in 1940 has notified her she's to learn how to drive an automobile, in the event the Germans attack and ambulance drivers are needed ...

On page 44 of *Blackout*, I gave up. There are several reasons for this. I might have dropped in on Connie Willis right in the middle of her time travel saga and was simply not invested in her Oxford academics as they fret and worry and rant over last minute changes to their orders of being sent through time. *You're being sent back in time! Why are you bitching and moaning? Shut up!*

Maybe if I hadn't come in late, I'd care a fig about any one of the half dozen characters Willis introduces in the first two pages. As is, I found the material far too geriatric, too plodding for my taste. Whatever

excitement, great romance or life and death struggle awaits these characters is barely hinted at after one hour of reading. I'm jumping in my time machine and getting outta here ...

Wyndie says

The hype of Connie Willis *Blackout* fell short. The story sets place in Oxford 2060 and World War II England. This was my first Willis novel and perhaps some of my complaints are due to my lack of knowledge in her description of time travel. I am not clear as to why ~~Dumbledore~~ Mr Dunworthy is frantically sending his 20something historians out to observe WWII England in such a chaotic and disorganized fashion. Their assignments durations and details tend to change abruptly and for no clear cut reason.

The four main characters were portrayed as whining nit-wits with an endless amount of internal dialogue. A character would mention the fact that they are going to X tube station or X destination, and without fail the historian would internalize with *you won't be going there, that place will be nothing but cinder by tomorrow*. Yes we understand the historians know just about everything except how time travel works and how they are going to get back to 2060 Oxford. I also grew weary of Willis writing style. Overall the novel was unnecessarily repetitive. The first 75 pages could have been reduced to 20. The historian would have a mundane adventure in 1940's London, travel back to 2060 Oxford, recap the events to a friend; another colleague walks into the room, and then proceeds to whine again to another nitwit historian about the same misadventure. We get it already; no need to continue with the moronic dialogue.

Willis must have done extensive historical research on 1940's England as reflected in her beautifully detailed scenes. These sections read more like a travelogue, which gave little to no momentum to either the plot or characters.

Needless to say I will not be reading the "exciting conclusion."

Clouds says

Christmas 2010: I realised that I had got stuck in a rut. I was re-reading old favourites again and again, waiting for a few trusted authors to release new works. Something had to be done.

On the spur of the moment I set myself a challenge, to read every book to have won the Locus Sci-Fi award. That's 35 books, 6 of which I'd previously read, leaving 29 titles by 14 authors who were new to me.

While working through this reading list I got married, went on my honeymoon, switched career and became a father. As such these stories became imprinted on my memory as the soundtrack to the happiest period in my life (so far).

** Published as two books, **Blackout** and **All Clear** do not work as two separate stories. This is one tale spread over two volumes. As such I am writing one extra long review and spreading it between the two books.*

*** As this is a time-travel book with events reported in a non-linear manner, I am writing this review as a*

'non-linear' 'time-travel' review. I've labelled the paragraphs and then jumbled them up between the two reviews. You poor schmucks have to make sense of my drivel (if such a thing is possible) – think of it like a puzzle, or a game, yeah?

*** Sometimes I wonder; is my brilliance perhaps outshone only by my modesty?

Begin your journey by going through THE BROWN DOOR WITH THE BRASS HANDLE

Parts of your journey will occur on this review of ALL CLEAR

THE NARROW STAIRS

The haters:

“I suppose the good news is that it will probably take Willis another six years to publish her next book; the bad news is that it too will probably win awards it doesn't deserve.” – Nicholas Whyte

“Blithering idiots. Read rage. That is all.” – Stacey

“Warning: This review will be lengthy due to pure hatred.” – Kemper

I don't agree with his conclusion, but I highly recommend checking out Kemper's superb roasting of this fine book!

CONTINUE BY ENTERING THE DUTY OFFICE

DEPARTMENT OF B&AC

3) There were historical and setting fact errors.

- Dear reader, your Mum is a “historical and setting” fact error. Yes, I'm juvenile enough to find that funny. I've spent a lot of time in London and nothing jumped out at me as being stretched beyond the limits of narrative credibility. I'm not a blitz expert, but I feel the books offer a convincing and engrossing vision of blitz-time London.

CONTINUE BY JOINING QUEUE 14H

SMOKING AREA

I have to go... I think I just spotted my retrieval team!

I hope you enjoyed my review

COUNTER 83

So. Here we are. I see some of you looking at me askance (isn't that a lovely word, askance?) because I've flattered and defended these books, this story, and yet only given *Blackout* 3-stars and *All Clear* 4-stars. Well, yes. It's true; the story does have flaws, I cannot deny it any longer!

CONTINUE BY TAKING A FORM WTF/83/CC

ACROSS THE QUAD

2) These characters are stupid. They do stupid things. They don't think. I hate them.

- Dear reader, sometimes smart people can be stupid. I have a friend who is an Oxford grad. He's a brilliant computer scientist. But I've seen him get baffled by a manual can opener. These characters are historians, anthropologists and actors – but they are still, at heart, Oxford academics. When things go wrong, they panic – they seize on odd hopes and worry endlessly about things outside their control. They're fallible, error-prone, and human. I quite liked them all.

CONTINUE INTO THE DEPARTMENT OF B&AC

PIDGEONHOLES

My own experience of *Blackout* was delayed several months as my wife stole my newly arrived copy (she's a bigger Willis fan than me – perhaps because she worries more?). Darling Wifelet then wedged the book under the baby's pram with all her shopping while she was out and about it town... and lost the book. Which she then worried about telling me... Do you suppose there's a direct correlation between Willis fans and worriers?

END YOUR JOURNEY IN THE SMOKING AREA

QUEUE 14H

- 4) The entire book consists of inner dialogues of them fretting about stupid, trivial crap!
- Dear reader, now we're cooking with gas!

The emotion which permeates this story is anxiety. Worry, stress, angst, dread, call it what you will. I have some experience with anxiety disorders and Willis does such a good job at replicating the constant, wearying, nagging sense of restless unease that at times I found it acutely discomfoting. It's easy to name stories of love, lust, greed, fear, vengeance, guilt, faith, ambition, pride, etc. But 'worry' – that unglamorous emotion which stalks us when we try to sleep – worry is rarely the headline act. I can understand why this insidious sense of anxiety would disappoint so many readers – who likes to read about people getting stressed-out? It might not be entertaining, but this endless circling of the problem (like a cork in a draining bathtub) had an echo of Truth (yes, with a capital T) that made it far more valuable to me than an escapist adventure.

CONTINUE BY APPROACHING COUNTER 83

After this I read: Wintersmith

Chrissie says

After 1 hour and forty minutes of the audiobook:

I am a person stuck firmly in reality. I knew when I started this that it was a time-travel book. I figured I could ignore this aspect, but this is proving much harder than I expected. I am having huge problems. All this about slipping into drop sites, about language implants, divergent points and slippage. It is hard to ignore SO much detail. I feel like I have been dropped into a movie, with people dashing around right and left. The setting is stress-filled, and I find no reason to be stressed by that which is so utterly inconceivable. I want to be moved, but I want to be moved by urgent, REAL issues. Everybody is griping about their problems of doing their "job" properly, which is all fake and contrived, so how can I possibly empathize?

I wish it would get to a point where I am experiencing something worth experiencing.

I have not given up, but the neurotic tempo is pushing me to the limit. I don't mind stress, IF there is some reason to be stressed.

After 4.5 hours of the audiobook:

I have to express how very difficult it is for me to read / listen to this book. It was recommended to me by my dear friend Lisa, and she is a great friend and I respect her tremendously, but even good friends do not always like the same books. I tried, but am giving up.

IF you should think as I did that you can ignore the time-travel aspect and just read the book for its historical content, forget this notion. There are way too many details tied to the concept of time-travel to make this possible. The history thrown in is like stones being thrown into a pond. Plunk, plunk, plunk - little historical details without the larger context.

I do not relate to the characters. I have never seen such a bunch of complainers. IF they love their occupation as time-travel historians studying history, then why are they constantly grumbling over glitches? This should be seen as part of the job! Their emotional responses to the circumstances feel wrong to me. One example - when Polly is so scared of walking in the dark of London during the Blitz. In addition, I have walked out in the woods at night, your pupils dilate and even if you don't see clearly you don't hit into things right in front of you. Details like this make me feel that what I am reading is not possible. The conversations, the behavior and the emotions feel off.

There is romance and it is corny beyond words.

I find the book cinematic in tone. This is not a compliment.

Katherine Kellgren narrates the audiobook. Everyone loves her, but not me. I do have to admit that she is talented at switching between different dialects. I had to turn down the volume to bear listening, but this was mostly because the complaining drove me nuts.

Please, don't tell me it is the narration that is wrecking the book for me. No, it is the time-travel concept and the author's words, the tone of the novel.

I am so sorry, Lisa, but I cannot do this book.

Laurie says

I love Willis' novels, with time-travelling anthropologists getting into all kinds of mischief in their historical setting, complicated by love and feelings of responsibility, I'd have given it 5 stars if she hadn't forced me to wait six months for the second half of the story...

Ben Babcock says

Time travel is a sexy science-fiction trope. It's right up there with faster-than-light travel (the two are, in fact, inextricably related, and chances are you if you invent one then you'll have invented both) as something that, as far as our current understanding of the universe works, is impossible. There are some fascinating loopholes involving wormholes and general relativity, but in order to get it working you need metric shit-

joules of energy and something called *exotic matter*, and it would probably kill you. Besides, even if you got your cosmic time machine working, you wouldn't be able to travel back to a time before you built the time machine. But once you get beyond the physics of time travel and whether it's possible, *then* the real fun begins. Because time travel creates a headache for those of us mired in the swamps of linear time, and inevitably, time travel stories demonstrate why it's a good thing we *don't* have to comprehend paradoxes in real life.

Connie Willis doesn't go into too much depth regarding how time travel is accomplished in her 2060 version of Oxford, where historians visit the past on research assignments. There's some kind of device that creates a "net", which is probably some kind of fancy space-time fold that wraps around the traveller and sends him or her to different "spatiotemporal coordinates". The location where the traveller arrives is his or her "drop", which the traveller must reach to return to Oxford. Rather than dropping this upon us the moment the story begins, Willis does the right thing and gradually introduces us to her theory of time travel. We get some very intriguing hints and speculation about whether historians can alter the past (the prevailing theory is that they can't, but some theorists beg to differ) and some mutterings about "slippage". This is how Willis gets away with using the "meanwhile, in the future" device (TVTropes alert), which is probably the one thing I hate most about time travel stories. We'll look at whether slippage is enough to mollify me later, but first let me talk about World War II.

Blackout starts at a disadvantage for me personally, because I don't particularly like WWII fiction. I will read it once in a while, but I don't go out of my way to find historical fiction set during that period. So keep that in mind when I endorse the atmosphere that Willis creates in *Blackout*, which is clearly (sometimes too clearly) (TVTropes alert) the product of meticulous research. Polly, Eileen, and Mike all visit different parts of England in 1940: Polly is in London to observe the beginning of the Blitz; Eileen is a maid at a manor that has taken in evacuees; Mike is at Dover to observe the evacuation from Dunkirk. Eventually they all converge on Polly and the Blitz. I love the details Willis includes in her depiction of the period, from the differences between American and British English idioms to the expectations for dress and the excuses one might need for being out after the sirens go off. Willis successfully conveys that the Blitz, and England in general during wartime when the threat of German invasion loomed, was more than just a different time; it possessed an entirely different *mentality*, one that I don't think those of us lucky enough never to have lived through a war that threatens one's country can grasp.

Before I read *Blackout*, I knew in general what the Blitz was and that Londoners would often take shelter in Underground stations. That was about it. I didn't know anything about boarding arrangements, about the effects the Blitz had on department stores, and I knew very little about the rationing that went on during the war (I knew that it existed, and that was about it). It was really refreshing to read a book that didn't focus on the military aspects or the Holocaust but instead on civilian life (and the life of women ambulance drivers in the FANY). During the Blitz, any sort of lapse in communications with loved ones meant that one's mind immediately assumed the worst: they hadn't made it to the shelter in time; they were hit by a bomb or by shrapnel; they were caught in a fire ... the Nazis never managed to land on English soil, but they inflicted casualties on London and its citizens all the same. When someone I care about doesn't show up, I just assume he or she got stuck in traffic; the citizens of London in 1940 did not have that luxury. Practically every night involved sheltering underground and listening to bombs going off overhead, wondering if one would return home after the all clear only to find that one no longer *has* a home. Or a place of employment. The historical fiction parts of *Blackout* are fascinating and immensely satisfying.

As a time travel novel, *Blackout* runs into problems about halfway through, once Polly, Mike, and Eileen start worrying that they are stranded in 1940. None of their drops open, so they all have the same idea to find one another and use that person's drop. When they realize they all had the same problem, they wait for a retrieval team from the future to arrive—all the while wondering why the team hasn't *already* arrived (because it's time travel, so there should be no need to wait). Being stranded in the past begins to test our three historians' nerves, because they are trapped in the middle of the Blitz! Polly memorized the dates of

bombings, which buildings were hit, and that sort of thing, but only up until the end of the year—she didn't think she would need to know them for the entire Blitz. So there's a very palpable, somewhat ironic fear here, because in a way these three are more frightened of the Blitz than the stalwart contemporaries (or "contemps" as the historians call them). They are so used to knowing when and where bombs will hit that not knowing is a lot more unusual than it is for the contemps, who never had such foreknowledge. Worse still, even though everything they have ever learned about time travel theory insists historians cannot alter the past, each of them harbours his or her own doubts. Every possible discrepancy becomes a source of concern until it's revealed not to be a discrepancy, and each wonders if he or she has done something that causes the Allies to lose the war.

I can grok their fears. I'd hate to be stranded in the Blitz too, knowing there's some kind of future possible, knowing that I *could* know the dates and places that were bombed but just didn't have that knowledge on me. So for a moment, there's a justifiable and interesting suspense. Unfortunately, Willis attempts to sustain that suspense entirely too long, and my mood moved from sympathetic to annoyed to aggravated as my sympathy for the characters diminished. Kemper's review provides an excellent explanation as to why. If your connection is so slow you don't want to load another page (and that is the only excuse for not reading his review *right now*), allow me to summarize: **all the characters in this book are ninnies**, or as Kemper puts it:

Almost the entire book is their inner dialogues which consist solely of fretting about stupid trivial crap, wild speculation that turns out to be completely wrong and repeatedly asking, "Oh, when will the retrieval team arrive?"

You'd think that time travelers should be hardy adventurers with the ability to improvise and adapt to problems. These dumbasses can't complete the simplest of tasks without it becoming a story of epic proportions.

I couldn't agree more. Leaving aside the government-inquiry-level incompetence of the Oxford time travelling history department (or whatever it's called), which apparently can't be bothered to send historians to the past with the proper preparation, none of the three main characters accomplish anything in *Blackout*. They complain about the retrieval team not showing up and **they lie to each other and keep secrets** to avoid "worrying" each other unnecessarily. Seriously? The three of you are time travellers stuck in 1940, and you don't come clean in your very first conversation, say, "I have a deadline; I was here at V-E day and can't cross my own timeline" (Polly)? You *know* that is only going to lead to trouble, but you do it anyway! I know you guys are only human, and you're flawed and whatnot, but there should be some sort of mandatory certification test for time travel.

But no, Mike, Polly, and Eileen spend the rest of *Blackout* working "together" even as they work a bit at cross-purposes. This leads to all sorts of close misses and coincidences, the type of events that are funny the first time it happens and then just repetitive each time thereafter. The same goes for their rationalizations as to why the retrieval team hasn't arrived. The only explanation that makes sense in their current theory of time travel is that the "slippage" has increased. Slippage is a phenomenon whereby the time-travel net does not send someone to the precise time and location intended. Instead, for some reason, the net "slips" in space or time (but usually not both), and theorists reason this is the universe's way of preventing historians from protecting "divergence points" and preventing passersby from observing the visual manifestation of the historian and his or her drop. Slippage is a safety mechanism, then, of the universe, and time travellers shouldn't be able to alter the past. Willis leaves us wondering if this interpretation is true, or if there is something else happening, and I admit I want to know the answer. Of course, I am writing this from a future when I am already halfway through *All Clear*, and so far that entire book seems unnecessary. But that's

another review....

Find out the stunning conclusion to the review begun here!

Ben's review of *All Clear*

Amy says

Sometimes, if it takes you 10 years to write a book, you just shouldn't. Willis has a writing tick that absolutely annoys me, but in the past, I've been able to mainly ignore it because the storylines have been good. But her annoying writing tick overwhelms any story that was to be had in this book. The tick I'm speaking of is her tendency to talk about every mundane humdrum thing and to catch up every personality-less character that walks in the room concerning these mundane humdrum things. In *Doomsday Book* (which shares a world and characters with this one), Willis had a character tell everyone that walked in the door that there was no toilet paper and why. In this book, Willis has the main character wandering around looking here and there and yonder for someone and everyone telling him alternate ideas of where this person might be. She has characters ramble off lists of what they should do and alternative lists if the hoped-for scenario doesn't work out. Experiencing this book is like being stuck inside one of those exhausting dreams where you relive and repeat some mundane task you've done over and over for the day. If you have writers block for 10 years, for the love of God, don't write until you have something for your characters to do other than run around looking for things, making lists, and getting lost. Somewhere in all this mess is a time travel story involving World War something or the other.

I hate to admit that I was absolutely unable to finish reading this book. Willis' tedious daily-grind style of writing nearly drove me mad. I couldn't take any more of the characters re-hashing EVERYTHING over and over to everyone and thinking out loud about every step of their day-to-day life. Plus, the characters (as usual) have no discernible personality. Listening to this book in CD in the car would eventually always makes my baby cry (she rarely cries), probably because the reader is so blasted annoying, especially when she does children's dialogue.

I read an interview at the I09 book club with Willis concerning this book. I found it interesting that the interview questions are mainly asking her why she wasted so many words having her characters run around in circles in their brains and in their actions in this book. At least I'm not alone in my analysis. Yeesh.

Jamie Collins says

October update: Bump from 4 to 5 stars, when read along with the next book, *All Clear*.

Typically good writing from Connie Willis, and a riveting story - or half of a riveting story, at least. This is the first half of a long novel, and seems chopped off rather than deliberately crafted to be the first volume of a duology. I look forward to the next book, and I almost wish I had waited to read this one until it was available.

The rushed and disorganized Oxford historians of the future with their time travel "net" will be familiar to readers of *Doomsday Book* and *To Say Nothing of the Dog*. This novel focuses mostly on three historians

who position themselves to witness events in England during WWII: the experiences of children evacuated from London to the north of England in 1939; the evacuation of British soldiers from Dunkirk; and the early weeks of the London Blitz. There are other characters introduced but their storylines are abandoned, I can only presume to be picked up in the next book.

Willis tells small, personal stories with very nice historical details. I got wrapped up in the drama of each of the three main characters. The tension in the book is very well done: even though the time travelers have detailed foreknowledge of events, they're still relieved when the bomb falls on schedule and hits the "right" target, for example.

There's a strange error in one of the chapter headings. Queen Elizabeth's most famous quote ("The children won't leave without me...") is attributed to Queen Mary.

Stephanie Swint says

Connie Willis created a beautiful piece of time travel/historical fiction with 'Blackout.' Depending on how you want to look at this book it is either the first book in the All Clear series or the third installment of the Oxford Time Travel series. 'Blackout' includes characters from 'The Doomsday Book' with Colin Templar and Mr. Dunworthy. They are not the stars of this double-decker novel but they do play very important roles. 'Blackout' revolves around three historians from the future sent to observe different key events during World War II. 'Blackout' is the story of what happens when their assignments end but they can't get back home. They either can't get to their drops or they are damaged and won't work. Oxford should send a retrieval team. 'Blackout' is what happens when they don't show up.

I've read this and 'All Clear' three times. I've listened to them and read them and enjoy it both ways. What Connie Willis does extraordinarily well with these books is make the experience of the everyday person who didn't enlist in the war accessible. During World War II people in London were shop girls, children, and old men. She focuses on the every day heroics of the people who lived at the time and took the famous words of Churchill to heart, "Keep calm and carry on." These words that have been appropriated by a new generation were originally meant to steady a people who were sleeping in bomb shelters and waking to find their homes and places of employment bombed. People who would never have been thought of as heroes are highlighted as old clerics joining the fire brigade to keep St. Paul's safe, the shop girls who signed up to become Ambulance drivers and WRENS, children under the age of 16 who were collecting scrap metal and lying to become ARP wardens. Willis paints a realistic picture of rationing and living conditions during one of the coldest, wettest, and bleakest winters in England during 1940. Our historians experience this from the perspective and benefit of privilege. They are from the future where the living conditions and medical breakthroughs make life much easier. They haven't had to deal with shortage. They are historians and they researched the conditions but research and experience are two different things. They have the advantage of knowing that they win the war but the tables are turned when they can't get home. There is a fear that they have changed events. What if they did something to alter the course of the war? They become the contemporaries they were studying. Their only hope is to find other historians studying World War II. If they can find another drop site they will have found a way home.

Willis explores the invasion of Dunkirk, experiences of the evacuated children, the fall of the service class, the Blitz, and the V1 attacks. Her research is solid. She did eight years of research to complete these two books. Some have found the books to be daunting and long due to the amount of detailed historical information included. This, however, is what makes this book special for me. She provides great information sources, but one in particular caught my attention. She utilized the Mass Observation Diaries heavily and credits them as being invaluable. The diaries came from observers and volunteers in London recruited by

Mass Observation. Harrison founded the organization in 1937 with Madge and Jennings to create an 'anthropology of ourselves'. The writers chronicled the lives of ordinary people in Britain. By luck, the study neglected to tell the volunteers writing the journals the study was ending prior to the start of World War II creating an amazing resource of first hand accounts detailing the everyday lives of British citizens during the war. Follow this link to find out more about the original Mass Observation project. I can see why some people would have a hard time engaging in the All Clear Series. It is a commitment to read them. Blackout is 512 pages and All Clear is 643 pages. Willis refers to them as a double-decker novel because Blackout ends abruptly and starts up immediately with All Clear. Many have argued it should have been one book, but if two is a bit unwieldy one would have been extremely off-putting. You will want the sequel immediately. Plan to either download 'All Clear', buy the physical book when you get three fourths of the way done, or download the fabulous narration by Katherine Kellgren immediately after finishing 'Blackout.'

I do not recommend this for people with a short attention span, or those who are looking for a light read. It is hopeful, but it is also drenched in data. If you want a light time travel piece I would encourage you to pick up Rysa Walker's 'Timebound' or 'Just One Damned Thing After Another' by Jodi Taylor. 'Blackout' is a great time travel novel and is a personal favorite. Rarely have I seen an author be able to weave such great fiction around factual history. Usually you get one or the other. If you enjoy historical fiction with the added enjoyment of science fiction time travel this is perfect for you.

If you like this you may like:

- The Doomsday Book by Connie Willis
 - Crytonomicon by Neal Stephenson
-

Erik says

I can't do it anymore. I made it to page 250, but I can't read another page. I just can't do it - I refuse to subject myself to its badness anymore. Why should I? Why should I torture myself?!

This book is bad. That it won the Hugo and Nebula awards straight up blows my mind. KERPOWWWW my brains are mush. It'd be like if Transformers 3 had won the Oscar for Best Picture or if Kermit the Frog was elected president of the United States.

You know all that mundane, boring stuff that never gets shown in movies? Like before the big climactic trial in a law thriller, the protagonist's driving to the courthouse. He arrives but finds there are no parking spots. So he circles around a bit, looking for one, and then finally gives up and goes to a nearby parking garage. But then he finds he has no cash in his wallet, so he drives over to a nearby ATM, waits in line, and gets a couple ten dollar bills. Finally he returns to the parking garage and finds a parking space and pulls in. In his rush, he accidentally locks his keys in the car and his briefcase is in the trunk. DANGIT. So he calls his partner up and asks if she has copies of all the materials needed. No she doesn't. Well, what will take more time: for her to go to the office and bring them to the courthouse or for a locksmith to show up? They argue a bit and decide to just do both. But our protagonist doesn't have the number to a locksmith, so he hikes to a nearby phone booth, hoping to find the yellow pages. There isn't one. But aha, duh, he has a smart phone! It's brand new, yknow, and he's forgotten it and BLAH BLAH BLAH.

Not only does Blackout fail to skip these parts, it **purposefully** focuses on them. I kid you not. I just read an entire 10+ page chapter that involved doing chores. Yep. Chores.

But that's not all. Practically every single element of this book, besides its exhaustive research, is bad.

Characterization is atrocious. There's three main characters: Eileen, Mike, and Polly. I'm 300 pages in, and I am completely unable to describe them. What do they look like? No idea. Hopes/dreams (aside from all REALLY wanting to study history!!!)? No idea. Quirks, idiosyncrasies, political leanings, religious leanings, moral leanings? No idea. There is essentially no characterization.

The structure is atrocious. It's a multiple split narrative, jumping between Eileen, Mike, Polly, and then random others. Even 150 pages in, new narratives were still being tossed in. Like this one that involved blowing up inflatable tanks. Or this FANY (read: a nurse) named Mary. NO introduction to her whatsoever. Just straight up randomly new narrative inserted. I was like... Huh?

The writing is atrocious. Where is the writing voice? There is no flair, no gusto, no sharpness. I'm starving for a decent metaphor or something insightful. I always keep a keen eye out for lines that pop - I like to add them to my quote zoo. ZERO. I have noticed ZERO lines that impressed me. And the internal dialogues... oh my god. Let me give you a taste of what you can expect:

I would if I could, Eileen thought, but while she'd been intent on taking care of her evacuees, Samuels had boarded up all the doors except the one in the kitchen, moved his chair in front of that, and nailed shut the windows in every room but the ballroom, which was always full of children. And she only had ten more days. If no one else came down with the measles.

But if they did, surely Oxford would attempt to pull her out. She was surprised they hadn't already. Now that most of the children had recovered and Binnie was out of danger, Una and Mrs. Bascombe could easily handle the situation but there was no sign of the retrieval team and no message from them.

Seriously, the entire book is written that way: oh this boring thing happened and here are my boring thoughts about it.

The plot sucks. Nothing happens. They're all in England, screwing around, taking care of not-even-that-ill children or looking for a job as a shopgirl and worrying about being unable to properly wrap a package or trying to find a newspaper or talking about dresses. Seriously, it's the mundane junk that reading is supposed to be an escape from.

Even the research, which is admittedly thorough, is turned into a negative because Connie Willis fails to integrate it into the actual plot. For example, this one painful visit to St. Paul's involved Polly walking around and noting that all the artwork/sculptures was either missing or covered in sand bags. Like, "Oh it could have been beautiful but it was covered in sand bags." That was THE ENTIRE POINT OF THE VISIT. To note how un-noteworthy it all was. And a lot of the historical details, if you actually ask a British person or a WW2 historian, are wrong. Whether it be the very clear American dialect/speech patterns coming from British characters or the bizarre romanticism of the evacuation of Dunkirk.

I really cannot stress enough that this book is bad. I would even go so far as to say it is objectively bad. Practically every mistake that first-time novelists are warned to avoid... this book has em. I've read textbooks that were more interesting and children's stories that were more informative. I've read the poems of emotionally compromised teenage girls that had more interesting language.

This book is a huge blow, in my mind, to the credibility of both Hugo & Nebula awards. Well before the snafu with the sad & rabid puppies, Blackout demonstrated to me that these awards are, in many ways, a

popularity contest divorced from an assessment of quality. Apparently the author Connie Willis is a wonderful human being and a fine friend. Which, yknow, good for her - and I mean that. But giving her book a Hugo or Nebula on that account does a massive disservice to readers. I personally have therefore come to view both awards with a healthy dose of skepticism. Literature awards should have a higher criterion than voting for the prom queen.
