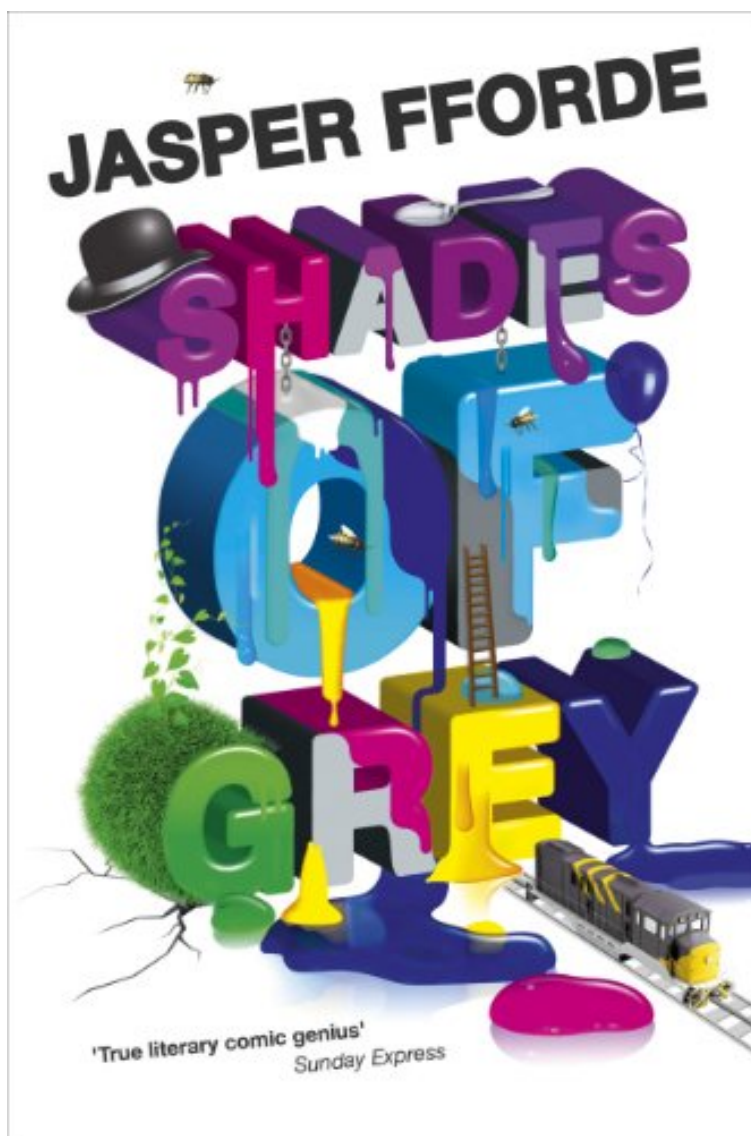


Shades of Grey (English Edition)



Par Jasper Fforde
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Par Jasper Fforde : Shades of Grey (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shades of Grey (English Edition):

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurHundreds of years in the future, after the Something that Happened, the world is an alarmingly different place. Life is lived according to The Rulebook and social hierarchy is determined by your perception of colour. Eddie Russett is an above average Red who dreams of moving up the ladder by marriage to Constance Oxblood. Until he is sent to the Outer Fringes where he meets Jane -- a lowly Grey with an uncontrollable temper and a desire to see him killed. For Eddie, it's love at first sight. But his infatuation will lead him to discover that all is not as it seems in a world where everything that looks black and white is really shades of grey ...If George Orwell had tripped over a paint pot or Douglas Adams favoured colour swatches instead of towels ...neither of them would have come up with anything as eccentrically brilliant as Shades of Grey.ExtraitA Morning in Vermillion2.4.16.55.021: Males are to wear

dress code #6 during inter-Collective travel. Hats are encouraged but not mandatory. It began with my father not wanting to see the Last Rabbit and ended up with my being eaten by a carnivorous plant. It wasn't really what I'd planned for myself. I'd hoped to marry into the Oxbloods and join their dynastic string empire. But that was four days ago, before I met Jane, retrieved the Caravaggio and explored High Saffron. So instead of enjoying aspirations of Chromatic advancement, I was wholly immersed within the digestive soup of a yateveo tree. It was all frightfully inconvenient. But it wasn't all bad, for the following reasons: First, I was lucky to have landed upside down. I would drown in under a minute, which was far, far preferable to being dissolved alive over the space of a few weeks. Second, and more important, I wasn't going to die ignorant. I had discovered something that no amount of merits can buy you: the truth. Not the whole truth, but a pretty big part of it. And that was why this was all frightfully inconvenient. I wouldn't get to do anything with it. And this truth was too big and too terrible to ignore. Still, at least I'd held it in my hands for a full hour and understood what it meant. I didn't set out to discover a truth. I was actually sent to the Outer Fringes to conduct a chair census and learn some humility. But the truth inevitably found me, as important truths often do, like a lost thought in need of a mind. I found Jane, too, or perhaps she found me. It doesn't really matter. We found each other. And although she was Grey and I was Red, we shared a common thirst for justice that transcended Chromatic politics. I loved her, and what's more, I was beginning to think that she loved me. After all, she did apologize before she pushed me into the leafless expanse below the spread of the yateveo, and she wouldn't have done that if she'd felt nothing. So that's why we're back here, four days earlier, in the town of Vermillion, the regional hub of Red Sector West. My father and I had arrived by train the day before and overnights at the Green Dragon. We had attended Morning Chant and were now seated for breakfast, disheartened but not surprised that the early Greys had already taken the bacon, and it remained only in exquisite odor. We had a few hours before our train and had decided to squeeze in some sightseeing. We could always go and see the Last Rabbit, I suggested. I'm told it's unmissable. But Dad was not to be easily swayed by the rabbit's uniqueness. He said we'd never see the Badly Drawn Map, the Oz Memorial, the color garden and the rabbit before our train departed. He also pointed out that not only did Vermillion's museum have the best collection of Vimto bottles anywhere in the Collective, but on Mondays and Thursdays they demonstrated a gramophone. A fourteen-second clip of Something Got Me Started, he said, as if something vaguely Red-related would swing it. But I wasn't quite ready to concede my choice. The rabbit getting pretty old, I persisted, having read the safety briefing in the How Best to Enjoy Your Rabbit Experience leaflet, and petting is no longer mandatory. It's not the petting, said Dad with a shudder, it's the ears. In any event, he continued with an air of finality, I can have a productive and fulfilling life having never seen a rabbit. This was true, and so could I. It was just that I'd promised my best friend, Fenton, and five others that I would log the lonely buns Taxanumber on their behalf and thus allow them to note it as proxy seen in their animal-spotter books. I'd even charged them twenty-five cents each for the privilege then blew the lot on licorice for Constance and a new pair of synthetic red shoelaces for me. Dad and I bartered like this for a while, and he eventually agreed to visit all of the town's attractions but in a circular manner, to save on shoe leather. The rabbit came last, after the color garden. So, having conceded to at least include the rabbit in the morning's entertainment, Dad returned to his toast, tea and copy of Spectrum as I looked idly about the shabby breakfast room, seeking inspiration for the postcard I was writing. The Green Dragon dated from before the Epiphany and, like much of the Collective, had seen many moments, each of them slightly more time worn than the one before. The paint in the room was peeling, the plaster molding was dry and crumbly, the linoleum tabletops were worn to the canvas and the cutlery was either bent, broken or missing. But the hot smell of toast, coffee and bacon, the flippant affability of the staff and the noisy chatter of strangers enjoying transient acquaintance gave the establishment a peculiar charm that the reserved, eminently respectable tearooms back home in Jade-under-Lime could never match. I noticed also that despite the lack of any Rules regarding seat plans in non-hue-specific venues, the guests had unconsciously divided the room along strictly Chromatic lines. The one Ultraviolet was respectfully given a table all to himself, and several Greys stood at the door waiting patiently for an empty table even though there were places available. We were sharing our table with a Green couple. They were of mature years and wealthy enough to wear artificially green clothes so that all could witness their enthusiastic devotion to their hue, a proudly expensive and tastelessly ostentatious display that was doubtless financed by the sale of their child allocation. Our clothes were dyed in a conventional shade visible only to other Reds, so to the Greens sitting opposite we had only our Red Spots to set us apart from the Greys, and were equally despised. When they say red and green are complementary, it doesn't mean we like each other. In fact, the only thing that Reds and Greens can truly

agree on is that we dislike Yellows more. You, said the Green woman, pointing her spoon at me in an exceptionally rude manner, fetch me some marmalade. I dutifully complied. The Green woman's bossy attitude was not atypical. We were three notches lower in the Chromatic scale, which officially meant we were subservient. But although lower in the Order, we were still Prime within the long-established Red-Yellow-Blue Color Model, and a Red would always have a place in the village Council, something the Greens, with their bastard Blue-Yellow status could never do. It irritated them wonderfully. Unlike the dopey Oranges, who accepted their lot with a cheery, self-effacing good humor, Greens never managed to rise above the feeling that no one took them seriously enough. The reason for this was simple: They had the color of the natural world almost exclusively to themselves, and felt that the scope of their sight-gift should reflect their importance within the Collective. Only the Blues could even begin to compete with this uneven share of the Spectrum, as they owned the sky, but this was a claim based mainly on surface area rather than a variety of shades, and when it was overcast, they didn't even have that. But if I thought she was ordering me about solely due to my hue, I was mistaken. I was wearing a NEEDS HUMILITY badge below my Red Spot. It related to an incident with the head prefect's son, and I was compelled to wear it for a week. If the Green woman had been more reasonable, she would have excused me the errand due to the prestigious 1,000 MERITS badge that I also wore. Perhaps she didn't care. Perhaps she just wanted the marmalade. I fetched the jar from the sideboard, gave it to the Green, nodded respectfully, then returned to the postcard I was writing. It was of Vermillion's old stone bridge and had been given a light blue wash in the sky for five cents extra. I could have paid ten and had one with greened grass, too, but this was for my potential fiancée, Constance Oxblood, and she considered overcolorization somewhat vulgar. The Oxbloods were strictly old-color and preferred muted tones of paint wherever possible, even though they could have afforded to decorate their house to the highest chroma. Actually, much to them was vulgar, and that included the Russetts, whom they regarded as *nouveau couleur*. Hence my status as potential fiancée. Dad had negotiated what we called a half promise, which meant I was first-optional to Constance. The agreement fell short of being reciprocal, but it was a good deal a concession that, despite being a Russett and three generations from Grey, I might be able to see a goodly amount of red, so couldn't be ignored completely. Writing to Fish-face already? asked my father with a smile. Her memory's not that bad. True, I conceded, but despite her name, constancy is possibly her least well-defined attribute. Ah. Roger Maroon still sniffing about? As flies to stinkwort. And you mustn't call her Fish-face. More butter, remarked the Green woman, and don't dawdle this time. We finished breakfast and, after some last-minute packing, descended to the reception desk, where Dad instructed the porter to have our suitcases delivered to the station. Beautiful day, said the manager as we paid the bill. He was a thin man with a finely shaped nose and one ear. The loss of an ear was not unusual, as they could be torn off annoyingly easily, but what was unusual was that he'd not troubled to have it stitched back on, a relatively straightforward procedure. More interesting, he wore his Blue Spot high up on his lapel. It was an unofficial but broadly accepted signal that he knew how to fix things, for a fee. We'd had crayfish for dinner the night before, and he hadn't punched it out of ration books. It had cost us an extra half merit, covertly wrapped in a napkin. Every day is a beautiful day, replied my father in a cheery manner. Indeed they are, the manager countered genially. After we had exchanged feedback on the hotel for being clean and moderately comfortable, and on us, for not bringing shame to the establishment by poor table manners or talking loudly in public areas he asked, Do you travel far this morning? We're going to East Carmine. The Blues' manner changed abruptly. He gave us an odd look, handed back our merit books and wished us a joyously uneventful future before swiftly moving to attend someone else. So we tipped the porter, reiterated the time of our train and headed off to the first item on our itinerary. Hmm, said my father, staring at the Badly Drawn Map once we had donated our ten cents and shuffled inside the shabby yet clean map house, I can't make head nor tail of this. The Badly Drawn Map might not have been very exciting, but it was very well named. That's probably why it survived the deFacting, I suggested, for the map was not only mystifying but mind-numbingly rare. Aside from the Parker Brothers' celebrated geochromatic view of the Previous World, it was the only pre-Epiphanic map known. But somehow its rarity wasn't enough to make it interesting, and we stared blankly for some minutes at the faded parchment, hoping to either misunderstand it on a deeper level or at least get our money's worth. The longer and harder we look at it, the cheaper the entrance donation becomes, Dad explained. I thought of asking how long we'd have to stare at it before they owed us money, but didn't. He put his guidebook away, and we walked back out into the warm sunlight. We felt cheated out of our ten cents but politely left positive feedback, since the drabness of the exhibit was no fault of the curators. Dad? Yes? Why was the hotel manager so dismissive of East Carmine? The Outer Fringes have a reputation for being

unsociably dynamic, he said after giving my question some thought, and some consider that eventfulness may lead to progressive thought, with all the attendant risks that might bring to the Stasis. It was a diplomatically prescient remark, and one that I had cause to consider a lot over the coming days. Yes, I said, but what do you think? He smiled. I think we should go and see the Oz Memorial. Even if it's as dull as a magnolia, it will still be a thousand times more interesting than the Badly Drawn Map. We walked along the noisy streets toward the museum and soaked in the hustle, bustle, dust and heat of Vermillion. All about us were the traders who dealt with daily requisites: livestock herders, barrow boys, water sellers, pismen, storytellers and weight guessers.

Catering for more long-term needs were the small shops, such as repairers, artifact dealers, spoon traders and calculating shops that offered addition and subtraction while you waited. Moderators and loopholists were hireable by the minute to advise on matters regarding the Rules, and there was even a shop that traded solely in floaties, and another that specialized in postcode genealogy. Amid it all I noticed a stronger-than-usual presence of Yellows, presumably to keep an eye out for illegal color exchange, seed trading or running with a sharp implement. Unusually for a regional hub, Vermillion was positioned pretty much on the edge of the civilized world. Beyond it to the east were only the Redstone Mountains and isolated outposts like East Carmine. In the uninhabited zone there would be wild outland, megafauna, lost villages of untapped scrap color and quite possibly bands of nomadic Riffraff. It was exciting and worrying all in one, and until the week before, I hadn't even heard of East Carmine, let alone thought I would be spending a month there on Humility Realignment. My friends were horrified, expressed low-to-moderate outrage that I should be treated this way and proclaimed that they would have started a petition if they could have troubled themselves to look for a pencil. The Fringes are the place of the slack-willed, slack-jawed and slack-hued, remarked Floyd Pinken, who could comfortably boast all three of those attributes, if truth be known. And be wary of losers, self-abusers, fence leapers and fornicators, added Tarquin, who, given his family history, would not have seemed out of place there either. They then informed me that I would be demonstrably insane to leave the safety of the village boundary for even one second, and that a trip to the Fringes would have me eating with my fingers, slouching and with hair below the collar in under a week. I almost decided to buy my way out of the assignment with a loan from my twice-widowed aunt Beryl, but Constance Oxblood thought otherwise. You're doing a what? she asked when I mentioned the reason I was going to East Carmine. A chair census, my poppet, I explained. Head Office is worried that the chair density might have dropped below the proscribed 1.8 per person. How absolutely thrilling. Does an ottoman count as a chair or a very stiff cushion? She went on to say that I would be showing significant daring and commendable bravery if I went, so I changed my mind. With the prospect of joining the family of Oxblood and of myself as potential perfect material, I was going to need the broadening that travel and furniture counting would doubtless bring, and a month in the intolerably unsophisticated Outer Fringes might well supply that for me. The Oz Memorial trumped the Badly Drawn Map in that it was baffling in three dimensions rather than just two. It was a partial bronze of a group of oddly shaped animals, the whole about six feet high and four feet across. According to the museum guide, it had been cut into pieces and dumped in the river three centuries before as part of the defacing, so only two figures remained of a possible five. The best preserved was that of a pig in a dress and a wig, and next to her stood a bulbous-bodied bear in a necktie. Of the third and fourth figures there remained almost nothing, and of the fifth, only two claw-shaped feet truncated at the ankles, modeled on no creature living today. The eyes are very large and humanlike for a pig, said my father, peering closer. And I've seen a number of bears in my life, but none of them wore a hat. They were very big on anthropomorphism, I ventured, which was pretty much accepted fact. The Previous had many other customs that were inexplicable, none more so than their propensity to intermingle fact with fiction, which made it very hard to figure out what had happened and what hadn't. Although we knew that this bronze had been cast in honor of Oz, the full dedication on the plinth was badly eroded, so it remained tantalizingly unconnected to any of the other Oz references that had trickled down through the centuries. Debating societies had pondered long and hard over the Oz Question, and published many scholarly tracts within the pages of Spectrum. But while remnants of Tin Men had been unearthed by salvage teams, and Emerald City still existed as the center of learning and administration, no physical evidence of brick roads had ever been found anywhere in the Collective, either of natural or synthetic yellow and naturalists had long ago rejected the possibility that monkeys could fly. Oz, it was generally agreed, had been a fiction, and a fairly odd one. But in spite of that, the bronze remained. It was all a bit of a puzzle. After that, we paused only briefly to look at the exhibits in the museum, and only those of more than passing interest. We stopped and stared at the collection of Vimto bottles, the preserved Ford Fiesta with its obscene level of intentional obsolescence, then at the Turner, which Dad thought wasn't

his best. After that, we made our way to the floorbelow, where we marveled at the realistic poses in the life-size Riffraffdiorama, which depicted a typical Homo feralensis encampment. It was all disturbingly lifelike and full of savagery and unbridled lust, and was for the most part based upon Alfred Peabody's seminal work, *Seven Minutes among the Riffraff*. We stared at the lifeless mannequins with a small crowd of schoolchildren, who were doubtless studying the lower order of Human as part of a Historical Conjecture project. Do they really eat their own babies? asked one of the pupils as she stared with horrified fascination at the tableau. Absolutely, replied the teacher, an elderly Blue who should have known better, and you, too, if you don't respect your parents, observe the Rules and finish up your vegetables. Personally, I had doubts about some of the more ridiculous claims regarding Riffraff. But I kept them to myself. Conjecture was a dish mostly served up wild. As it turned out, the phonograph would not be demonstrated, because both it and the music disc had been put beyond use with a very large hammer. This wasn't a result of mischief, but a necessary outcome of Leapback Compliance issues, as some fool hadn't listed the device on this year's exemption certificate. The staff at the museum seemed a trifle annoyed about this, as the destruction of the artifact reduced the Collective's demonstrable phonographs to a solitary machine in Cobalt's Museum of the Something That Happened. But it wasn't all bad, added the curator, a Red with very bushy eyebrows. At least I can lay claim to being the last person ever to hear Mr. Simply Red. After giving detailed feedback, we left the museum and headed off toward the Municipal Gardens. We paused on the way to admire an impressive wall painting of great antiquity that was emblazoned across the gable end of a brick house. It invited a long-vanished audience to Drink Ovaltine for Health and Vitality, and there was an image of a mug and two odd-looking but happy children, their football-sized eyes staring blankly out at the world with obvious satisfaction and longing. Although faded, the red components in the lips and script were still visible. Pre-Epiphanic wall paintings were rare and, when they depicted the Previous, creepy. It was their eyes. Their pupils, far from being the fine, neat dot of normal people's, were unnaturally wide and dark and empty as though their heads were somehow hollow and this gave their look of happiness a peculiar and contrived demeanor. We stood and stared at it for a moment, then moved on. Any colorized park was a must-see for visitors, and Vermillions offering certainly didn't disappoint. The color garden, laid out within the city walls, was a leafy enclave of dappled shade, fountains, pergolas, gravel paths, statuary and flower beds. It also had a bandstand and an ice cream stall, even if there was no band, nor any ice cream. But what made Vermillions park really special was that it was supplied by color piped directly from the grid, so it was impressively bright. We walked up to the main grassed area, just past the picturesque, ivy-gripped Rodin, and stared at the expanse of synthetic green. It was a major improvement on the park back home, because the overall scheme was tuned for the predominance of Red eyes. In Jade-under-Lime the bias was more toward those who could see green, which meant that the grass was hardly colored at all and everything red was turned up far too bright. Here the color balance was pretty much perfect, and we stood in silence, contemplating the subtle Chromatic symphony laid out in front of us. I'd give my left plum to move to a Red sector, murmured Dad in a rare display of crudeness. You already pledged the left one, I pointed out, in the vague hope that Old Man Magenta would retire early. Did I? Last autumn, after the incident with the rhinoceros. What a dope that man is, said Dad, shaking his head sadly. Old Man Magenta was our head prefect and, like many Purples, would have trouble recognizing himself in a mirror. Do you think that's really the color of grass? asked Dad after a pause. I shrugged. There was no real way of telling. The most we could say was that this was what National Color felt the color of grass should be. Ask a Green how green grass was and they'd ask you how red was an apple. But interestingly, the grass wasn't uniformly green. An area the size of a tennis court in the far corner of the lawn had changed to an unpleasant bluey-green. The discordancy was spreading like a water stain, and the off-color area had also taken in a tree and several beds of flowers, which now displayed unusual hues quite outside Standard Botanical Gamut. Intrigued, we noticed there was someone staring into an access hatch close to the anomaly, so we wandered over to have a look. We expected him to be a National Color engineer working on the problem, but he wasn't. He was a Red park keeper, and he glanced at our spots, then hailed us in a friendly manner. Problems? asked Dad. Of the worst sort, replied the park keeper wearily. Another blockage. The Council are always promising to have the park repiped, but whenever they get any money, they spend it on swan early-warning systems, lightning protection or something equally daft. It was unguarded talk, but we were Reds, too, so he knew he was safe. We peered curiously into the access hatch where the cyan, yellow and magenta color pipes fed into one of the many carefully calibrated mixers in order to achieve the various hues required for the grass, shrubs and flowers. From there they would feed the network of capillaries that had been laid beneath the park. Colorizing gardens was a complex task

that involved matching the osmotic coefficients of the different plants with the specific gravities of the dyes and that was before you got started on pressure density evaporation rates and seasonal hue variation.

Colorists earned their perks and bonuses. I had a pretty good idea what the problem was, even without looking at the flow meters. The bluey-green cast of the lawn, the grey appearance of the celandines and the purplish poppies suggested localized yellow deficiency, and this was indeed the case the yellow flow meter was firmly stuck on zero. But the viewing port was full of yellow, so it wasnt a supply issue from the park substation. I think I know what the problem is, I said quietly, knowing full well that unlicensed tampering with National Color property carried a five-hundred-merit fine. The park keeper looked at me, then at Dad, then back to me. He bit his lip and scratched his chin, looked around and then lowered his voice. Can it be easily fixed? he asked. We have a wedding at three. Theyre only Grey, but we try to make an effort. I looked at Dad, who nodded his assent. I pointed at the pipe. The yellow flow meters jammed, and the lawns receiving only the cyan component of the grass-green. Although I would never condone rule breaking of any sort, I added, making sure I had deniability if everything turned brown, I believe a sharp rap with the heel of a shoe would probably free it. The park keeper looked around, took off his shoe and did what I suggested. Almost instantly there was an audible gurgling noise. Well, Ill be jaundiced, he said. As easy as that? Here. And he handed me a half merit, thanked us and went off to package up the grass clippings for cyan-yellow retrieval. How did you know about that? said Dad as soon as we were out of earshot. Overheard stuff, mostly, I replied. We had a burst magenta feed a few years back, which was exciting and dramatic all at the same time a cascading fountain of purple all over the main street. National Color was all over us in an instant, and I volunteered myself as tea wallah just to get close. The technical language of the colorists was fairly obfuscating, but I did pick up a bit. It was every residents dream to work at National Color, but not a realistic prospect: Your eyes, feedback, merits and sycophancy had to be beyond exemplary, and only one in a thousand of those who qualified to take the entrance exam. We ambled around the garden for as long as time would permit, soaking in the synthetic color and feeling a lot better for it. Unusually, they had hydrangeas in both colors, and delicately hand-tinted azaleas that looked outside of the CYM gamut: a rare luxury, and apparently a bequest from a wealthy Lilac. We noted that there wasnt much pure yellow in the garden, which was probably a sop to the Yellows in the town. They liked their flowers natural, and since they could cause trouble if not acceded to, they were generally given their own way. When we passed the lawn on our way out, the grass in the anomaly was beginning to turn back to fresh lawn green, more technically known as 102-100-64. It would be back to full chroma in time for the wedding. We stepped out of the color garden, and walked back toward the main square. On the way we passed a Leaper who was seated by the side of the road, covered entirely in a coarse blanket except for his alms arm. I put my recently acquired half merit in his open palm, and the figure nodded in appreciation. Dad looked at his watch. I suppose, he said with little enthusiasm, we should go and have the rabbit experience. *Revue de presse* The world of the near future is anything but an ashen wasteland in the impish British authors refreshingly daft first volume of a new fantasy series. Already cult-worshipped for his popular Thursday Next and Nursery Crimes novels (First Among Sequels, 2007, etc.) *Fforde* is something like a contemporary Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear. Hes a shameless punster with a demonic flair for groan-worthy parodies and lampoons, and its just too much bother to try to resist his greased-pig narratives. In this one, which does take place in a possibly post-apocalyptic world, a repressive Colorocracy ranks and separates citizens according to their ability to perceive particular colors. For example, haughty Greens and dictatorial Yellows (Gamboges) deem Red-ness hopelessly lower class. Its as if 1984 were ruled by Coco Chanel. Our hero, Eddie Russett (a Red, naturally), is an affable young man who hangs out with his father Holden (a healer known as a watchman), killing time until his arranged marriage to fellow Red Constance Oxblood. But when son and father resettle in the odd little hamlet of East Carmine, the lads eyes are opened to a confusion of standards and mores, and the realities of sociopolitical unrest. While serving his punishment for a school prank by compiling a chair census, Eddie visits fascinating new places, enjoys the wonders of the UnLibrary and the organized worship of Oz, and decides that conscientious resistance to entrenched authority probably wont bring about the ultimate ecological catastrophe Mildew. Hes a little less sure about his wavering infatuation with Jane, a militant, pissed-off Grey (theyre the proles) who rather enjoys abusing him. Eventually, the best and brightest prosper, while characters of another color end up in the relational red (so to speak). All this is serenely silly, but to dispel a black mood and chase away the blues, this witty novel offers an eye-popping spectrum of remedies. A grateful hue and cry (as well as sequels) may be anticipated. *STARRED* Kirkus In Eddie Russetts world, color is destiny. A persons perception of color, once tested, determines their rank in the Colorocracy, with primes ruling bastard colors

and everyone lording it over the prole-like grays. No one can see more than their own color, and no one knows why but there are many unknowns ever since *Something Happened*, followed by the deFacting and successive *Great Leaps Backward*. Due to an infraction against the Collectives rule-bound bureaucracy, Eddie is sent to East Carmine, in the Outer Fringes, where manners are shockingly poor, to conduct a month-long chair census. In short order, he falls in love, runs afoul of the local prefects, learns a terrible secret, and is eaten by a carnivorous tree. This series starter combines the dire warnings of *Brave New World* and *1984* with the deevolutionary visions of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and *Riddley Walker*, but, Fforde being Fforde, his dystopia includes an abundance of teashops and a severe shortage of jam varieties. It's all brilliantly original. If his complex worldbuilding sometimes slows the plot and the balance of silly and serious is uneasy, we're still completely won over. In our own willful myopia, we sorely need the laughs. **STARRED**

Booklist