

on better memory and they each give away free one memory technique, and each gives pretty much the same technique. And you could find that same technique free by going to the library and getting out a book on memory devices. Many of them, including each of the memory courses, come on cassette. Now the library book will have about 160 pages of about 300 words each--that's about 48,000 words. The cassettes will usually be eight cassettes, each with a 50-minute

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lecture filled with music and pauses for exercises. You will get roughly 6000 words per cassette or a total of about 48,000 words. You are paying between \$50 and \$100 to save yourself the effort of going to the library and reading one book. But how much money is there is saying you can change your life by going to the library and reading a book? Instead, some guy claiming to be from "The Memory Institute"--you won't find that one in any list of America's learning institutions--claims he learned these techniques from a man who went from being an auto mechanic to a millionaire in two years. (Hey, at the rates my mechanic charges, he is well on his way without any secrets!)

The one thing these commercials are good for is to get an idea of what is important to us as Americans. How often have you heard someone get on television and say for \$49.95 he will send you a set of cassettes that will teach you about national fiscal policy or particle physics. No, the topics are cellulite, weight loss, memory, car polishes, paint pads, improving you sex life, being a supportive wife (Hey, Evelyn, you want to take the "Light His Fire" course? No, I thought not.), over-priced woks, and racks to stuff into turkeys' rear ends to stand them up in the oven.

And now that this set of articles is over I don't feel I have to watch another damn one of these stupid programs.

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The greatest vested interest is not property but ignorance.

TERRAPLANE by Jack Womack
Tor, 1990 (1988c), ISBN 0-812-50623-5, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This starts out as a futuristic science spy type of novel. But when the main characters try to escape from the Soviet Union in an airplane, they trigger a device which catapults them into an alternate world--or more accurately, a parallel world. Why the latter rather than the former? Well, they find themselves not in the 21st Century, but in 1939, which they attribute to the rate of history being different in the second world. This idea of a similar (or not so similar) world just a step away from ours is more in line with the parallel universe assumption, even though the use of a break-point to build a different world than our own is more an alternate history convention.

And there is a break-point, though to reveal it would take much of the enjoyment out of the novel, since part of Womack's skill is in gradually showing us what has made this world what it is. It is not a

"steampunk" world, though the cover with its high-tech look around a 1930s car might give you that impression. The technology in universe #2's 1939 has minor differences from our own, but there are no amazing steam-driven spaceships or anything.

Womack also does a good job in showing life in universe #2 from the point of view of the blacks. Too often, scientists who travel to an alternate universe meet scientists in that universe, travel in comfortable circles, and don't have to deal with any class problems. The other variant, of course, is they find themselves a black scientist in an America where slavery still exists or some such. But in T_e_r_r_a_p_l_a_n_e Womack draws something partway between these two extremes, and does it well.

The weaknesses of the novel are minor. The claim of differing rates of time to explain how the protagonists end up in 1939 is, I think, not really convincing. (Is it that some critical event such as the first multi-celled being occurred 60 years later in one universe, or is it that everything in universe #2 happens at the speed of the life of universe #1 minus 60 years, all divided by the life of universe #1?) Some explanation of how traveling between universes sometimes results in a time-slip might have served better. A couple of the subplots could have been eliminated, but don't really detract greatly. A more annoying distraction is the future lingo that the characters speak--evidently the next major resource crisis is that all the verbs are used up and nouns and adjectives must serve instead. So the characters talk about how someone needs to be hospitalized, or how they curbsided their car. After a while the reader is annoyed by this, and wants to wallslam the book. Luckily, for most of the book the characters normal-language rather than future-speak, so it is bearable.

BLACK ALICE by Thomas M. Disch and John Sladek
Carroll & Graf, 1989 (1968c), ISBN 0-88184-506-X, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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The Tenniel-like illustration on the cover of this book notwithstanding, B_l_a_c_k_A_l_i_c_e has little if any connection to

Alice's
Adventure in Wonderland or
Through the Looking Glass. The plot of this
mystery novel involves the kidnapping of a young girl named Alice who
converses with an imaginary companion named Dinah. She is held for
ransom in a warehouse and, to be sure she isn't recognized, the
kidnappers give her a pill that turns her black (not entirely
unrealistic--that's similar to how the author of *Black Like Me* did his
research). While the mystery proceeds--not even so much who did the
kidnapping, or even why, but some of the history and motivation behind
the whole sequence of events--we see how Alice, having previously led a
life of comfort and even luxury, must learn to live as a black child.
While I would not claim this is primarily a biting commentary on race
relations, I would say that one feature of the story is its
demonstration that outsiders' perceptions are frequently more important
than one's own feelings about one's place in society. William Blake may
have said, "A sincere belief that anything is so will make it so," but
he didn't say whether he was referring to a long-term transformation or
the more immediate problem of convincing the policeman at a race riot
that you as a black person just happened to be walking by on your way to
the store. One suspects it was more the former.

While no one aspect of this book is outstanding, they are all
well-done: the plot has a reasonable level of complication, the
characterization results in interesting yet believable characters, the
social commentary is there yet subtle. Fans of Disch or Sladek will be
interested in this, of course, but even for those who are not I would
give this a mild recommendation.

DIE HARD 2: DIE HARDER
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: McClane is back, picking his wife up at the airport and foiling a plot by mercenaries to free a Noriega-like dictator. Much in the mold of a James Bond film, D _ i _ e _ H _ a _ r _ d _ 2 has some good suspense, good action, nice visuals, and minorities in good roles that did not necessarily call for minorities. McClane is not as creative as in D _ i _ e _ H _ a _ r _ d , but his powers of deduction are tested just as much. Rating: high +1.

This year there is no James Bond film, in fact, but there is a reasonable substitute. There is no film about British superspy James Bond being sent out to save England, but there is a film about L.A. supercop John McClane sending himself out to pick up his wife from Dulles Airport in Washington D.C. McClane is played by Bruce Willis who is my idea of no actor, but in films such as this can be a reasonable substitute. Of course, dealing with an airport during Christmas rush is never easy. McClane has to deal with airport police who ticket him for parking in a no-parking zone and with a bunch of Army-bred mercenaries who are trying to free Manuel Noriega (thinly disguised under the character name Esperanza). D _ i _ e _ H _ a _ r _ d _ 2 is the story of how McClane gets the airport police to tear up the parking ticket and how he picks up his wife on a night when Dulles is not at its dullest. I will not say exactly how McClane gets the ticket torn up but it involves killing a bunch of "bad guys" and saving a lot of "good guys" (to use his sophisticated jargon). It also involves him being just about the only guy with intelligence and pluck in an airport full of and run by jerks.

D _ i _ e _ H _ a _ r _ d _ 2 i _ s a big beefy action film much in the style of a James Bond film. It follows the time-honored traditions of Bond films, like all the luck working for the hero. McClane makes no false moves while trained commandos make mistakes such as running out of ammunition without realizing it. Eight bad guys can be having a showdown with McClane but they will very obligingly attack one at a time so McClane can pick them off like Horatio at the Bridge. Later, when there is one piece of equipment that McClane really needs it just sort of falls into his hands, no muss, no fuss. That is not to say there is not a whole lot of musing and fussing in the film. But McClane is the sort of hero who can go through a trash compactor, wince and maybe bleed a little to remind the audience that it is painful to be compacted, and five minutes later he is back to normal. His bones must be made of the stuff they built Patton tanks from (or perhaps should build them from).

There are a number of reasons the plot could not really proceed as

it does. McClane gets an identification on a character based on fingerprints that he faxes from a car rental stand. Even assuming he

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could coerce the car rental agency to do his faxing, it is very unlikely the print at the other end would have anything but black blotches. But I guess part of the fun of seeing a film like this is picking holes in the screenplay, which in this case was written by Doug Richardson and Steven de Souza. The latter wrote _ 4_ 8_ H_ o_ u_ r_ s and here is adapting _ 5_ 8_ M_ i_ n_ u_ t_ e_ s, the novel by Walter Wager on which _ D_ i_ e_ H_ a_ r_ d_ 2 is based.

Visual effects are impressive and provided by Industrial Light and Magic. One very nice shot involves McClane sort of flying away from an explosion but toward the camera. The musical score is by Michael Kamen. Rare is the film review that has a spoiler warning for a comment about the musical score, but this one does. Jump to the next paragraph if you wish to avoid it. Through the film Kamen often uses a theme for the villains that sounds just like the first eight notes of Sibelius's "Finlandia." Well, I had always thought they did sound ominous, but was it coincidence or was Kamen really quoting? Sibelius's tribute to Finland has, after all, little to do with the story at hand. Then in the final suspense scene the orchestra finally breaks out into a big chunk of "Finlandia." The end credits then are a full orchestral performance of "Finlandia." It sounds mighty good in Dolby Surroundsound. That's worth fifty cents of the admission price all by itself.

This is an enjoyable action film: nothing requiring great thought, but certainly enjoyable. I would give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

