



be said,

suffers from the same flaws and difficulties as most middle-of-a-trilogy novels. It does not start at the beginning, nor does it go through to the end. You must know what happened in R\_e\_d\_M\_a\_r\_s for G\_r\_e\_e\_n\_M\_a\_r\_s to make any sense or have any meaning. There is also (to my tastes) far too much technical discussion of terraforming

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and areology, though some may really like this part. It is only in the second half of G\_r\_e\_e\_n\_M\_a\_r\_s that Robinson returns in force to the political and historical aspects of the series. All in all, I have to reserve final judgement on G\_r\_e\_e\_n\_M\_a\_r\_s until B\_l\_u\_e\_M\_a\_r\_s

concludes the series, and then see if G\_r\_e\_e\_n\_M\_a\_r\_s serves its purpose in the overall picture. That is the only way to view this book and much as I want to see Kim Stanley Robinson finally get a Hugo, it makes no sense to me to look at this as a possibility. But of course, your mileage may vary. [-ecl]

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2. I was talking last week about a French company that is working on touchy-feely suits to employ virtual reality to allow lovemaking to be done at a distance over data communications lines. Now is this a growth industry that AT&T could get into on the ground floor or am I nuts? (Don't answer that. Whether I am nuts or not has nothing to do with it.) Talk about giving the customers a product they can relate to, this is it. I mean all you hear about these days is safe-sex. Well, this really is really safe. You might get an electric shock, but you darned sure are not going to get a virus--unless maybe a computer virus.

Now think of the special expertise AT&T could bring to this market. Think of the possibilities that get added if we just apply what we know about conference calls. Then we can bring in answering technology, particularly the capability to record messages. If you are not home when your lover called you can record the message and play it back when you want. As often as you want. You can even keep a recording and play it back when you feel the urge. You can record a library of your favorite calls and play them back whenever

you need some excitement. Then you can trade them with your friends. Soon people will be selling them. You might even be able to get great performances on CD ROM. Then you could put the data into a computer, analyze it, and compose new scenarios and new compositions. It gives a whole new meaning to the Turing Test. We are talking here about what could become a new form of art. You start by giving young people something they really want and would be willing to pay for ... guilt-free, risk-free, one-night stands. Lots of communities already have numbers you can phone in to be part of a big conference call where you meet strangers. With the use of this technology, those community numbers could replace singles bars. (One imagines pickup lines like "Hey baby, wanna plug me into your serial port?")

There is a cartoon showing two dogs sitting at a computer and the older dog is telling the puppy "On the Internet nobody knows you're a dog." That line has new meaning here. In fact with virtual reality You can appear to be a stranger who is just your correspondent's type. Your lover need never know what you look

like and can instead set some required parameters, and let the system choose others at random. There are no dogs on the Internet.

You know, I do this to myself all the time. This started out as a joke. I read a real article in W\_o\_r\_l\_d\_P\_r\_e\_s\_s\_R\_e\_v\_i\_e\_w and I thought I could get milk some humor from describing it to you. It is sort of a whimsical science fiction speculation. Right now it just doesn't seem all that whimsical. I wonder if in fifteen years we won't see this article--those of us who remember it--as more prophecy than humor. It all sounds like it is a bit sleezy for AT&T, but I wonder if it is. AIDS has lent an air of respectability to the makers of condoms. The mores of society are changing. Sooner or later somebody is going to make a\_l\_o\_t of money off of this idea. But I bet you it won't be AT&T.

Stephen Bury is a pen name for the writing team of Neal Stephenson ( \_ S \_ n \_ o \_ w \_ C \_ r \_ a \_ s \_ h ) and J. Frederick George. (Someone on the Net claimed that George is Stephenson's father; I have no further evidence of that.) And \_ I \_ n \_ t \_ e \_ r \_ f \_ a \_ c \_ e is a high-tech political thriller about a politician who suffers a stroke and undergoes a radically new treatment--with some startling side effects.

In many ways this was reminiscent of Stephen King's \_ D \_ e \_ a \_ d \_ Z \_ o \_ n \_ e-- there's a political campaign, complete with fascists, seedy politicians, and schemes and plots galore. There are some everyday sorts of characters who find themselves caught up in the sweep of events. The plot device may be different (though both deal with extraordinary mental powers), but a lot of what surrounds it is the same. It's true that Bury uses his humor slightly differently from King. King uses a slapstick approach, while Bury has a more intellectual tack: "Brain cells didn't grow. But the connections between them did. The network of linkages was constantly shifting and reconnecting itself in a process that was usually described as 'learning.' Dr. Radhakrisnan did not really care for this terminology because it contained a value judgment. It implied that every time new synapses were formed inside a person's head it was because they were memorizing Shakespeare or being taught how to integrate transcendental functions. Of course, in reality most of the internal rewiring that went on in people's brains took place in response to watching game shows on television, being beaten up by family members, figuring out the cheapest place to buy cigarettes, and being conditioned not to mix plaids with stripes."

Unfortunately, the careful plotting slips up in a couple of spots. On page 10 it is established that Clinton is no longer President,

yet on page 356 a televised debate is running the theme of "Campaign '96." (Yes, there could have been an impeachment, but the story seems to rule this out.) Later, someone seems to think a Presidential term runs eight years. And would a whiz-bang political campaign manager really hire someone from \_ S \_ t \_ a \_ r \_ T \_ r \_ e \_ k : \_ T \_ h \_ e \_ N \_ e \_ x \_ t \_ G \_ e \_ n \_ e \_ r \_ a \_ t \_ i \_ o \_ n as someone he was trying to pass off as a news anchorman?

If the science-fictional device is not entirely convincing, well, I'm willing suspend my disbelief given that most of the rest of the story is believable. The book moves along briskly (I read it in five hours of plane flights) and keeps the reader's interest. But it's more a political thriller than hard science fiction. Readers who enjoyed S\_n\_o\_w\_C\_r\_a\_s\_h may also miss the philosophical underpinnings that were present in that earlier work. Of course, this may be one reason why Stephenson's name does not appear on this volume.

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"There is no 'i' in 'team'.  
-- ON DEADLY GROUND  
"There's none in 'Cyclops' either, now"  
-- Odysseus