

I was trying to figure out what that title could mean--it didn't seem to syntax somehow, when he went on to explain the game. You are in a magic war and you attack your enemy through the use of these game cards. Each card changes rules like in COSMIC ENCOUNTER--another game that for a while was popular at science

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fiction conventions. The cards each have inscriptions like "All players and flying creatures suffer X damage" or "Target creature regenerates" or "Target spell is countered four times cost of target spell" or "All damage from any one source is added to your life instead of subtracted." Well, it is an interesting concept that you don't pull the cards from some stack on the game board but buy them. That adds some mystery since you don't know what cards are out there.

So far it sounded like an interesting idea. Nothing too shocking. At least not yet. I asked, once you have used a card what happens to it? It stays played and can't be reused. I suppose it could be played again in the next game, but I am not sure this game is designed to be played more than once. One thing still puzzled me however. Then I asked THE QUESTION. "What," I asked, "is to stop whoever invests the most money in these cards from having a real advantage over his opponent?" "Well, nothing. That's usually how it works, in fact." At first that bothered me a little until I gave it a little bit of thought. Then it bothered me a lot. I had seen this sort of thing before someplace else.

This guy Richard Garfield, the inventor of the game, in effect created several artificial wars so he could sell these cards, which are really weapons, to both sides of the conflict. So how is this guy any different from an arms manufacturer? Well clearly he is different in some fundamental ways, though none that will win him any Nobel Peace Prizes. First, he really does have the ability to invent his own little wars. And there are more than enough fans of gaming who will cooperate with him and fight the wars. An arms merchant doesn't have it quite that easy. Then when a war starts, Garfield is assured that only he can sell the weapons to each side. If anyone else tries, he can scream copyright infringement. Now a real arms manufacturer actually has to develop and produce arms. Garfield just has to think of his weapons and print the ideas up on

pasteboard. By just thinking of the weapon he can make it exist. The only thing positive I can say for him is that his weapons don't actually kill, they only "play kill" in a game.

But Garfield has set up a game in which whoever has the biggest bucks can buy himself a big advantage. That is true of most militaries. And deep down, is that any different from other walks of life? Isn't that the American Way? The basketball player who can afford the best shoes has a jump on the player who can't. The college football team who purchases the best recruit has the advantage the one that doesn't. And it's not just sports. When I was in high school the SATs measured aptitude and that was all. You had as much as you had and no more. Then there was no royal road to aptitude. But there were people willing to pay to look smarter to the colleges and somebody wanted that money. I was told in Long Island high schools in a certain affluent neighborhood I know about, every student took out-of-school courses in how to ace

the SATs. It is considered a real disadvantage to have to take the tests cold like the poor folks do. These places have statistics to prove they can improve scores. And I believe it, because any test takes some figuring out and adapting to. If you think about it, that is built into the scores and is actually part of the measure of aptitude--but it is the part that someone can give you the answer sheet about ... if you can pay. Once again it is the guy with the big bucks who can buy the appearance of aptitude and intelligence. And it is him who will probably get the high-paying jobs, over someone who is less affluent but more deserving. I think that explains a lot about what is happening in this country. Nobody seems all that upset about SAT-cramming courses. It is just supply and demand. Well, I guess you get the society that you are willing to settle for.

2. THE HIDDEN LIFE OF DOGS by Elizabeth Marshall Thomas (Houghton-Mifflin, ISBN 0-395-66968-8, 1993, 148pp, US\$18.95) (a book review by Mark R. Leeper):

I find that overall my book reviews tend to be a little more negative than my film reviews. I think that part of the reason for this is that reading a book requires both more time and more effort than seeing a film and I think I may assume that a book should pay off in dividends that are proportionately high. Now one of the remarkable things is that some of the books that pay the highest dividends are some of the shortest books. Alan Lightman's E_i_n_s_t_e_i_n'_s_D_r_e_a_m_s was too short to be a novel, it was more a novella, but it was richer in ideas than any other science fiction book I had read in years. Curiously most science fiction shops did not even carry it, considering it not their thing. Perhaps it wasn't their thing but it certainly should have been. That was the best fiction book I have read for years. The best non-fiction book is probably about the same length. In less than sparse 150 pages, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's H_i_d_d_e_n_L_i_f_e_o_f_D_o_g_s. In that short space are joy, tragedy, science, philosophy, and a generally good story.

Thomas is an anthropologist who is best known for T_h_e_H_a_r_m_l_e_s_s_P_e_o_p_l_e, a study of the !Kung people. I never actually read the book but who can forget a name like !Kung? Her studies of dogs began when she started to wonder where a dog in her care went when he escaped to illegal freedom. Also she wanted to understand his need for escape. She decided to follow Mischa and observe what she could from her anthropological insight. I had a dog when I was growing up and learned enough about canine behavior to put to rest in my mind the foolish myth that dogs think they are human. Thomas does not even start that basically. In talking about her dogs she sees them as creatures with comprehensible intellects, but still

alien. She is very candid about the mysteries of canine behavior she was able to fathom and those that she could not. She has observed, by her reconning 100,000 hours of dogs lives and condensed her experiences into this short book.

As an example of her writing, in her introduction she says "Do dogs think we're God? Probably not. But just as we think of God's ways as mysterious, dogs find our ways capricious and mysterious, often with excellent reason. Every day the humane societies

execute thousands of dogs who tried all their lives to do their very best for their owners. These dogs are killed not because they are bad but because they are inconvenient. So as we need God more than He needs us, dogs need us more than we need them, and they know it." As I have watched dogs I have seen them try to puzzle out our behavior and that seems to be a very accurate observation.

Thomas makes no societal values when studying dogs. Instead she treats canine society as if were an unknown human culture. While it is clear that she likes and respects dogs, she reports dispassionately both positive and negative aspects of canine society--some as negative as infanticide. But as she would with humans, when she describes the negative aspects, she tries to understand the reasons. She also describes early in the book her observations of dogs picking up human characteristics and mannerisms. As she describes the lives of the dogs of her acquaintance her narrative takes on some of the characteristics of an epic novel spanning three generations, though of course not as many years as if they were human generations. When she says what a dog is feeling, she usually will tell you her evidence, but it does not lessen the impact.

It is difficult to describe this book without making it sound too much like W_a_t_e_r_s_h_i_p_D_o_w_n or even L_a_d_y_a_n_d_t_h_e_T_r_a_m_p. You have to read it to understand how keenly observed the book is. But it is definitely recommended and will forever come to mind when you have interactions with dogs in the future.

3. The schedule for book discussions has been slightly re-arranged, since David Brin's G_l_o_r_y_S_e_a_s_o_n has just been released in paperback. [-ecl]

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