Book Review: Neuromancer

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Recommended Citation
Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not: un-rewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

For the seasoned TQM or reengineering business person, Vision, Values and Courage, on the surface, appears to be a rerun of some familiar themes. However, the examples listed throughout are integrated with academic theories in such a way as to strengthen one's recall of the key points. At a minimum, the book provides the knowledgeable reader with a few tools and good ideas to make the reading worthwhile. For the novice, this reading provides an excellent overview of current business practices and thinking and a strong foundation in the terminology being used today. All in all, Vision, Values and Courage is worth your time.

Neuromancer
By William Gibson
Ace Books, 1984,
Reviewed by Dr. Robert J. Bunker, adjunct professor, National Securities Studies program, California State University, San Bernardino, CA.

Those in the RD&A community, above all others, recognize that advanced commercial and military technology is now taking us down many new and never explored scientific paths. To understand where we are going and not be left behind, we have to keep our minds open to radically new concepts and perceptions. We must remain childlike in our ability to absorb new knowledge because as the traditional military paradigm begins to shift, we can't afford not to. One way to remain on the cutting edge of the emerging Information Age is to read those works which have had a profound effect on the reshaping of our society. Neuromancer represents one of those works.

It is a science fiction work which garnered multiple literary awards when it was first published in 1984. That same year, coincidentally, witnessed the introduction of the Macintosh with its pull-down windows and point-and-click interface. Neuromancer is significant because it provides much of the conceptual foundation for what we call Cyberspace. This concept is defined as 'A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts...A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data...Like city lights, receding...'

This work is also significant from a military perspective because of its story line. It teams a computer hacker, "cyber-space cowboy," with a surgically-enhanced special forces-type operative. Together, they engage in what best can be described as coordinated acts of espionage both within cyber-
space and within the traditional battlespace that we are accustomed. The unleashing of computer viruses, the overcoming of intrusion, countermeasures electronics (ICE), and the stealing of data is interwoven with traditional forms of sabotage such as breaking into secure physical facilities. The envisioned dual-dimensional operations this work provides may offer an important glimpse into future warfare.

The book also contains multiple references to non-lethal technology. The use of foam barricades backed up by sandbag guns for riot-control purposes, as described in the book, now hardly seems the stuff of science fiction given our recent experience in Somalia during the final withdrawal of the Mogadishu Port Facility. The use of a building's internal video system to produce seizures in susceptible individuals by means of a psychoactive effect was also noted as was a scenario where a computer system's permanent memory was minutely shifted—a form of information attack now referred to as "knowledge warping."

Other forms of advanced technology also appear in this work. "Wetware," computer-based implants, is a common theme as are "dermadisks," which release bio-technical substances such as synthetic endorphins which are used to overcome pain and injuries while a military operation is in progress. "Chameleon suits," which allow for reduced image and signature avoidance for the individual soldier, are also present.

While this work was first published 12 years ago, it should still be of special interest to the RD&A community. In fact, much of the "science fiction" it contains has become, or is in the process of becoming, science fact. The latter, in turn, is now providing much of the technical basis for the bold vision which we call the Army's Force XXI initiative.

A DOS User's Guide
To the INTERNET: E-Mail, Netnews, and File Transfer with UUCP

By James Gardner

Reviewed by MAJ Mark A. Ernyei of the TRADOC System Managers' Satellite Communications Office at Fort Gordon, GA.

In today's information technology age, it is important for all Army acquisition officers and Department of Army civilians working in the acquisition field to have the capability of gaining and sharing knowledge with others in their related fields. One way to do this is through the INTERNET, where a wide array of information is available. However, in order to retrieve this information, you must first understand how to use the services required to gain access to the INTERNET.

A DOS User's Guide to the INTERNET explains these services in great detail and provides examples of how to use each one. Included with this book is software known as UNIX to UNIX Copy Protocol (UUCP) by Martice Kern Systems, Inc. UUCP is a communications protocol which sets the rules for transferring data from one computer to another. Gardner offers a series of easy-to-follow examples which explain the purpose and use of the UUCP software. You are somewhat limited as to the options you can perform on the INTERNET with this software, but you can get a taste of how to use file transfer (to retrieve files from bulletin boards) and Usenet news. You are also provided with the capability of sending and receiving electronic mail (E-mail) across the street or around the world.

Readers will especially appreciate the author's use throughout the book of highlighted areas called "For Your Information" (FYI). These FYIs focus your attention on excellent time-saving tips and interesting facts about the particular system you are using. They also help solve problems that you may encounter while you are working on the INTERNET.

The greatest challenge INTERNET users face is sensory overload. You can spend hours just looking through the INTERNET (often referred to as "surfing") for information that you may need at work or home. The author points out that the trick is to locate material that you can use without getting bogged down in the intimidating "noise" of the INTERNET. There are software packages available on the market that will assist you in tracking down information, but they are only a start. According to the author, experience is the best teacher in getting the maximum benefit with the minimum of wasted time.

Although a welcome addition to the INTERNET library, The DOS User's Guide to the INTERNET does have its shortcomings. First, the author never focuses on the available commercial networks such as CompuServe, Genie, and Prodigy. In my opinion, these are great ways to access the INTERNET and they are very user-friendly. Second, the author sometimes forgets that his readers are not all computer experts. Some of the directions in the reference pages are obviously written for the advanced user. If these instructions were rewritten in a simple and direct manner, the author could steer the novice reader/user away from much confusion and frustration.

On the whole, however, Gardner has provided a good springboard for anyone who is interested in learning to "surf the NET," and informative reading for those who wish to hone skills they may already possess.

Book Reviews

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