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Digital Fortress

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Digital Fortress

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Review of *Digital Fortress*/

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Digital Fortress

Posted on February 1, 2004 by Editor

By Jeffrey Barlow <barlowj@pacificu.edu>
Editor, Interface

What can one say about an author who seems, like Tom Clancy and John Grisham, well on his way to becoming an industry unto himself? The latest (as of this writing) issue of The New York Times “Books” section [1] lists Brown’s The Da Vinci Code in second place among hardcover fiction lists; he holds down first and second place on the Paperback Fiction lists with Angels & Demons and Deception Point respectively. The book reviewed here, Digital Fortress, languishes in a mere 8th place in Paperback Fiction, although this is not bad for a book first published in 1998.

Brown is a former English teacher at the elite prep school, Phillips Exeter Academy, where he had previously graduated before moving onto Amherst for his B.A. [2] He has “only one piece of advice” for beginning writers: “Write a commercial manuscript.” Clearly, he has more than acquired the knack. [3]

But the question here is, do we learn anything about the impact of the Internet from Digital Fortress, or even about electronic communication? This may not be a completely fair query for a book published in 1998, the Late Middle Ages of the Internet.

However, the book is being sold everywhere because of its connection to electronic communications. This is the reason that we review the book here, and the reason that we so desperately wanted to enjoy it. One of the back-cover blurbs refers to it as a “realistic technothriller” and another promises that it will “rivet cyber-minded readers.”

Unfortunately, I find myself as a reviewer untechnothrilled and far from riveted. There is an common phenomenon in American publishing, where a writer who polishes his craft by writing commercially unsuccessful pieces finally hits it big, as did Brown with The Da Vinci Code, and his publishers gleefully exploit their rights to his early books and plaster the market with them. That appears to be the case with this book.
In addition to being just too dated to tell us much about the Internet, the plot is so muddled and the characters so one-dimensional that I find it difficult even to summarize the work. For the first few chapters I thought it a sort of patriotic rant, complete with a brainy (but long-legged) female code-breaker heroically battling an evil Japanese genius for control over the National Security Administration’s (NSA) cryptographic operations.

Then, at some indefinable point, the issue really became the right to privacy, and our heroine, and her rather dull male co-protagonist, morphed into defenders of the public’s right to be free of the sort of operations that she was eagerly protecting earlier. At the end, I have no idea how the author feels, save that these certainly are very complicated issues, security vs. privacy.

Throughout, I learned little except that the NSA has a lot of computers and apparently doesn’t do a very good job of assessing the honesty or even sanity of its employees, both major and minor. It will be hard to miss this book, it is everywhere you turn; but follow my advice and try to do so. If you are looking for a good read with some appeal to those of us interested in computing and communication, this isn’t it.

Notes:

http://writerswrite.com/journal/may98/brown.htm

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5 THOUGHTS ON “DIGITAL FORTRESS”

Kellee Bumby
on January 30, 2014 at 6:15 PM said:

Nice post. I was checking continuously this blog and I’m impressed! Extremely helpful info particularly the closing section 😊 I handle such info much. I was seeking this certain info for a very lengthy time. Thanks and good luck.
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on February 4, 2014 at 10:21 AM said:

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on February 4, 2014 at 10:32 AM said:

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on February 4, 2014 at 10:42 AM said:

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