

HEALTH AND STRESS

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Hans Selye Award Recipient Ross W. Adey, M.D.

Plenary Sessions On Clinical Aspects Of Magnetotherapy And Electromedicine, Violence In Society, (Workplace, Domestic, School, Road Rage), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Type A Behavior Update, Time, Stress And Creativity, And Much More. Special Satellite Holistic Medicine Day On March 6

VIOLENCE & STRESS WHY ARE THEY EPIDEMICS?

Key Words: Violence and TV, V-Chip, supermarket, phone, computer, and road rage, terrorism, chemical and biological warfare, antibiotic resistant superbugs

The marked increase in violent behavior over the past decade has become so pervasive, that many believe it has now reached epidemic proportions in the United States. No demographic group is exempt, and many of the examples, such as the murder, mutilation, scalding and burning of helpless and innocent infants and toddlers are difficult to comprehend. Adolescents and even younger children bring guns, box cutters, and other weapons to school, and have no hesitation about using them, not only in inner city ghettos where they may be needed for self protection, but even in seemingly peaceful, rural areas.

We read of school children who kill fellow students and teachers for no apparent reason. Domestic violence and spousal and child abuse is rampant, as are homicides in the workplace, and reports of atrocities committed on the elderly in Nursing Homes by presumed caregivers. "Road rage", "phone rage", "supermarket rage", and "Going Postal" have now become part of vernacular speech.

Why is all this happening, and what can be done about it? Some believe that media glorification of violence and macho behavior has been a major influence, particularly movies and television. The average child spends over 25 hours a week glued to the tube. By the time elementary school is finished, they will have seen 8,000 murders and 100,00 acts of violence, and by age 18, almost twice as many.

Homicide rates for white Americans doubled between the introduction of television in 1950 and 1975, the greatest surge being in 1965, when the first generation of TV viewers reached adolescence. By 1987, the rate doubled, has been climbing ever since, and the experience in Canada was almost identical.

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*The Newsletter of
The American Institute of Stress*

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The Role Of Television

Over this same time period, in South Africa, where television had been banned, homicide rates remained constant. However, by 1987, when their first TV generation became teens, it suddenly doubled, and has been escalating ever since. Numerous anecdotal reports also confirm the dangerous influence of television. A few years ago, police apprehended an individual in a rural area of New York State who confessed to raping and stabbing six young women to death and dumping their bodies in deserted areas. He told them he was motivated by watching violent TV movies like *Robocop*, which he wanted to emulate.

The important role of TV violence was demonstrated in one study where psychologists showed each of two groups of children a different version of a video tape. Video A showed a lady acting normally with a big doll, cuddling and having fun with it. The second group saw video B, in which she was violently kicking and hitting the same doll. After viewing the tapes, the children were left in a room with various toys, including a doll that looked like the one shown in the videos. Those who watched video A reacted normally, but the video B kids kicked and hit the doll, and were aggressive and antagonistic in other activities.

Many of the Saturday morning cartoon shows for kids, like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Power Rangers*, routinely glorify violent and destructive activities. Other examples were cited in a recent report on just the Fox network. "When *Animals Attack*" showed a bull impaling a woman with its horns and tossing her through the street like a rag doll, with this footage being repeated three times. In "World's Scariest Police Shootouts", a desperate man flips his car off the highway and then holds his wife hostage at gunpoint. After a standoff ensues, he turns the gun on her and fires directly into her chest, and then a few more times after that, as she tries to flee. Seconds later he is gunned down by police. "Close Call" has graphic coverage of a bomb squad member leaning over a chamber where a possible explosive is stored, only to have it detonate in his face. This scene is repeated seven times, often in slow motion, so that none of the gory details will be missed. Even programs like "TV's Funniest Outtakes" that are presumably amusing, show a judge at a track meet being impaled by a javelin.

As a result, there has been strong pressure to establish a rating system similar to that used for motion pictures, so that parents can know what to exclude. Many broadcasters already have advisories for violence, foul language, and sex, and HBO rates its programs for three different levels of each category. The V-Chip is another possible aid. It allows parents to automatically block reception of programs that have undesirable ratings, but it is doubtful that this will solve the problem. Critics claim this is a form of censorship that violates First Amendment rights. In addition, it is often difficult to rate programs to everyone's satisfaction, and by the millennium, when 500 channels from all over the world are expected to be available, it is doubtful that all will comply.

There are 250 million TV sets in the U.S., and the V-Chip will only be in new ones. Since it would take ten years to replace existing TV's, the chip won't have very much impact in the near future. There is also the additional cost, and parents who don't even know how to set their VCR clocks, may have trouble implementing it effectively. And many kids will probably be smart enough to learn how to unblock it, or simply watch their favorite programs on an older set, or at a friend's house.

Crowding, Competition, And Guns

The widespread availability and easy access to firearms and explosives capable of mass destruction is another factor. Despite the Brady Law and automatic weapons legislation, high powered guns can be obtained from black market sources if you are willing to pay the price. Detailed instructions on how to construct inexpensive bombs with remote control activation that can demolish anything from a car to a large office building are freely available on the Internet.

Psychosocial stresses resulting from increased crowding, competitiveness, and time urgency are additional contributors to the current epidemic of violence that seems to have pervaded so many aspects of contemporary life. Spousal and child abuse are increasing problems, especially in minority groups. Violence in the workplace is also rampant. Disgruntled workers killed more than 100 bosses or co-workers last year, and seriously injured many more. Violence is now steadily surfacing in supermarket express lanes, if people plunk 15 items down when the sign reads "10 or Less", write a check or pull out a credit card, when "Cash Only" is mandated, or even count a bag of three lemons as one item. In Milwaukee, an irate customer sliced off half the nose of a woman ahead of him who abused the express lane directions. Checkout clerks may also come under attack, since they must enforce the rules, while being careful not to antagonize customers. In one instance when yogurt was on sale at three for \$1, a shopper who was alone in the express lane had two tubs of yogurt over the limit, and became furious because the cashier refused to take them, and told her to go to the end of one of the regular long lines.

There is "technorage", where frustrated workers demolish computers and other equipment that refuse to operate properly. Even more common is "phone rage" which results from automated phone services that keep you on hold for lengthy periods. And when a connection is finally made, they keep supplying menus to select from that rarely give you the information you require, or access to another human being to explain your problem. Violence in airplanes has increased dramatically, prompting new limits on alcohol, which is often the cause. But it is on the road that things have really deteriorated.

Road Rage

Motorists are being shot, stabbed, and run over for totally inane reasons, like "She wouldn't let me pass," or "Nobody gives me the finger." According to authorities, of the more than 41,000 deaths due to traffic accidents in 1997, two-thirds resulted from road rage. Road rage differs from aggressive driving, like speeding or going through red lights, in that it deliberately entails violence to others. The American Automobile Association's recent survey indicated that drivers fear road rage as much as they do drunk driving and speeding.

Road Rage is characterized by high-risk drivers who combine the anonymity of operating an automobile, with a willingness to take out their anger on anybody at anytime. They have high frustration levels and little concern for other motorists, as they tailgate, weave in and out of traffic by passing on the right, repeatedly flashing headlights and honking, or making insulting hand and facial gestures.

Although there is no specific penalty for most of these activities unless they are clear traffic violations, this is beginning to change. New York is considering a new bill to classify a motor vehicle as a deadly weapon, and in cases where a victim was killed or injured, a prison sentence could be imposed. Lesser charges could include suspension or revocation of your license, and mandatory aggressive-driving education.

To avoid being a road rage victim, it is essential to make every attempt to get out of the way, and never to challenge other drivers by speeding up or attempting to hold your lane. Avoid eye contact, ignore any gestures they make, and above all, don't return them. You can lessen your chances by allowing plenty of time to get to your destination, and avoiding periods of heavy traffic and congestion. Improve your comfort level by listening to relaxing music rather than controversial talk radio shows that can get you stirred up. Put your pride in your pocket, be polite, and give other drivers the benefit of the doubt.

You can't control other drivers, or a Jack Nicholson who comes at you with a golf club, but you can control your reactions. Sessions on Road Rage here and abroad, and other forms of societal violence will be featured at our 10th Congress.

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The Growing Problem Of Terrorism

As indicated, the widespread availability of powerful explosives has resulted in numerous deaths, injuries, and severe destruction of property. The Oklahoma City, Atlanta, and World Trade Center disasters are recent examples, but the problem is hardly limited to the U.S. There are recurrent reports of genocide in Eastern Europe, as well as bombings of innocent victims in Northern Ireland and Palestine. International terrorists have been responsible for blowing up planes, an Olympic camp, and most recently, U.S. Embassies.

Mass murders resulting from terrorism and wartime atrocities are hardly new. Illustrations of man's inhumanity to man date back to Cain and Abel, with numerous other Biblical examples. Homer's *Iliad* is replete with accounts of the rape, torture and slaughter of innocent women, children, and infants who were part of the spoils of war, and this was standard operating procedure for Attila and his Huns. Similar abuses occurred in the Crusades, Spanish Inquisition, pogroms in Eastern Europe, and the Holocaust. These and other crimes were often instigated and justified because of religious reasons that mandated a "holy war" to convert or punish non-believers for their own good.

Mass destruction today is more apt to be politically motivated, and directed toward an unknown population of innocent individuals. It is also more sophisticated, and many feel the U.S. may now be vulnerable to a computerized Pearl Harbor. This might start with an unexplained power blackout in one or more major cities, and as workers struggle to restore service, telephone and communication systems across the country become paralyzed. Misrouted freight and passenger trains collide, air traffic control systems go haywire, and flow-control mechanisms malfunction, triggering oil refinery blasts. As global financial systems are sabotaged, stocks plunge on world exchanges, and ATM machines start to randomly credit or debit accounts, causing depositors to panic in a rush to make withdrawals. TV networks lose control of programming, and orchestrated misinformation mysteriously starts to air on all channels. Even if defense missiles were able to be launched, it might be impossible to determine their targets, since the enemy's location or identity could be concealed.

How a terrorist attack on computers could affect the United States.



■ **Power blackouts** occur. Telephone systems become paralyzed.



■ **Phone systems** fail at military bases. Controlled weapons systems malfunction.



■ **TV networks and stations** lose control of programming. Disinformation campaign airs.



■ **Malfunctions** trigger blasts at oil refineries.



■ **Sabotage** disrupts fund transfers. Stocks plunge. Automatic teller machines randomly credit or debit accounts.



■ **Air traffic control systems** go haywire. Misrouted freight and passenger trains collide.

Source: Rand Corp. report for U.S. Defense Department

The above illustration from a U.S. Defense Department report summarizes some of the damage that could readily result from penetration of vital computer networks. Information war has no front line, and can occur anywhere in the world where these systems are accessible through their satellite and fiber-optic communication links.

Foreign teams have already broken into U.S. Government and corporate computer systems at vulnerable points, and more than a dozen nations, including Libya, Iraq and Iran have active information warfare programs. According to the General Accounting Office, Pentagon computers were infiltrated as many as 250,000 times in 1995. The actual number is probably much higher, because intruders are rarely detected. They have changed or destroyed sensitive data, and installed files to cover up their break-ins and make subsequent access easier. Corporate databases are even more vulnerable and in one case, a hacker with a laptop in St. Petersburg Russia, broke into Chicago Citibank accounts and transferred millions of dollars before anything was suspected. He was eventually caught not by modern technology, but luck and old fashioned police work.

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Last February, as U.S. Forces were contemplating a possible attack on Iraq, President Clinton received a top-secret briefing at which he learned that 3000 military computer systems across the country crucial for military operations had been penetrated. Officials were troubled for three tense weeks, fearing that enemy agents might have compromised the operation, until it was determined that the computer commandos were a couple of California teenagers. But if these high school hackers could breach national security, what sort of damage could well trained and heavily financed foreigners inflict?

The State Department tracks more than three dozen terrorist groups with these and other capabilities to seriously threaten national security, including sophisticated chemical and biologic products. The deadly nerve gas Sarin used by the Aum Shinryko doomsday cult killed a dozen people in the 1995 Tokyo subway attack. Since then, evidence has been found that this group had tried to use Sarin as well as other nerve gases and poisonous agents elsewhere, including a U.S. military base in Japan. Although its leader was eventually apprehended and jailed, it is estimated that they have a war chest of over \$1 billion. In addition to an unknown number of Japanese members, they have recruits in other countries, including up to 16,000 in Russia alone. It is important to reemphasize that this is only one of three dozen terrorist groups that we are aware of, here and abroad. One heavily financed and well protected cult in Afghanistan is committed to destroying the U.S.

Biological Warfare

In addition, there are new potent biological products that could prove to be weapons of mass destruction. It is known that Iraq has been intensively investigating this possibility, as has Russia, with whom they have very close relations. After the decline of the USSR, it was revealed that Soviet scientists were working with smallpox, and had stockpiled an unknown quantity of the deadly virus. Smallpox was declared eradicated from the earth by the World Health Organization in 1980, and we now have a large population that has received no vaccine for decades, and, therefore extremely susceptible to this highly contagious and deadly virus.

Smallpox is resistant to all antibiotics, and death rates run 50 percent and higher. In view of the potential danger that now exists, infectious disease experts have urged an expenditure of up to \$50 million immediately to manufacture and stockpile smallpox vaccine. They also indicate that it will cost \$1 billion to upgrade Public Health system defenses against other lethal agents that have been developed, such as:

- Anthrax, whose highly resistant spores are disseminated in the air. When inhaled, they are carried to lymph nodes, and mild flu-like symptoms are produced for a day or two. There is a subsequent period of few symptoms, followed by shortness of breath, shock, and usually death within 24 hours due to the toxins produced by the bacilli, for which there is no treatment.
- Ebola virus is fatal in 50-90% of all patients who become infected. The incubation period can last from a few days to three weeks, when there is the onset of fever with internal and external bleeding, nausea and vomiting, followed by liver and kidney failure.
- Bubonic Plague has an incubation period of two to six days, which is followed by fever, headache and swollen glands. This progresses to an overwhelming pneumonia that rapidly spreads to others by airborne organisms in cough droplets that kills half its victims.

There is great concern about our inability to cope with these modern types of terrorism. More than 200 officials from across the country met in Washington at a two day closed door meeting in late August to urge the Clinton administration to put a single Government agency in charge of developing a new national plan within six months. The present system was described as "frequently chaotic, confusing, and overly bureaucratic." Although hundreds of millions have been spent in recent years on training, new equipment, and infrastructure protection as well as intelligence gathering, there is little coordination. Despite the Olympic bombing experience two years ago, Atlanta's top preparedness official recently complained "Even we don't know who to talk to at the Federal level."

And, as indicated in the following, common bugs that have become resistant to antibiotics have evolved that could also be readily utilized.

ANTIBIOTICS - A TWO EDGED SWORD

Sulfonamides for rheumatic fever, penicillin for pneumococcal pneumonia, and streptomycin for tuberculosis are obvious examples of early and spectacular triumphs of antibiotics over infectious diseases. In many instances, these have now been superseded by more powerful derivatives that also have a much wider spectrum of efficacy. Some even appear to be able to prevent or treat other disorders ranging from peptic ulcer and esophagitis, to heart attacks, strokes, and certain cancers.

Duodenal and gastric ulcers have been shown to be caused by the helicobacter bacterium, and antibiotics have now become the drugs of choice. In contrast to conventional medications, recurrences are rare, and treatment may also reduce the risk of stomach cancer. As indicated in a prior Newsletter, chlamydia infections, which are extremely common but mild, may have long term consequences that cause accelerated atherosclerosis that leads to coronaries and strokes. There is good evidence that organisms responsible for chronic gum disease and bronchitis can also contribute to heart attacks, and the same may be true for cytomegalovirus and possibly other members of the herpes virus family.

Although all of these microorganisms produce very mild clinical symptoms, they linger in the body and trigger a low grade but chronic inflammatory response. The immune system marshals its defenses, and as part of this response, macrophages are sent to literally "eat up" the invaders. Much like Jonah in the whale, they can survive despite being swallowed up, and macrophages subsequently transport them to other trouble spots in the body to which they are attracted because of inflammation.

One common location is some area of arterial injury caused by atherosclerotic deposits, where the organisms can readily invade vessel walls and continue to reproduce. This intensifies the inflammatory response and attracts other macrophages to the area, bringing more bacteria that further aggravate the problem. As this vicious cycle is repeated over and over, the arterial lesion keeps expanding and bulging due to inflammation, as well as the release of chemicals that stimulate smooth muscle proliferation. The flow of blood progressively slows down to a trickle, and clots can form causing a complete occlusion of the vessel.

Some believe that antibiotics might soon prove to be effective in preventing or treating coronary heart disease, and stroke. One study has already shown that heart attack victims treated with azithromycin for 36 days were much less likely to suffer recurrent problems. In another, roxithromycin significantly reduced anginal attacks in unstable patients, and other antibiotics have also been found to be effective. Based on this, should all minor upper respiratory and other infections be treated aggressively with antibiotics to prevent these and other complications of obstructive atherosclerotic plaque? It's a Catch 22 situation, and most authorities believe that this would do more harm in the long run, since their indiscriminate use has already led to serious problems.

Over the past decade, lethal flesh eating staphylococci have emerged, and there have been epidemics of a strain of streptococcal pneumonia resistant to penicillin and more powerful derivatives that threatens to become the leading cause of meningitis, ear and sinus infections. More than 90 percent of staph aureus strains are now resistant to penicillin and other antibiotics, including methicillin the last line of defense before vancomycin. Methicillin resistant staph infections killed 1409 people in New York City in 1995 alone, 200 more than were murdered in the crime ridden Big Apple.

Staph organisms that are resistant to vancomycin have started to emerge. Enterococci like coliform bacteria are normal and harmless inhabitants of the gut. However, deadly new strains have evolved that no drug can touch, and people who eat organic foods are eight times more likely to contract these killers. Although a new drug, Synercid, does appear to eradicate these, it may never become available. Nor is it likely that other promising pharmaceuticals presently in the pipeline will be promoted. The problem is that there would be no incentive to devote the time and millions of dollars that would be necessary to obtain FDA approval, unless the company could eventually profit from this financially. That would never happen unless the drug were widely prescribed, which is unlikely if it were reserved only for selected cases. Even if it did come into common use, this would undoubtedly also lead to resistant strains that would soon make it obsolete.

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There are several contributors to this current crisis. Antibiotics are so widely used in farming, that almost every bite of meat, poultry or dairy products we consume contains them. In addition, many genetically engineered crops now utilize what are known as antibiotic resistant "marker" genes, which when assimilated by bacteria, can also make them resistant.

Since infectious diseases are the leading causes of death in developing countries, having effective antibiotics available is extremely important. The problem is that drug-resistant strains of microbes are beginning to emerge in these countries as well for various reasons. One is that there are relatively few medical laboratories, so doctors prescribe antibiotics without being able to do tests to determine whether they are needed or appropriate. In addition, drugs are not regulated in many developing countries, and antibiotics are widely available without prescription in general stores, and market stalls. As a result, there is widespread and uncontrolled use, and patients may not take a full course if they are unable to afford it. All of these factors favor the development of bacterial strains resistant to antibiotics.

An editorial in the September 5 issue of *The British Medical Journal*, which was devoted to this subject, pointed out that drug resistant pathogens that cause dysentery, cholera, pneumonia, tuberculosis, gonorrhea, plague, and typhoid fever, have become an increasingly serious problem in recent years. Many of these microbes are no longer susceptible to multiple antibiotics, and have caused outbreaks of disease not only locally, but in other parts of the world where they are spread by seemingly healthy travelers.

Over prescribing appears to be the main cause of serious superbug problems in Western nations. A report from Britain's House of Lords revealed that "up to 75% of antibiotic use is of questionable therapeutic value" in the U.K., and that "Resistance to antibiotics constitutes a major threat to public health and ought to be recognized as such more widely than it is at present." The chief medical officers of Europe have been so concerned, that they mandated a special meeting in Copenhagen in September to develop new strategies against growing microbial threats. And in the past 12 months, two special World Health Organization meetings have been convened because of the abuse of antibiotics in animal husbandry, which has also contributed to drug resistant strains.

Across the pond, one study found that 25-45% of the almost 200 million doses of antibiotics annually prescribed in our hospitals were unnecessary, as were up to 50% of those given to outpatients. Even when indicated, many patients stop taking their medication once they feel better, but before the infection has been eradicated, leaving only the strongest bugs to survive and spread. Doctors routinely write antibiotic prescriptions for colds, bronchitis, and minor respiratory infections, despite the fact that 90 percent are caused by a virus, and antibiotics are useless. Although most are aware of this, they are prescribed because this is what patients want. Some also justify giving antibiotics by claiming they are trying to prevent complications from viral attacks that could possibly lead to bacterial infections. But since they don't know what the future pathogen will be, there is no assurance that the antibiotic would be effective. Many feel it may also lessen the risk of a malpractice suit, should some unavoidable complication occur.

This problem is particularly common in over anxious parents with insurance coverage for office visits and prescriptions, who are more likely to demand antibiotics for their children at the slightest sign of a cough or sore throat. Individuals from lower socioeconomic groups can't afford to pay for office visits, much less a full course of expensive antibiotics. Their infections subside because natural defense mechanisms are activated to overcome them, and as a result, they also develop greater resistance to possible future infections. One very recent report from 8 U.S. hospitals found that antibiotic resistant systemic pneumococcal infections had nearly doubled in the past three years. At particular risk were white children 5 years and younger who had received prior antibiotic therapy or attended day care. Nineteen of the 1255 patients in the study died.

The Director of the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently warned that an "immediate and aggressive response" is needed to combat the inappropriate prescribing of antibiotics. He feels that all patients for whom antibiotics are prescribed, should consider asking their physician this question, "Do you really think I need this?" Sounds like good advice.

8 Book Review:

Working Anger: Preventing and Resolving Conflict on the Job. Ronald T. Potter-Efron
New Harbinger Publications, Oakland CA, 1998, 166 pages, \$12.95

Almost one million people are victims of violent crime in the workplace each year. Each week in 1996, an average of 20 were murdered and 18,000 others were assaulted while working. Homicide is the leading cause of death for female workers, and violence is responsible for 12% of all workplace fatalities. In addition to deaths, severe injuries and disabilities, there is a significant financial toll. It is estimated that workplace violence is responsible for \$13.5 billion in medical costs and \$55 million in lost wages annually. There are several factors that have contributed to this, the most important being soaring levels of job stress. Increased mergers, acquisitions, and hostile takeovers have led to heightened fears of job security, especially for middle management and upper echelon personnel, many of whom are middle aged or older with lengthy service records, and will find it difficult to obtain a position with similar compensation in a highly competitive job market.

The workplace environment has also become more impersonal, with more and more emphasis on the bottom line and cost containment, often to the detriment of quality of life. The pervasiveness and prevalence of aggressive and hostile acts on TV and in movies and the media has created an atmosphere in which violence is common, and by inference, condoned, as a means of getting even. The recent film, *Dirty Works*, is about a "revenge for hire" company, and the September issue of *Maxim*, a men's magazine, has an article titled "What have you done to get back at your boss?" Samples include canceling airline and hotel reservations, spiking Brownies with Ex-Lax, or anonymously informing a spouse about an alleged extramarital affair. On the Internet, the editor of Disgruntled (www.disgruntled.com) points out the "Suing an employer for wrongful termination is expensive and can take years. For some people, sabotage can give a feeling of fairness and closure. One Department is "Getting Even: Tales of Revenge and Sabotage."

This book is directed to workers who have troubles dealing with their anger and frustration, or who have been the target of such abuses by others, as well as supervisors and managers, and Employee assistance personnel responsible for disciplinary actions, and firing because of poorly handled conflicts in the workplace. As pointed out in the Preface, beyond consuming 40 to 60 hours a week, work is an extremely important center of most people's lives, being second only to family interests and concerns. And for some individuals, work transcends everything else, so that any disturbances or threats to the status quo will be felt more deeply, and apt to be responded to more aggressively, if not violently. Most people really do want to work in an atmosphere of harmony and peace, rather than conflict and anger, and this book explains how employees and management can achieve this environment by working together. Chapters are devoted to ways to prevent, reduce, or resolve conflicts, how to recognize the early warning signs of anger and frustration that often lead to violence, and how to deal with such problems. Illustrative case histories and self scoring quizzes, and attractive diagrams enhance the presentation, making it well worth its modest price.

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