

Remembering the forgotten war

Historian Bruce Cumings' latest book is a squirm-inducing assault on America's moral behavior during the Korean War

BY DWIGHT GARNER
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

North Korea, like Cuba, is a country suspended in time, one that exists off modernity's grid. It's a place where the Cold War never ended, where the heirloom paranoia is taken down and polished daily.

Korea's Cold War chill is heating up. Four months ago a South Korean warship was sunk, and a South Korean-led international investigative team concluded that North Korea was responsible. Today the US and South Korea begin large-scale naval exercises off the coasts of the Korean Peninsula and Japan in a show of force.

The world will be watching, and here's a book that American policymakers may hope it won't be reading: Bruce Cumings' *The Korean War*, a powerful revisionist history of America's intervention in Korea. Beneath its bland title, Cumings' book is a squirm-inducing assault on America's moral behavior during the Korean War, a conflict that he says is misremembered when it is remembered at all. It's a book that puts the reflexive anti-Americanism of North Korea's leaders into sympathetic historical context.

Cumings is chairman of the history department at the University of Chicago and the author of *The Origins of the Korean War*, a respected two-volume survey. He mows down a host of myths about the war in his short new book, which is a distillation of his own scholarship and that of many other historians. But he begins by mowing down David Halberstam.

Cumings, who admires Halberstam's writing about Vietnam, plucks the wings from *The Coldest Winter*, Halberstam's 2007 book about the Korean War. The book, he argues, makes all the classic mistakes popular American historians tend to make about this little understood war.

SCRATCHING THE SURFACE

Halberstam's book is among those that "evinces almost no knowledge of Korea or its history" and "barely get past two or three Korean names," Cumings writes.

"Halberstam mentions the US Military Government from 1945 to 1948, which deeply shaped postwar Korean history — in one sentence," he adds. "There is absolutely nothing on the atrocious massacres of this war, or the American incendiary bombing campaigns." Ouch.

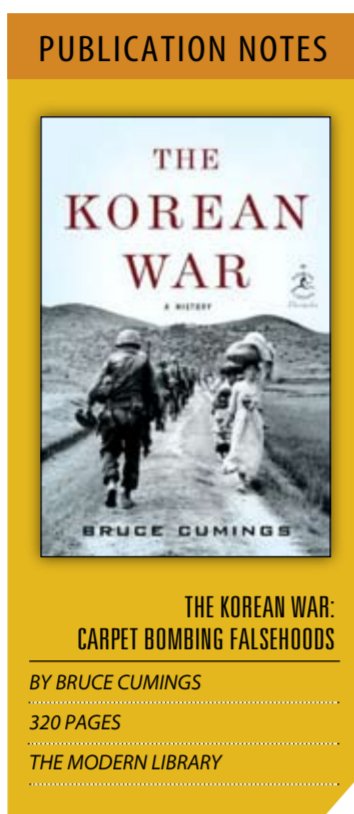
Americans need to get past the idea, Cumings says, that the Korean War was a "discrete, encapsulated" story that began in 1950, when the US intervened to help push the Communist north out of the south of Korea, and ended in 1953, after the war bogged down in a stalemate. The US succeeded in containment, establishing the 4km-wide demilitarized zone that still runs through Korea's middle, but failed miserably at the war for the north, an attempt at Communist rollback.

Cumings argues that the Korean War was a civil war with long, tangled historical roots, one in which America had little business meddling. He notes how "appallingly dirty" the war was. In terms of civilian slaughter, he declares, "our ostensibly democratic ally was the worst offender, contrary to the American image of the North Koreans as fiendish terrorists."

Cumings likens the indiscriminate American bombing of North Korea to genocide. He writes that American soldiers took part in, or observed, civilian atrocities not dissimilar to those at My Lai. An official inquiry is needed into some of these events, he writes, for any kind of healing to begin. (He also writes that this war, during which nearly 37,000 American soldiers died, deserves a memorial as potent and serious as Maya Lin's Vietnam memorial.)

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Among the most important things to understand about North Korean behavior then and now, Cumings writes, is the longtime enmity between Korea and Japan. Japan took Korea as a colony in 1910, with America's blessing, and replaced the Korean language with Japanese. Japan humiliated and brutalized Korea in other ways. (During World War II the Japanese Army forcibly turned tens of thousands of Korean



women into sex slaves known as "comfort women.") About this history Cumings writes, "Neither Korea nor Japan has ever gotten over it."

North Korea, which is virulently anti-Japanese, remains bitter and fearful of that country and of the US. It will do whatever it can to stay out of the hands of South Korea, where leaders have long-standing historical ties to Japan.

Cumings, in *The Korean War*, details the north's own atrocities and acknowledges that current "North Korean political practice is reprehensible." But he says that we view that country through "Orientalist bigotry," seeing only its morbid qualities. We wrongly label the country Stalinist, he argues. "There is no evidence in the North Korean experience of the mass violence against whole classes of people or the wholesale 'purge' that so clearly characterized Stalinism," he writes.

HIDDEN HISTORY

The most eye-opening sections of *The Korean War* detail America's saturation bombing of Korea's north.

"What hardly any Americans know or remember," Cumings writes, "is that we carpet-bombed the north for three years with next to no concern for civilian casualties." The US dropped more bombs in Korea (635,000 tonnes, as well as 32,557 tonnes of napalm) than in the entire Pacific theater during World War II. Our logic seemed to be, he says, that "they are savages, so that gives us the right to shower napalm on innocents."

The Korean War has its share of awkward sentences, and Cumings makes at least one mistake of his own, referring to Michael Herr's 1970 nonfiction book *Dispatches*, about the Vietnam War, as a novel.

But this lean book may put some readers in mind of *Wartime*, Paul Fussell's acidic attack on some of the comforting myths about World War II. Cumings' prose, at its best, is reminiscent of Fussell's stylized, literate high dudgeon.

Witness the carnage in this passage from early in *The Korean War*: "Here was the Vietnam War we came to know before Vietnam — gooks, napalm, rapes, whores, an unreliable ally, a cunning enemy, fundamentally untrained GIs fighting a war their top generals barely understood, fragging of officers, contempt for the know-nothing civilians back home, devilish battles indescribable even to loved ones, press handouts from General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters apparently scripted by comedians or lunatics, an ostensible vision of bringing freedom and liberty to a sordid dictatorship run by servants of Japanese imperialism."

This year is the 60th anniversary of the Korean War's conventional start. Even from this distant vantage point, Cumings writes, there are still multiple unpleasant facts Americans have not learned about this war, "truths that most Americans do not know and perhaps don't want to know, truths sometimes as shocking as they are unpalatable to American self-esteem." His book is a bitter pill, a sobering corrective.



PHOTO: AP

POCKET-SIZE POINT-AND-SHOOT CAMERAS, IN 3D

Sony Electronics is pushing 3D technology in the home, with its 3D televisions and 3D video games and movies. Earlier this month it brought more dimensionality into the electronics market by announcing a new crop of 3D pocket cameras, the DSC-TX9 and DSC-WX5.

Sony calls these cameras the world's smallest in the 3D realm and says they can take three-dimensional panoramic images with a new technology, Sweep Panorama. This allows camera owners to press the shutter button and move across a panoramic scene to create extensive, captivating photos, Sony says.

There's a catch; although all the photos can be viewed as normal 2D images on any traditional surface, they require a 3D television and the appropriate 3D glasses to make the images pop off the screen.

The two cameras also have a 12.2-megapixel sensor, record high-definition video and offer a range of new features, including "background defocus," which can give the image more depth, and "superior auto mode," which can offer crisper images than other point-and-shoot cameras.

The cameras are expected to be available by late September, and will cost US\$300 to US\$400.

IN THE WORLD OF CARS, LESSONS ABOUT MONEY

The World of Cars, based on the Disney/Pixar movie *Cars*, is a new site from the people who created Club Penguin, where children as young as 5 years old can adopt their own pet penguin, decorate their own igloo and type messages to other penguins (children) on the site. On The World of Cars, intended for ages 6 to 12, children create their own car, drive around and chat with other cars (users).

The site is fun to use. But it's helpful to understand how it makes money. It uses a "freemium" technique, or the "velvet rope," in trade show jargon. This means that your child is enticed with something free and fun — some races and a chance to design his or her own car — but soon is asked to pay for cool-looking extras.

Older children perhaps can resist, but first-graders likely cannot, especially after they see that other cars, and not theirs, have accessories, like a special paint color. To get those extras, the child needs a "sponsor" — i.e., a parent — to pay the subscription charge (US\$5.95 a month, for example). If you are unwilling to pay, a happy child can be turned into a pouting one.

Or perhaps it's just a lesson in temptation in the information age. Although the site has no stated educational mission, it may still have something to teach.



PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

SOUNDS GOOD, LOOKS A LITTLE ODD

Etymotic, which makes high-end stereo earbuds, has broken from tradition in designing its new Bluetooth headset, the EtyBlu2. While other manufacturers strive to make their headsets smaller and less obtrusive, Etymotic has opted for function, including a boom mic that wraps around the face, ending in a foam windscreen, tempting lookers-on to shout, "Operators now standing by!"

The result is both desirable and not. You won't have to yell to be heard, and the sound quality is clear, although people can still tell you're on a mobile phone. But it may be hard to get the earpiece to fit comfortably because it is on a lengthy stem that may put the body of the unit far from your face. It also may be hard to get the earpiece to stay put. A custom earbud tip, which costs about US\$100, could help.

If your ears fit the off-the-rack model, the EtyBlu2 costs US\$130 from online retailers like Amazon.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ETYMOTIC

BACKING UP THE WHOLE NETWORK OF COMPUTERS

The 500-gigabyte Clickfree C2N drive can automatically back up Windows PCs and Macs over a home network with real set-it-and-forget-it ease. At US\$180 (US\$142 at Amazon), it is a bit costly. But if you're lazy about backing up your data and have a home network, it's a great solution.

Once the drive is installed on each computer, it is nestled in its dock, from which it automatically runs universal backups. You attach the drive via USB to the first computer. The BackupLink software automatically installs and backs up the computer. The default backup includes text documents, spreadsheets, presentations, photos, music, videos, financial documents, e-mail files (it also can extract e-mail attachments) and favorite Web sites. You can configure the software to back up only certain categories of files and, within those categories, certain file types.

After the first computer is backed up, you plug the C2N into the next and repeat. After adding all computers, you drop the C2N into its dock and attach it to any computer in the network. All will be automatically backed up.

You can use the software on any computer to browse the Clickfree drive and open backed-up files from other computers on your network — a nice feature.

But if you have a lot of photo, music and video files, you'll soon hit the 500-gigabyte limit, so be sure to assess your backup needs before you buy.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLICKFREE

INDIA UNVEILS PROTOTYPE OF US\$35 TABLET COMPUTER

It looks like an iPad, only it's 1/14th the cost: India has unveiled the prototype of a US\$35 basic touchscreen tablet computer aimed at students, which it hopes to bring into production by next year.

If the government can find a manufacturer, the Linux operating system-based computer would be the latest in a string of "world's cheapest" innovations to hit the market out of India.

The tablet can be used for functions like word processing, Web browsing and video-conferencing. It has a solar power option too — important for India's energy-starved hinterlands — though that add-on costs extra.

"This is our answer to MIT's US\$100 computer," human resource development minister Kapil Sibal told the *Economic Times* when he unveiled the device on Thursday.

In 2005, Nicholas Negroponte — co-founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab — unveiled a prototype of a US\$100 laptop for children in the developing world. India rejected that as too expensive and embarked on a multiyear effort to develop a cheaper option of its own.

Negroponte's laptop ended up costing about US\$200, but in May his nonprofit association, One Laptop Per Child, said it plans to launch a basic tablet computer for US\$99.

Sibal turned to students and professors at India's elite technical universities to develop the US\$35 tablet after receiving a "lukewarm" response from private sector players. He hopes to get the cost down to US\$10 eventually.

Mamta Varma, a ministry spokeswoman, said falling hardware costs and intelligent design make the price tag plausible. The tablet doesn't have a hard disk, but instead uses a memory card, much like a mobile phone. The tablet design cuts hardware costs, and the use of open-source software also adds to savings, she said.

Varma said several global manufacturers, including at least one from Taiwan, have shown interest in making the low-cost device, but no manufacturing or distribution deals have been finalized. She declined to name any of the companies.

India plans to subsidize the cost of the tablet for its students, bringing the purchase price down to around US\$20. "Depending on the quality of material they are using, certainly it's plausible," said Sarah Rotman Epps, an analyst at Forrester Research. "The question is, is it good enough for students?"

Profitability is also a question for the US\$35 machine.

Epps said government subsidies or dual marketing — where higher-priced sales in the developed world are used to subsidize low-cost sales in markets like India — could convince a manufacturer to come on board.

The project is part of an ambitious education technology initiative by the Indian government, which also aims to bring broadband connectivity to India's 25,000 colleges and 504 universities and make study materials available online. So far nearly 8,500 colleges have been connected and nearly 500 Web and video-based courses have been uploaded on YouTube and other portals, the ministry said.

— NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE AND AP



PHOTO: AP

Just when you thought the vampire fad was coming to an end, American author Justin Cronin revamps the genre with his post-apocalyptic novel

BY ALICE FISHER
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

This is one of those books that arrives on the shelves with a backstory. When the first chapters of Justin Cronin's vampire fantasy started circulating in US publishing houses back in 2007, they sparked a fierce bidding war. Cronin became a rich man long before the public got their hands on his work (the book and film deals netted over US\$5 million).

The public's turn has finally come and *The Passage* is being touted as this year's blockbuster beach read.

The story starts in the near future with government experiments on a virus that gives those infected with it superhuman strength and eternal life. The downside is that it also gives them fangs, claws, glowstick orange skin, a taste for human flesh and raging photophobia. The first section details the virus' discovery and subsequent tests conducted on death-row inmates. It's taut and tight and, from the amorality of the military experiments to the passing references to America's polluted, lawless state, everything in the opening section drips with dread.

In fact, the opening chapters are so effective that it takes ages to settle into the second section, which is set in the post-apocalyptic world left by the

inevitable release of the virus. The action had been fast and violent, with helicopters and bombs; in part two, there's a new cast of characters living a century later who plod round on horses and get excited if they catch a rabbit. The pace does pick up, though, and Cronin's post-viral world is inventive and interesting — even if it does owe a debt to *The Road*, *The Stand* and *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*.

Cronin, who won the Hemingway/Pen award for an earlier novel, is a skilled writer. Most of the characters are well drawn and he tackles the philosophical issue of gaining eternal life at the cost of your soul in between the throat-ripping battle scenes. But he does have some annoying quirks. He sprinkles italics and unnecessary capital letters around in a very distracting way. He's weirdly coy about using the word vampire — his creations are variously called Virals, Flyers,

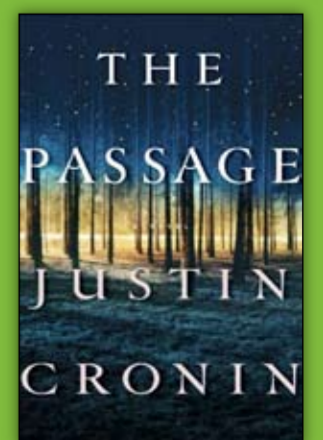
Dracs and Smokes.

Also, the only character who appears in both sections of the novel is a six-year-old girl called Amy (or The Girl from Nowhere, as Cronin has it). She should be fascinating — Amy possesses ill-defined special powers and has kept her humanity despite viral infection — but readers have no access to her interior life and she barely speaks. No doubt this is because *The Passage* is the first of a trilogy and her story will unfold in later books, but it does mean that this one has a gaping hole at its heart.

A further problem is practical. If you need to take a flight to reach the beach you want to read this on, it will be virtually impossible to fit this 784-page hardback in hand luggage. If you do manage to cram it in, though, you won't regret it. I turned *The Passage's* pages feverishly to find out what happened next.

'28 Days Later' ... with vampires?

PUBLICATION NOTES



THE PASSAGE
BY JUSTIN CRONIN
784 PAGES
BALLANTINE BOOKS