The Dream Machine: J.C.R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal

By M. Mitchell Waldrop

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Written with the novelistic flair that made his *Complexity* "the most exciting intellectual adventure story of the year" (*Washington Post*), M. Mitchell Waldrop's *The Dream Machine* is the first full-scale portrait of J.C.R. Licklider and how his dream of a "human-computer symbiosis" changed the course of science and culture. But more than that, it is an epic saga of technological advance that spans the history of modern computers from the Second World War to the explosion of creativity at Xerox PARC in the 1970s to the personal computer boom of the 1980s and the Internet boom of the 1990s. Capturing the drama, passion, and excitement of the brilliant men and women who were caught up in one of the great intellectual and technological adventures in human history, *The Dream Machine* has the hallmarks of a classic.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
While it's true that no one person's vision encompassed all of what we now consider personal computing, we can't help but focus on individual effort as we try to understand how we got here. Science writer M. Mitchell Waldrop carefully balances this hero culture with a historian's mania for completeness in *The Dream Machine: J.C.R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal*.

"Lick," as his students and colleagues called him, was deeply involved in guiding the evolution of personal and networked computing from the 1950s through the 1980s, after leaving a career in cognitive psychology. Waldrop captures his spirit vividly--contrary to our stereotypical view of computer scientists, Licklider was profoundly interested in his fellow humans, and this interest helped him lead the design of technology adapted to human needs.

Waldrop interviewed dozens of contemporaries and examined reams of notes and primary sources to compose this massive biography of influence that stretches from MIT to the Pentagon to Xerox PARC and far beyond. If it sometimes seems that Licklider was a little too well beloved, especially in comparison to some of the more colorful figures in computing's recent history, it is worth remembering that his patience and humility were the very qualities that helped deliver the home-computing revolution we take for granted today. If we had to choose just one 20th-century computer pioneer that we couldn't do without, it would have to be the man behind the Dream Machine. *--Rob Lightner*

From Publishers Weekly
Licklider was a brilliant scientist whose essential contributions to cognitive psychology and cybernetics included critical early developments in the field of man-machine interaction. However, his original work is often overshadowed by his accomplishments as a teacher, administrator and project leader and this ably written and well-researched biography isn't likely to propel him into the limelight. Waldrop (Man-Made Minds) devotes about 20% of the book to Licklider himself; the rest covers his teachers, colleagues and students at MIT and the Pentagon including computing pioneers Douglas Engelbart, Wes Clark and Larry Roberts and Licklider's indirect influence on the development of personal computers and the Internet (via "the world's first large-scale experiment in personal computing" at MIT). To his credit, Waldrop avoids common stereotypes of computer nerds or saints, delivering a vivid account of Licklider and his contemporaries. But he was not able to interview Licklider (who died in 1990), nor does he include material from personal papers or memoirs. Instead, Waldrop bases most of the book on secondary accounts, including biographies and histories of technology. The result is an informative and engaging history of computers from the 1930s to the 1970s, with an emphasis on Licklider and his period of greatest influence, 1957 to 1968. (Aug. 27)Forecast: A six-city author tour will raise some interest, but there isn't much demand for another history of computing and the Internet, especially when Katie Hafner and Matthew Lyon's Where Wizards Stay Up Late and Martin Campbell-Kelly's Computer cover the same material.

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From Library Journal
Licklider, known to many simply as "Lick," was a revolutionary thinker for his time. During the early 1960s, he viewed the computer as a tool of communication and focused his attention on networking them for

accessing information and resource sharing. Waldrop, a former writer for Science magazine and author of Complexity, paints a comprehensive portrait of his subject, describing how his dream of a "human-computer symbiosis" would change the course of history and culture. Lick's work as the director of the Advance Research Projects Agency (ARPA) for the Department of Defense led him to envision "a user at a remote terminal, having access to a variety of resources at several interconnected computer centers." While heading ARPA, he developed time-sharing the interactive use of computers by several people at the same time and paved the way for the creation of the Internet. This fascinating account is recommended for an informed audience. Joe Accardi, William Rainey Harper Coll., Palatine, IL

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Paul Butler:

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Playing with family within a park, coming to see the ocean world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, after that why you don't try matter that really opposite from that. A single activity that make you not experience tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition of knowledge. Even you love The Dream Machine: J.C.R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal, you can enjoy both. It is great combination right, you still would like to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh can occur its mind hangout guys. What? Still don't understand it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

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