

that these automata served as the vanguard of a new industrial age.

Standage, who also authored 1999's *The Victorian Internet*, specializes in linking the technologies of the past with the discoveries of the present. And, as in his previous book, the connections he makes, while novel, are not always justified. Standage theorizes that these marvelous machines were the true progenitors of the Industrial Revolution: "At the intersection between entertainment, technology, and commerce, automata allowed new ideas to flow from one field to another and acted as a catalyst for further innovation." Now, some would say that population growth, mobility of labor, and the expansion of capital were the main factors behind the Industrial Revolution. But, hey, if Standage wants to attribute it to chess-playing robots, that's his prerogative.

Standage wants to pass off the Turk as a primitive form of artificial intelligence, a forerunner to Deep Blue. While it's an interesting concept, I'm not sure if the comparison is entirely valid: Deep Blue, after all, was actually run by circuitry and programming; the Turk was run by a man in a box. Yet it is interesting to note that the Turing test—the modern-day standard for measuring artificial intelligence—confirms a computer's intelligence based upon the skill with which it deceives inquisitors. If there's one thing (besides playing chess) that the Turk was good at, it was deception. And the emotions elicited by Deep Blue and the Turk are curiously similar.

Echoes of Kasparov's sputtering excuses are heard in the commentary of one of the Turk's critics, who proclaimed that the possibility "that an AUTOMATON can be made to move the Chessmen properly ... is UTTERLY IMPOSSIBLE." One can't help but hear a note of latent fear in this vehement denial. Perhaps the speaker was struck by an all-too-modern feeling that, while the mechanically digesting ducks of the world were well and good, an automaton that usurped what had previously been man's most characteristic province—the brain—hit a little bit too close to home?

As we race forward into an age where the potential for technological advancement is rivaled only by the potential amount of fear that might be caused by those advances, it is good to have some historical grounding. In *The Turk*, Tom Standage has written a highly entertaining book that, all in all, succeeds in its goal of convincing us that machine intelligence is limited, but man's cunning knows no bounds.

JUSTIN PETERS is a Washington Monthly intern.

Later, Nader

By Joshua Micah Marshall

Crashing the Party, Ralph Nader's memoir of his 2000 presidential campaign, is one part travelogue and one part free-ranging jeremiad against anything and everything connected to contemporary American politics. This book is not about public policy; and it moves much more briskly than one might expect given the author's fact-dense style of public speaking. But like his campaign, the book is a thoroughly insider affair with good times and positive reinforcement to those who buy into Nader's message, contempt for those who don't, and little effort to bridge the ground between the two.

Nader kicks off the narrative describing his decision to mount a second presidential run, picks up speed as his effort gets underway and old friends pledge support. Then he pulls us through the manic narrative of a year-and-a-half-long, shoestring national campaign, thick with asides about this or that local polluting power plant and morality tales about sell-out, straw-man Democrats. The mood of the book is unmistakably "onward and upward with activism." And, for those inclined to be thus inspired, that mood will likely prove inspiring. For others not under the spell, however, the mix of cliché, nostalgia, and reunion will likely have a quite different effect. For them, much of the book, particularly the first half,

will have the feel and cadence of one of those early '80s TV movies where the cast of some '60s-era sitcom reassembles for one last adventure. Picture a graying Gilligan flying from city to city pitching the professor, Mary Ann, and other worthies on some quixotic quest to save the Island.

Beneath the book's color, it is impossible not to recall the depth of bitterness and mutual incomprehension that separated Nader's supporters from those on the left who opposed him. So great was this gulf that a number of Nader's arguments, however powerful to his supporters, will likely read to his opponents like he is making their own case.

Consider the following passage in which Nader ridicules the mainstream media:

"Reporters described the assemblage as a motley crowd with a grab bag of causes having no seeming connection to one another. What, pray tell, were they protesting that the media found so difficult to describe? Here's what: poverty in an era of great concentrated wealth; corporate welfare; globalization through the WTO, NAFTA, and the World Bank, corrupt money in politics; bloated military budgets; global warming and other ecological degradations; genetically engineered foods without labeling; Occidental Petroleum's plans to drill on the sacred homeland of the

U'wa tribe in Columbia; the prison-industrial complex; the widening income gap; sweatshops; the need for mass transit; tobacco industry and its lavish \$1,000-a-plate events for 'Blue Dog Democrats'; and the giant media conglomerates."

And you thought it was just a grab bag of causes with no connection to one another!

Readers will also recognize the essence of Nader's campaign writ large in his

literary recollection of it. The book's signature emotions are self-righteousness (about Nader's cause) and contempt (for all who disagreed with it). Nader's supporters (invariably

**RALPH
NADER**
How to Tell the Truth and Still Run for President
**Crashing
the Party**

CRASHING THE PARTY:
How To Tell The Truth And Still
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by Ralph Nader
St. Martin's Press, \$24.95

described as “thoughtful”) are set against a pitiful cast of sellouts, hacks, turncoats, and cowards, which constitutes more or less everyone else on the leftward side of the political universe. To be sure, Nader and his crew were treated to no small amount of derision by Al Gore’s supporters in 2000. But none of it matches Nader’s intensity of denunciation, the facile opportunism of many of his political gambits, or the breezy thoughtlessness of many of his attacks.

Consider another passage. Nader describes one campaign interlude in which John Judis of *The New Republic* briefly traveled with him to write a story on the campaign. (Full disclosure: Judis is a friend.) Judis ended up writing a pained article critical of Nader’s campaign. In return Nader treats Judis to the standard ad hominem treatment. He first blames Judis’s article on the influence of Marty Peretz, *TNR*’s perennially Gore-boosting owner. Then he blames it on Judis’s jaded politics charging that Judis had “strayed from any fundamental grip on the question of corporate power in America.” That’s a strange criticism, though, because Judis had just written a lengthy book on pretty much exactly this topic. A small error perhaps, but a revealing one, and typical of the book.

Nader covers a lot of ground in *Crashing the Party*; he meets a lot of people; and he reviews a lot of issues. But now and again, when he happens on something that you know something about, it becomes apparent that he’s talking out of some other part of his body than his mouth. There are chapters that even Nader’s critics will find powerful, entertaining, and convincing. Whether Nader and Patrick J. Buchanan should have been included in the 2000 presidential debates is a question over which reasonable people may differ. But Nader levels a potent critique at the corporate-funded, bipartisan presidential commission which now presides over the debate process. Not only would the debate commission not allow Nader into the debates, they wouldn’t even let him near them. Some of the book’s most entertaining passages are

those in which Nader describes the risible game of cat-and-mouse he and the commission’s stooges played as the aspirant candidate tried to make his way even into one of the viewing areas to watch the debate.

In these market-friendly days, Nader’s constant references to corporate this and corporate that can’t help but strike a tinny note for many. But Nader’s rants against the smugly self-contained Commission on Presidential Debates often ring true. And today, in the aftermath of the Enron debacle, accusations of widespread and systematic corporate wrongdoing can’t be dismissed as obscurantist chatter nearly so easily. Nader’s supporters will no doubt argue that these recent revelations show that we very much need the Ralph Nader who first sounded the alarm against corporate malfeasance in the 1960s and 1970s.

They’re right. We do. Too bad the 21st-century Ralph Nader is the one we’re stuck with.

JOSHUA MICAH MARSHALL writes the *Talking Points Memo* (<http://talkingpointsmemo.com>).

Vengeance is Mined

By Joshua Hammer

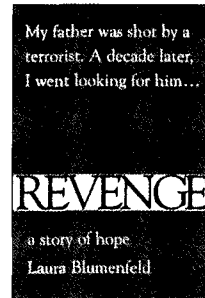
IN THE WINTER OF 1986, LAURA Blumenfeld’s father was shot and lightly wounded by a Palestinian militant as he strolled through the labyrinthine alleyways of Jerusalem’s old city. The attempted killing was a random attack—the gunman was part of a terrorist cell that set out to kill U.S. and British tourists in the aftermath of the U.S. bombing of Libya—but *Washington Post* reporter Blumenfeld took it personally. A decade later, during a “honeymoon year” spent in Jerusalem with her husband, a New York City prosecutor, Blumenfeld embarked on an all-consuming hunt for her father’s would-be killer. As Blumenfeld

writes early in her quest: “I was inhabited by a grandiose thought: My father’s injury should not go unanswered.”

Blumenfeld’s search for the assailant is the core narrative behind *Revenge: A Story of Hope*, but the detective story is only one part of this meandering, intermittently fascinating book. For Blumenfeld isn’t interested merely in finding the terrorist who fired the bullet; she has an equally obsessive need to understand her own motivations, and to confront the universal human impulse for revenge. This quest leads her through the blood-soaked Middle East, where she interviews Mossad agents, Holocaust survivors, and the then

Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu about collective and personal vengeance. She also tracks down family members of victims of the 1986 terrorist shooting spree to find out how they coped with the loss or injury of their loved ones. And she takes the reader on a Cook’s Tour of vengeance “experts” around the world, from black-veiled widows in Mafia country in Sicily to imams in the Iranian spiritual center of Qom to peasants in the dusty mountain hamlets of northern Albania. “I was looking for the shooter, but I also was looking for some kind of wisdom,” she writes. “So much of life’s turmoil comes from individuals or groups trying to settle a score. For years, from my perch at the *Post*, I had written about some dramatic examples ... Now I wanted to break it down and study it. I wanted to master revenge.”

Her excursions far afield yield some gut-wrenching stories and some interesting anthropological detail: In Albanian villages ruled by a medieval set of laws known as the canon, for example, she meets families who for decades have never ventured beyond their doorstep to avoid being killed by descendants of murder victims. And there’s an emotional conversation with a Mossad agent named Rafi



REVENGE
A Story of Hope
by Laura Blumenfeld
Simon & Schuster, \$25.00