

FAST TIMES AT FAIRMONT HIGH BY VERNOR VINGE



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FAST TIMES AT FAIRMONT HIGH BY VERNOR VINGE PDF

In a near future where wireless mind links and wearable computers blur the line between artificial reality and "real" reality, it's final exam time at San Diego's Fairmont Junior High. Juan Orozco and his friends have a killer idea for their off-line project. But can a bunch of 13-year-olds really figure out the secret of what's going on at Torrey Pines Park?

- Sales Rank: #91115 in Audible
- Published on: 2008-12-08
- Format: Unabridged
- Original language: English
- Running time: 167 minutes

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The future of middle school?

By Kat Hooper

Originally posted at FanLit.

Juan is an eighth grader in a near-future San Diego. Final exams have arrived and Juan and his friends are under a lot of pressure to perform well because those who don't keep up in this fast-moving information-driven virtual-reality society are left behind. That's what happened to Juan's father. Juan is determined to succeed, so much so that he's experimenting with cognition-enhancing drugs.

For one of their exams, students must work with a partner on a project of their choosing without outside assistance. That means that Juan and his partner Miriam can't access any information or help that's not already been downloaded into their wearable computers and networked brains. If they're caught communicating with anyone from outside, even remote students, they'll fail. While Juan and Miriam are working on their project in the Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve, they come across a new species of intelligent mice acting strangely in the park. If they want to get their own theory out there before someone else makes the discovery, they have to integrate a lot of sketchy facts very quickly and make some wild guesses about what's going on in Torrey Pines. They also have to worry about a remote virtual student who may be trying to steal their project.

Vernor Vinge presents a possible future that's not too hard to believe in. In order to just keep up with their peers, kids are required to be hooked into a global network where they can access and assimilate huge amounts of information in a very short time. Those who can't handle the new technology and who can't absorb a lot of data rapidly will end up on the bottom rungs of society. Parents and grandparents who haven't learned to use the new technology or to adapt to a barrage of new knowledge are quickly becoming obsolete. Juan feels so much pressure that he's willing to cheat by using drugs.

Fast Times at Fairmont High is supposed to be scary -- and a warning, I think -- but as a college professor and the mother of an unmotivated eighth grader, the thought that kids would be so driven to learn and excel

sort of excited me. In reality I think that even if (or when) we have these technologies in the future, most eighth graders will still be more interested in playing games and socializing with friends than worrying about their future socioeconomic status. I can't see Vinge's future actually coming to pass, but it's fascinating to think about and I wouldn't be surprised if kids are someday, in the not too distant future, using the cool technology that Vinge describes.

Fast Times at Fairmont High is set in the same world as Vernor Vinge's novel Rainbow's End which is on my TBR stack. Fast Times at Fairmont High won the 2002 Hugo Award for Best Novella. I listened to Brilliance Audio's version which is just under three hours long and is nicely narrated by Eric Michael Summerer.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Fast Times

By Joseph A. Nickence

If you had read Rainbows End, you were immediately familiar with the characters. But alas, the names are the same, but the characters are different. Regardless, this is a great story, and worth your time.

0 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Not Free SF Reader

By average

Drug assisted outside exam's rodent release.

4 out of 5

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