



Kiln People

David Brin , Beth Meacham (Editor)

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In a perilous future where disposable duplicate bodies fulfill every legal and illicit whim of their decadent masters, life is cheap. No one knows that better than Albert Morris, a brash investigator with a knack for trouble, who has sent his own duplicates into deadly peril more times than he cares to remember.

But when Morris takes on a ring of bootleggers making illegal copies of a famous actress, he stumbles upon a secret so explosive it has incited open warfare on the streets of Dittotown.

Dr. Yosil Maharal, a brilliant researcher in artificial intelligence, has suddenly vanished, just as he is on the verge of a revolutionary scientific breakthrough. Maharal's daughter, Ritu, believes he has been kidnapped--or worse. Aeneas Polom, a reclusive trillionaire who appears in public only through his high-priced platinum duplicates, offers Morris unlimited resources to locate Maharal before his awesome discovery falls into the wrong hands.

To uncover the truth, Morris must enter a shadowy, nightmare world of ghosts and golems where nothing--and no one--is what they seem, memory itself is suspect, and the line between life and death may no longer exist.

Kiln People Details

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From Reader Review Kiln People for online ebook

That70sheidi says

As an inherently lazy person - deeply, happily lazy - the idea of Kiln People appeals to me. Someone to do my laundry, awesome! However....

What started as an interesting story with some cool plot twirls turned into a plodding, pedantic, slit-your-wrists boring slodge about halfway through. I would say about half of the book could be cut without any loss in part because of all the repetition (hey guess what there's stockpiled food here for government officials to eat in case of holocaust, hey, look, it's that freeze-dried food, oh and hey check this out it's a wall of food for elites during an emergency, but wait let me throw in another funny fresh quip about our tax dollars at work har har you can relate right?).

Some of the repetition at the beginning is great because it establishes how precisely alike the ditto copies are when they come out of the kiln, but when you're midway through the book and each of those copies has to rehash everything that's happened over the last two days for the third time in as many pages it gets tiresome.

The other BIG issue - needlessly expositing about technology and scientists we do not and will never have - just slows down the pace. There's awesome action/adventure momentum and then slam, the reader is shoved into a wall of painful philosophy loaded with too many examples: it's not just mountains and molehills, and the sea and a teacup, and a zebra and a giraffe, and a flea and a dinosaur, and a blade of grass and a golf course lawn, and an atom and a white dwarf, it's all of them together EACH TIME there's some sort of poetic comparison or contrast or whatever the hell the author is nattering on about while I just want to get back to what is happening with all the Alberts!

SO MUCH boring crap stuffed in around the frame of great characters and fairly intriguing motives made this a really, really, really long book.

Joey-Joey-Jo-Jo says

Ben says

I enjoyed this book just as much the second time around. While certain twists or plot developments were more obvious to me, and I found it a lot easier to see where Brin was going as my incomplete recollections of the story were prompted on, I got a lot more out the skill in which he wove the story together and his style of tell-telling.

Written from various different perspectives, all of which are that of one or another version of the main protagonist, Albert Morris, Brin uses various different voices and tenses from chapter to chapter. It is also interesting to see how he develops the characters in different ways, when they are all essentially the same person, simply experiencing different events over a short period of time. Seeing how the character(s) react

the same way as well as differently is equally interesting, while keeping us mostly pleasantly free of unnecessary repetition.

The book is jam packed full of puns and plays on words and is amusing as well as exciting and reasonably fast paced. The plot is interesting and works well as a detective story as well as a science fiction novel. Brin wanders a little towards the end, getting a little bit too bogged down in the mystical aspects of the tale, and somewhat bizarrely the pace and rhythm of the plot staggers there too, even as he clearly tries to up the tension and pacing with faster and faster cuts between perspectives.

However, Brin offers us an enjoyable read which touches on some interesting issues of self and true identity. He presents a curious future world, which is both alluring and repellant at the same time with things being both better and worse, and the moral questions of the day being quite different to our own - though parallels can be seen with our society if we take certain things to be metaphors. For example, the issues of sex and fidelity with 'real' people or 'dittos' and what counts as cheating.

A very enjoyable book, crossing genres, which has the capacity to make you think and possessing of a dry sense of humour.

Mike says

5 Stars don't seem enough for this one. Such realistic science, you expect to see this capability in the near future. Believable and edge of the seat action.

j says

I like sci-fi, but man, a lot of these dudes are long-winded (and how do they manage to write so freaking many books regardless? Fantasy authors too especially). I picked this one up because it was lauded and I loved the concept: a future society where people sit on their asses on the couch and send out disposable one-use-only clones (made out of clay and color-coded based on brain power and durability, from dumb-as-Gumby Greens to sleek, efficient Ebonies) to do the stuff they don't want to do: go to work, run errands, walk the dog. Then the clones, already starting to break down, come home and upload their memories to the main user and *voila!* A whole day's work AND you got to watch *The View*.

Though there are some nifty ideas at work (what if the clone decides he doesn't *want* to run your errands? what would a religion that catered to creations that live only a day look like?), they aren't nearly interesting enough to support a 600-page book, at least when they've been wrapped in a smartass whodunnit with too many shifting points-of-view (which are technically *the same point-of-view* since the clones all have identical memories to begin with, argh).

I read about a third of it, didn't care enough to find out what was going to happen. Who knows, maybe it got really cool at the end. Still probably wasn't as cool as this.

Dev Null says

Brilliant!

A near-ish future detective story set in a world where people can make copies of themselves (dittos or dits) which they can then send off to do various tasks, only to download the memories back into the original at the end of the day.

Brin takes a truly weird idea for a technology, and then sets about looking at how it would change people and society - good ole fashioned speculative fiction - without getting all hung up on how the technology is supposed to work. His world had the off-kilter feel of something by Michael Marshall Smith, with a bit of the same humour, and the same edge and wryness we came to know and love from Brin in his Uplift books. The only faint blemish on this book - and it is faint - is also familiar from the end of the Uplifts; he seems to want his books to end in massive events of universe-shaking significance. In what otherwise felt like a detective story with a cool twist, the shift was a little abrupt (but only a little, and I loved it anyways.)

Definitely a keeper.

JBradford says

When I read Brin's *Existence* last month, I apologized in my review about giving it five stars, which I do not normally do for novels, but I had to do it not only because of the outstanding story but also and mostly because of the sheer talent displayed by the author. So—I went out in search of other things by Brin, and now I want to give this one six or seven stars! This novel is an incredible tour-de-force by a extremely intelligent writer who clearly loves to play with his writing skills. As with that other book, I rather expect that a lot of readers will not agree with me. My beloved wife would have stopped reading before getting through half a dozen of the numbered sections, and I doubt my beloved sister-in-law could even be convinced to get that far.

To begin with, the plot is utterly fantastic and I expect most conservatives would put it down as pure nonsense--which it is, I agree. But the writing is so well done that I am perfectly willing to suspend my disbelief and enjoy the work itself, as a piece of art. Just as an example of what I am talking about--I recently read a first book by a new author, which I had to mark down to two stars because the dialog was simply unacceptable; I could not bring myself to believe that real people would say the things those characters did, in the circumstance they were experiencing. In this book, however, the unbelievable characters are experiencing unbelievable situations, and the dialog is perfectly acceptable; if there were such characters, and if these things happened to them, I could see them saying what they said.

In addition, I love the way Brin plays with language in making up new words, the meanings of which are obvious. Even more entertaining, he demonstrates throughout a remarkable sense of humor that provides outright laughs if not smiles on nearly every page--from the wit behind the puns at the beginning of most sections to the truly funny way he comments as the omnipotent author about the things that are happening to his characters, or has his characters comment about what is going on. This is truly a funny book, which is rather rare in science fiction. Oh yes--didn't I tell you? This is science fiction, truly hard science fiction, and it has enough science to give you a headache--all carefully explained in reasoned accounts that seem so real I want to go check on Google to see if there really were such people! I noted on Brin's Webpage that he

intends to write a “comic” science fiction novel but questions whether that can be done. I really want to read anything that is funnier than this one!

Kiln People presupposes that some very smart scientists in the previous generation found a way to animate specially-made clay replicas of people by copying the mental processes and elan of the source person into a clay replica, which then gets baked in an oven to produce a life-size (or very much otherwise!) figure that walks and talks and thinks, but with a strong proviso: the replica can only survive for approximately 24 hours, after which it begins to disintegrate--and by the end of which time the replica is supposed to get back to the original and download all the memories of what it has experienced during the day. In the amazing world that Brin creates from this, people no longer work; instead, they send out copies of themselves to do the work. That hardly scratches the surface of this strange world--it does not begin to tell you about the different capabilities possessed by the duplicates, which come in a wide range of colors: ebony for highly intelligent copies (perhaps more so than their originals), white for highly emotional or sensual copies, gray for superior skills and adaptability, green for pure grunt work labor, etc.--all available at different costs and with different specialized abilities. Can you picture this? Can you conceive of this brave new world, that has such creatures in it?

Now picture a private detective, who for years has been trying to capture a master criminal with an incredible skill at disguise. On a given day, our esteemed detective, Albert Morris (who is a little down because his girlfriend, who lives on a houseboat when she is not living in, is off fighting a war, which in this world is a sporting event), bakes up three different copies of himself: a high-functioning gray to carry on the research and business interactions of his detective business, another slightly less expensive gray to go to an important meeting in his place, and a labor grade green to mow the lawns and clean the toilets around the household, while he himself goes off to pursue his chase of the evildoer. Off they all go, on seemingly unrelated tasks, and things begin to happen to them, with their various adventures and misadventures interacting as they all become involved in the nefarious complicated plans of an arch villain, with the result that you get the story from four different points of view--and the story, which twists and turns through several levels of complexity, becomes more and more fantastic as events evolve.

David Brin is a trained scientist. If you go out to his Website and read through some of his philosophical musings, you will find that he has lots of very strong opinions, very different in many cases from mainstream thinking ... and that he tends to personify any and all of these beliefs in his writings. Accordingly, the world that he creates builds from these ideas of where we are heading with exponentially developed cameras and television, artificial intelligence machines, our innate tendency to engage in conflict, etc. I am not sure that this is a world I would want to live in, but it is fascinating to read about.

Christopher McKittrick says

KILN PEOPLE is the most fun I had reading a book in a long while, and highly inventive (despite what a few scholars have said - jealousy, I suspect). It's big, and it gets a bit long in the 3rd quarter of the book, but it's really worth the read. I love Brin's fresh look at the definition of "soul" and his toying with transcendence. All in a funny, suspenseful, intriguing page-turner. Great SF!

I went into KILN PEOPLE with a bit of hesitation, expecting yet another take on cloning or golems, and ended up getting really sucked into the story. I think Brin does fabulous things with world-building and 3rd-tier extrapolations from the technologies in the book, and I constantly found

myself asking the next question... which Brin then answered in ways I hadn't anticipated. Some of the characters are just wonderful, especially the "Frankie" hero-figure, and I appreciate how Brin took a completely... well, Brinish approach to the idea of "soul" (and, indeed, "soulistics"), having real fun with it - and sharing that fun with the reader along the way while transcending the SF detective genre, among other things.

The primary flaw is its length, and I don't so much fault Brin for this as I do his editor - 50 pages could easily have been trimmed, because much of it is repetitive or over-expository, and TOR should have chopped it. Even so, I'm more impressed by this book than by most anything I've read in a long while, and in fact the light tone serves the content well, much better than a serious tone would have.

Highly recommended.

Remo says

La historia narra las peripecias de un detective en un futuro no muy lejano, en una sociedad totalmente transformada por una nueva tecnología, la golemtecnología. Es posible en este futuro "imprimir" o imprimir copias de cerámica de uno mismo (llamados golems o ídems), que pueden dedicarse a hacer las tareas que se les encomienden, mientras el yo real, el de carne, se dedica a lo que le plazca. Hay copias de varios precios y calidades. los verdes baratos, aptos para limpiar el baño y cortar el césped (y algo más, pero no adelantaremos nada), los grises sobrios de alta calidad, los ébano cerebrales... Las copias viven un día, al final del cual pueden descargar los recuerdos en su original. Es posible de esta manera vivir varias vidas a la vez. El autor dedica bastante rato a explicar Y explicar muy bien) qué cambios produciría una tecnología así en la sociedad. Nos cuenta qué ocurre con los grupos fundamentalistas, con las leyes para golems, con el día a día de la gente, con las nuevas perversiones y diversiones que ofrece una sociedad así...

Nuestro detective, Albert Morris, especialista en violaciones de copyright (tranquilos, no es de la \$GA€), se ve involucrado en un caso que será más grande de lo que había imaginado al principio. Bueno, en realidad se ve involucrado en tres casos simultáneamente, por lo que tiene a tres ídems trabajando en paralelo. Cada pista le(s) conducirá a algo mayor, hasta que llegamos a descubrir el vasto paisaje de lo que se oculta tras las levedades que investigaban los idAlberts al principio. El tratamiento formal de un ídem es añadirle un id al principio, por lo que los golems de nuestro protagonista son siempre llamados idAlbert o idMorris. Al prota humano se le llama todo el rato realAlbert. Está en todo, el autor.

La novela es estupenda. Es un relato de detectives que parodia en ocasiones a los relatos de detectives. En un punto de la novela el protagonista reflexiona sobre por qué no ha llamado a la policía, y se dice que todas las pelis de misterio o terror dejarían de existir si los protagonistas hicieran lo que deben hacer desde el principio: llamar a la poli. Pero él tampoco llama . El ritmo está bien llevado, con la posible excepción del final (qué difícil es hacer un buen final de novela), en la que se suceden una tras otra bastantes explicaciones de física cuántica (ondas de probabilidad resonantes, estados entrelazados, interferencia entre funciones de estado) mezcladas con conceptos de psicología que hacen un batiburrillo difícilmente comprensible. Pero cuando acaban esas explicaciones, la novela se propulsa de nuevo hacia su grand finale.

Hay alguna referencia clara al Mundo feliz de Huxley, como cuando habla de los trabajadores baratos, que ni sienten ni piensan, llamados epsilones (igual que en la novela de Huxley), y alguna otra referencia humorística que me arrancó una sonrisa:

Una cosa es ver la muerte venir a manos de tu creación. Eso forma parte de la tradición épica

humana, después de todo. Edipo y su padre. El barón Frankenstein y su monstruo. William Henry Gates y Windows '09...

Me ha encantado. Ciencia ficción de la buena. Mi nota: Muy, muy buena.

Jacqueline says

Kiln People is an intriguing book on several levels. Although set several generations into the future, it deals with important issues like identity, "souls", race, technology, and self-actualization. Who is Albert, really? Does he have core character traits? Without his memories, would he be the same person? These questions are addressed in this book. Additionally, while differences based on today's ideas of race have supposedly disappeared, the divisions in the future society are based on whether a person is born from a woman or a kiln. Within the kiln people, there is a hierarchy, additionally. Technology plays an enormous role in the society to the reduction of privacy. Is technology good, evil, or unimportant? Finally, I believe that the book addressed the importance of self-actualization. How do we creatively impact our world?

What does it mean to be human?

icowdave says

As much as I like David Brin's work, I just could not finish this book. No problems with the writing per se but the story was really ridiculous.

In the future, everyone has an in-home kiln that they use to make life-like robotic clay duplicates of themselves. You get up in the morning lay down on the machine with a blank next to you and imprint your consciousness on the ditto. You send it out to mow the grass or to the office to work in your place etc. There are different types of dittos for different tasks and each has a specific color. Make a green dit to do mundane chores, they're cheap to produce, but for work you'd make a gray as they're more suited for complex thinking. White ones will have sex for you if you can't be bothered to show up in person. If you're a waiter you make a yellow or two and off to work they go doubling your income etc. At the end of the day your dittos die so they have to be home before they expire so they can download the day's memories back into your brain. Need I go on?

When I read I try to picture the world I'm reading about. With Kiln People it was a cartoon world over-run by giant Gummy Bear people. I Could not take it seriously and had to bail after 140 pages. I only stuck with it that long because I just read Dune, glorious book that it is, and I thought it was the comparison that was killing Kiln People for me. Nope. It was the gummies.

This was a massive disappointment. Read anything else you like from Brin but steer clear of this one.

Arthur says

Short review: Fascinated by the concept, but in the end ultimately let down by the plot.

Well, I have to say that I enjoyed the ride, but I didn't necessarily enjoy the destination very much. That is probably because I did not exactly understand the destination - the ending. I loved the idea of duplicating soul standing-waves and having many of yourselves running around. I particularly liked the characters, including the like-able "Pallie" in the form of a ferret side-kick. Pal was sort of reminiscent for me of Pantalaimon, Lyra's daemon in the Golden Compass. Too bad he was crushed to oblivion, but at least realPal got to inload some fragments of that ferret golem's memories. What was way to deep for my comprehension was ditYosil's strange experiment with Albert's gray and red ditto. I understood the basic concept that ditYosil yearned to become almost god-like and all powerful by riding some strange wave and consuming the souls of recently deceased thousands, but I only really got the gist of what was going on. And I didn't quite understand what happened to realalbert at the end. Did he unload himself into the gray ditto or did the gray unload into realalbert? And I was perturbed at the way the novel kept you hanging concerning Aeneas Kaolin's role (if any) in the prion attack on Universal Kilns and other events in the story. I was hoping for a "gotcha" moment on Kaolin but was left unsatisfied. All in all it was a great idea. But the plot that was built around that idea was full of holes, loose-ends, and far too complex for the average individual to understand what the hell was going on. Maybe only David Brin understands the intricacies of ditYosil's master experiment using Albert Morris.

Tracey says

previously read 1 Mar 2003

I am fascinated by the concept of the "dittos" -- an temporary, alternate self that you can imprint your self/soul onto - and then download its experiences at the end of the day. Brin explores this technology and its potential effects on human society in detail - through the structure of a mystery.

The main character, Albert Morris, is a private investigator (you can imagine how helpful the dittos are to him!) and is investigating the disappearance/murder of one of the developers of the copying technology. He is also involved in an ongoing investigation of bootleg copying of famous people - with the two tasks entwining in surprising ways.

The story is told from the viewpoint of Albert and his dittos - we learn bits and pieces of what's going on from different viewpoints - with the story only finally coming together right at the end.

I suppose the re-readability of this novel depends on your long-term memory... fortunately, I'd forgotten most of the plot details and was therefore able to enjoy the mystery and its denouement about as much as I did the first time!

Apatt says

*"Sometimes you're the grasshopper. Some the ant. The difference now is that now you can be both, the very same day."**

That quote sums up the basic theme of *Kiln People* nicely. This was going to be my last book of 2015 but I underestimated its length. From the synopsis I expected it to be a quick, breezy fun read, but when I downloaded it on my Kindle I was surprised to find it's almost 600 pages long. A lot of it is still quite fun though, but it did outstay its welcome a little.

Kiln People hits the ground running with a very fragile non-human protagonist being chased and shot at by thugs, while his body is falling apart for some reason, with bits dropping off and limbs melting. From this gripping beginning, Brin skilfully introduces the concept of soul duplication where people commonly use a machine to create "dittos" or "golems" of themselves to send on errands, dangerous missions, and basically anything they don't want to do themselves. In Brin's words:

"A technology that lets people do all the things they want to do, all at the same time."

Art by SharksDen (brilliant Chinese artist)

These golems have a lifespan of one day, after which their clay bodies begin to disintegrate. Their creators get to enjoy their golems' experiences for themselves when these golems return to upload their experiences to them. In this way, the golems also get to live on as their souls reunite with their creator. Some golems are flawed copies and become "frankies", named after Frankenstein, where the golems ignore their creator's instructions and simply wander off to live their single day lives the way they want to. I like the idea of different grades of golems, colour coded to indicate their grade; the green ones being the cheapest and most fragile, the gray ones more resilient and with a higher brain capacity, the top of the line black ones more capable and intelligent than their creators.

Kiln People is a good example of high concept sci-fi where a single conceit is the basis of the entire storyline. I love this kind of setup when it is done well. It works well for sci-fi because the author can introduce a single outlandish technology and explore the hell out of it from all angles, looking at every possible implication of this world changing invention; from scientific, social and even philosophical point of view. This kind of sci-fi tends to be — more often than not — thought experiments rather than a prediction or projection of a possible future.

In this instance *Kiln People*'s basic idea enables Brin to look at the existential quandaries faced by the golems who are - by design - very short lived. I believe this book is partly an allegory for our responsibility for our children or even subordinates at work. Brin also looking at prejudice and how we often look down upon those from lower social strata. The allegories would be worthless without an engaging story to carry them, Brin is a talented storyteller and for the most part able to maintain my interest. However, I do find the book to be a little overlong, especially the last 50 or so pages which read like an overextended epilogue and a climax which takes a turn for the psychedelic and surreal. There are a little too many characters to keep track of for my liking, though the main ones are reasonably well developed. The prose is generally fine if unremarkable but I do like the narrative technique of switching from the protagonist's point of view to several of his golems. They start off as essentially the same people and their personalities gradually diverge.

In general *Kiln People* is well worth reading for the fascinating concept, world building and philosophical issues it tackles. It is a more serious work than I was expecting. Personally, I wish it was around 200 pages

shorter so the story would be tighter. As it is I can recommend it with the caveat that you expect to spend more time and effort in reading it than you would expect from the synopsis.

* This quote needs some clarification if you haven't read the book. What it means is that some days you wake up as you, a normal human being, other days you wake up inside the duplication machine as a golem. This is not literally the case of course, the golem has your memory and personality so when the book's point of view switches to him as the narrator he will feel that he is the ant - the inferior one - for the day.

Notes:

I haven't read John Scalzi's *Lock In* yet so I don't know how similar it is. Both books play with the idea of living life vicariously through an artificial construct but the details and slant of the storyline seem to be very different.

The movie *Surrogates* (2009) has a very similar premise to *Kiln People* but the implications of the technology is not explored in any real depth.

This review was entirely written on a smartphone. If you can avoid doing that, do.

Jonathan Lupa says

Though in some ways the ending was a little big for me, in general, this was an absolutely terrific bit of sci-fi mystery. The treatment of the cloning topics was terrific, and the storytelling was more than compelling enough to pull you through some of the more recitative sections.

I think the bottom line for me is that I need to go through this mans Bibliography and read them all.

Michael says

I was really disappointed with this book.

The concept is fun at first. It explores some interesting issues with identity and individuality and so on. Since there's a mystery going on, it reminded me of Asimov's robot mysteries, except here you've got dittos instead of robots.

The first problem that shows up is that it becomes pretty hard to keep track of who's who. Albert creates several dittos, and each chapter tracks one of them. It's hard to remember which ditto did what.

The real problem for me, though, was that about halfway through the book it all falls apart. It descends into all this metaphysical nonsense. The story gets more and more complicated and basically impossible to keep track of. It kept feeling like the book surely had to be about to end, but there were still hundreds of pages left! I had no interest in the last 200 pages; I don't know why I finished it.

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Wayne says

some creepy guy (who looked just like the simpsons' comic book guy) recommended this to me in my favorite used book store. he claimed it should have won Hugo instead of Neil Gaiman. I was hooked from the beginning, partially because the premise of the novel resonated with me. It was a fantastic read up until the last third of the book, which takes place over approximately ten minutes of the story's timeline. Some authors don't know how to edit.

Ric says

In the *rarified* sub-genre of **SF doppelgangers**, this must be, I am sure, a favorite. Years after I first read this book, I am **still** thinking about it, so there must be something here.

David Brin writes the story **tongue-in-cheek** (*I mean baking yourself a duplicate is kinda outrageous, isn't it?*), but without descending into parody or outright *silliness*. In fact he keeps a straight face throughout the book, and stays on the main theme, which is an interesting mystery tale, sufficient onto itself in terms of story-telling value. (*Somehow, this approach reminds me of Vernor Vinge's Marooned In Real Time, a 5-star book based on those absurd **bobbles**.*) Also, Brin doesn't take the extrapolation of the central premise too far, avoiding the *pitfall* of writing in thousands of additional words of "explanation." All that works for me, though I realize this may be a minority view.

I am somewhat **longing** for a sequel, but am ambivalent on this. Sometimes, a bad sequel could wreck the mystique of the original. In any case, wholeheartedly, thanks for writing this book, Dr. Brin.

Kim says

I thought this was a really good book, with a fascinating world concept that I'd love to see explored further. A post-internet technology without being alien, or space related. And sure the book did shove its head up its own ass towards the end and kind of lose its way it was still worth reading. I wish he, or others, would write more in this world.
