**FIRE IN PARADISE**

**By Micah Morrison**

*(reviewed on June 1, 1993)*

With one eye cocked for high drama, the other for any hint of bureaucratic bungling, Morrison (a reporter for Insight magazine) tells in fascinating detail the story of Yellowstone's 1988 firestorm. The summer of 1988 was a mean fire season. Big-time blazes were fought all across the country, but it was Yellowstone's million-acre incineration that caught the public's eye. Some viewed the conflagration as one of nature's great events and hailed the park's ``natural burn'' policy as a sensible response to nature's mysterious, sometimes scary, ways. But others disagreed, finding that policy to be a bone-headed approach without ecological merit or economic common sense. Morrison doesn't choose sides in this debate; he's more interested in the various snafus, mixed signals, reversals, and downright flimflammery that marked the handling of the fires. Confusion and cross-purpose reigned: The mission of the Forest Service clashed with that of the Park Service; there were manifold, antagonistic, uncoordinated levels of command; from the beginning, communication difficulties between the command structures, the press, and the public were evident; and firefighters had to contend with dwindling resources in the face of increased fire severity. Engaging as these facts may be, though, the real excitement of Morrison's report lies in his profiles of the fires--mischievous, multiple-personality characters full of nasty surprises. From the fires' first lazy hours right through the white-knuckle days of August when the flames threatened gateway communities, the author serves up a thrilling, blow-by-blow account of the wildfire. A suspenseful confrontation between a roaring inferno and an elephantine bureaucracy, in which everyone gets burned.