



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
 Club Notice - 5/19/95 -- Vol. 13, No. 47

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Middletown 5T-415
 Wednesdays at noon.

DATE	TOPIC
05/31/95	Book: BEGGARS AND CHOOSERS by Nancy Kress (Hugo Nominee)
06/21/95	Book: BRITTLE INNINGS by Michael Bishop (Hugo Nominee)
07/12/95	Book: MIRROR DANCE by Lois McMaster Bujold (Hugo Nominee)
08/02/95	Book: MOTHER OF STORMS by John Barnes (Hugo Nominee)
08/23/95	Book: TOWING JEHOVAH by James Morrow (Hugo Nominee)
09/13/95	Book: BRAIN CHILD by George Turner
10/05/95	Book: MIDSHIPMAN'S HOPE by David Feintuch (**THURSDAY**)

Outside events:

The Science Fiction Association of Bergen County meets on the second Saturday of every month in Upper Saddle River; call 201-933-2724 for details. The New Jersey Science Fiction Society meets on the third Saturday of every month in Belleville; call 201-432-5965 for details.

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1. Tom Russell in Holmdel is single-handedly inventing the field of AT&T-oriented Science Fiction. (Well, unless you count the stuff I write, but my stuff is all true). This week he turns his hand to alternate history (-mrl):

AT&T TODAY
(Special U.S. Edition)

Saturday, April 1, 1995 -- 11:15 a.m. EDT

THE MT VOID

Page 2

STOCK AT 4 P.M. ... AT&T at 63 7/8, up 10 3/8 from Thursday.
DJIA at 3888.94, down 22.21. THURSDAY'S CLOSE: AT&T at 54 1/4,
up 3/8. DJIA at 3911.15, down 24.89.

MCI BUYS BELLCORE *** As has been rumored, Bellcore, once the R&D arm of the Regional Bell Operating Companies, has been sold. MCI has acquired Bellcore to enable it to develop essential new technologies, such as to compete with AT&T's TrueVoice(TM) technology. According to Bob Lucky, MCI's newly-appointed Chief Technical Officer, the company will be re-named "MCI TRUE LABS," or MTL for short. "The TRUE is an acronym for "Traditional Research and Useful Engineering," says Lucky, "We have a lot of important work to do to refocus our work on long-distance services. Our R&E people will get free long distance service on the MCI network, and we want it to be unequalled in the world."

When asked if the purchase is intended to use Bellcore's strength in wireless technology to salvage MCI's disastrously misdirected attempt to get into this area, Lucky responded, "Clearly MCI now recognizes that scientists and engineers are better at making key business decisions than MBAs and financiers. We look forward to formulating a new wireless strategy for MCI."

Responding to this announcement, Bob Allen of AT&T has appointed Joe Nacchio to the post of AT&T Superchief Technical Officer. Nacchio will lead a reformed AT&T BTL. Joe commented, "We're calling it BTL to restore some of the old culture - it means Back-Together Labs." Allen said Nacchio will be making some key changes to ensure AT&T's continuing technical leadership: AT&T will revitalize its campus recruiting program to outbid Lucky's MTL for outstanding EE PhDs; Joe will be personally responsible for the determination of funding to each laboratory and project.

BTL President Daniel Stanzone said, "Joe and I will be making other

changes in the near future to revitalize the Labs, such as getting more inter-departmental communications by restoring the noon-time Tech Talks program and by restoring funding to the Bell Labs clubs. We have New Jersey EPA approval for private 9-hole golf courses at each major BTL location in New Jersey, and we're seeking approval in other states. The 'country club' is back!"

2. VIRUS (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: A glitzy, glossy story of an Ebola outbreak that sidesteps everything that would make the story really interesting and turns it into a cliched crime story. There is a much more interesting story about Ebola going on in

Zaire as I write this. Rating: -1 (-4 to +4)

Riding the tide of the current interest in emerging viral diseases comes an NBC made-for-TV film, VIRUS, broadcast on Monday, May 8. This is Roger Young's adaptation of the novel OUTBREAK by Robin Cook with Armand Mastroianni directing. People who remember my review of the recent movie OUTBREAK know I have a very specific interest in fiction and non-fiction about emerging and extremely virulent diseases, especially Ebola. I suppose this is a morbid fascination, but in my uninformed estimation, and that of a few other people I have read, viral diseases, mostly being uncovered as Africa develops, constitute a greater threat to human life than nuclear weapons ever did. This is in large part because, for now at least (and contrary to expectation), humans are smart enough to restrain themselves from loosing the destruction that a nuclear war would bring. But a virus does not wait for human permission to break out. And the story of the Ebola virus is far from over. At the time OUTBREAK was released there had been three acknowledged outbreaks of Ebola. Ebola Zaire occurred in an isolated region and it burned itself out quickly. In some experts' opinions it is still not clear why Ebola Sudan did not become a worldwide catastrophe. (Ebola Reston, chronicled in Richard Preston's best

seller THE HOT ZONE, apparently had only flu-like symptoms in humans.) Since OUTBREAK was released there came to light rumors of a fourth outbreak on the Ivory Coast last November. And as I write this the most important news story in the world--though certainly not the best covered by the news media--is that there is a fifth outbreak of Ebola in a population center in Zaire. We are very likely still at the really early stages of the story of the war between humans and the Ebola virus. We still do not know the animal host that serves as its breeding ground, and it keeps on breeding. And the forests of the world may harbor hundreds of such viral diseases with which humans have yet to make contact.

Well, on a lighter note we have this film run on NBC, based on the novel by Robin Cook. Cook is absolutely the wrong person to write a good thriller about Ebola. He writes stories about conspiracies in or near the medical community. When you are writing a story about a disease as dangerous as Ebola is all by itself, you do not need human bad guys. That is the same mistake that the film OUTBREAK made. Here it is not so much a mistake as a disaster. While OUTBREAK soured in the final third, this was a bad film almost from the word "go." This is primarily just a reprise of a favorite Hollywood plot of the damsel fighting the nasty conspiracy or evil people. Yes, this particular outbreak of Ebola is brought on as a plot by some nasty villains who have this reason why they want to see this potential worldwide cataclysm take place. The endangered damsel is Dr. Marissa Blumenthal (played by Nicollette Sheridan), a brilliant new hire at the Center for Disease Control. She just happens to be drop-dead beautiful, wears lots of makeup, and has carefully styled hair. She looks just exactly like any

intelligent CDC doctor would never look. And she is very quickly getting all the plum responsibilities. Of course there is some suspicion that is because she is living with the influential Dr. Ralph Harbuck (William Devane who acted with Sheridan previously on KNOT'S LANDING). Her success seems odd because she seems to have to have explained to her some very obvious safety precautions in the maximum security lab (like negative air pressure so air blows in rather than out). And if you see nothing ridiculous in someone in so important a position knowing so little, wait until you hear the motive of the conspirators! I will not

spoil the plot here, but it is a real doozy.

VIRUS is a poorly conceived thriller that sidesteps everything that really would be interesting about an Ebola outbreak in favor of an overused plot. I would give it a -1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

3. Hugo Factoid of the Week: Robert Silverberg has been nominated 23 times (and won 3), Harlan Ellison has been nominated 18 (and won 7), and Poul Anderson has been nominated 16 times (and won 7). Niven has been nominated 14 times by himself, 4 times with Jerry Pournell and 1 time with Steve Barnes. Next week: who has been nominated the most times in the fiction categories *without winning*? [-ecl]

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Rich bachelors should be heavily taxed. It is not fair
that some men should be happier than others.
-- Oscar Wilde