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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
Club Notice - 5/26/95 -- Vol. 13, No. 48

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. Of our next discussion book, BEGGARS AND CHOOSERS by Nancy  
Kress, Evelyn Leeper says:

Last year Nancy Kress expanded her Hugo-award-winning novella

"Beggars in Spain" to a novel. Now she's written a sequel, and while some may say this is too much of a good thing, on the whole BEGGARS AND CHOOSERS works.

THE MT VOID

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At the beginning of the 22nd Century, there are three groups of people in the world: the Sleepless, the genetically enhanced ("donkeys"), and the rest ("Livers"). And Kress follows three characters, one from each of the groups, to tell her story, which is a story of the widening distance between the haves and the have-nots. And lest you think this merely a problem of some maybe future, Kress makes sure you see it in current terms as well: "... the United States had always seemed to me like some powerful innocent beast, lushly beautiful, with the cranial capacity of a narrow-headed deer. Look how it stretches its sleek muscles in the sunlight. Look how it bounds high. Look how it runs gracefully straight into the path of the oncoming train."

Not surprisingly, Kress's future has its own set of oncoming trains that people are running straight into. The donkeys stay in power by paying taxes back to the livers, in the form of goods and services. And of course, this system is not stable, and we see the inevitable break-down unfold, as well as attempts by the Sleepless to introduce new scientific marvels, which may save mankind--or destroy it.

If Kress's sociology is right on target, her biology is less convincing--at least to me. Kress makes her characters confront the consequences of their actions, but while I found the basic idea of the central scientific development believable, how it used is less believable, and results in an ending that is on the one hand not completely convincing and on the other not a final ending. I would not be surprised to see another book next year (BEGGARS WOULD RIDE, maybe?). Still, a worthwhile book and one with plenty of meat for discussion. [-ecl]

2. It is amazing how the concept of the computer has taken hold. Five years ago the Internet only got public attention in the media when there was some sort of disaster like the Internet Worm and then the treatment was sort of like "Ha-ha! Look at what one Nerd was able to do to a whole bunch of other Nerds. It looks like Nerds aren't so smart after all. Yuk-yuk-yuk!" We got doubly stung because we used the Internet and because we were the Nerds who weren't so smart.

Most people didn't want to admit it, but they were secretly delighted by problems like the Worm on the Internet. It was a lot like the reaction I saw from people when a Soviet Lunar probe lost control and piled itself into the moon. "Oh, too bad," we would say with a grin. Until recently most people saw Internauts as a "them" rather than an "us" and saw technical problems on the information networks as an affirmation of their own life styles. But that isn't the sort of reaction you get when something happens

what you perceive as being closer to home. Relatively few people rubbed their hands with glee when they heard about the last big earthquake in Southern California. The reaction is more of "Hey, I might have wanted to drive over that overpass that just fell down." These days a lot more of the general public is giving thought to things like the Internet. Some people think they might want to use it. And you are hearing more about it in the media without being so condescending.

Now I am seeing special programs on PBS teaching the Internet on the level of Sesame Street. Science programs are carrying stories about Mosaic. Stories in my newspaper are telling you how to use a URL address to get to read congressional bills. The back pages of U.S. News and World Report are starting to look like something out of Mini-micro Systems. Entertainment Week is running reviews of CD Roms.

I was watching an ad for a computer service on TV. Some bozo was sitting at a windows screen and clicking on an icon for travel information. The next scene you see him frolicking around stone fountains with beautiful, long-legged women in white dresses. It was a good ad. I was almost convinced to subscribe to the service.

Then I realized that this must have been some sort of computer bulletin board. Who do you think is on the other end? It is probably who has traveled and will give you the benefit of their experience. It is probably someone a lot like me. And let's face it, if I knew where to frolic around stone fountains with beautiful, long-legged women in white dresses, would I be \*here\*? The Internet is good for a lot of things, but is not clear that you will be able to use it to find how to frolic around stone fountains with beautiful, long-legged women in white dresses in some foreign country unless you are the sort of person who already frolics with beautiful, long-legged women in white dresses, but just someplace closer to home. Of course I really don't know. You might want to try frolicking closer to home first. Try it around the stone lions in front of the New York Public Library. And if you do it, send me a picture.

And that is the technology report for this week. [-mrl]

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3. Hugo Factoid of the Week: Michael Bishop has been nominated 10 times without winning (so far--he's up twice this year). Runners-up include Gene Wolfe and Bruce Sterling (7 nominations each). Next week: who has had at least two nominations and has the best batting average for wins? [-ecl]

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