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From the Other Side of the Street-Viruses to Die For

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Woes about the World Wide Web abound. In one current of criticism or another, the Web has been seen as the primary cause of moral decay, the last step in the decline of civilization and even the precursor to the end of the world. Please say it isn't so Joe, or Tom or Dick or Harriet! Somehow, the wondrous utopian hope of the electronic revolution that was to link Lagos to Latvia in a great intellectual unification has languished, caught like a woolly mammoth in the Labrea tar pits. People in all walks of life noticed that even in cyberspace things didn't magically materialize—swoosh—unless someone worked very hard and another someone tossed in a few greenbacks, yen or marks.

Still, if nothing else, the Web has provided an open forum for any cause or cause celebre—nee Monica. Rumors run rampant raging relentlessly round the cyberworld. Post, post haste, and don't postpone have become the calling card for the cyber-generation fixated on instant gratification, concentration spans of microseconds, and senseless Web sites. Along with the spread of what information has become, the evil side of Webbing it has increased as dramatically as computing power, making the creation and dissemination of viruses so rapid that by the time you've been warned, the damage is already done. My father used to lesson my fright as a child by telling me that if you see lightning strikes, they can't hit you. In today's cyber-universe, it's not the seeing that counts, but what attitude you've donned to stop the pain. Oh King, your new anti-Norman virus shield is ready.

To combat the flow of bad viruses, I've gathered together an esteemed group of computer whizzes, six-year-olds who shall remain nameless, and asked them to develop some benign, in the eye of the user, viruses that have several beneficial effects. After hours of work, this young group of normal computer geniuses came up with the following list of strains. Quite remarkable in their breadth, these viruses are now available for distribution.

The EECK (Exquisite Elsevier Crippling Knockout) Strain—This virus attaches itself to Reed-Elsevier stockholders through telepathic screen semiosis. The virus lies dormant for the greater part of its life and spawns only during the time that stockholders see the Reed-Elsevier annual report. The active virus invades a stockholder's central nervous system, blocks vision completely and sends subtle suggestions to the stockholder indicating that Reed-Elsevier's profits and journal prices are too high.

The GEEK (Government Email Education Kopykat) Strain—This virus searches the Internet and intercepts any email addressed to legislative representatives at the local, state or federal levels. Prior to routing the email to its destination, the following lines are inserted before the signature:

Vote for Tomorrow.
Fund Higher Education.
Support Libraries and University Presses.
Remember, we have the pictures!

The MEEK (Monograph Escaped Electronic Kuckoo) Strain—This bird of a virus infiltrates university and select commercial publishers' typesetting operations by residing in the boot sector of removable mass storage devices. On user activation of any page layout program, the virus copies files of book-length material and uploads these files to a secret site on the Net. This site has extremely high and thick firewalls and is only accessible to ACRL members. The virus gets its name because an image of a large cuckoo clock appears on the user's screen while the virus takes action. A bird pops out of the cuckoo as soon as the upload is complete and sings "So Long—it's Been Good To Know You."

continued on page 50
Othertside of the Street

from page 48

The PEEK (Patron Eternal Enlightenment Klient) Strain—An extremely virulent strain that keeps mutating every twelve hours, the strain was initially spread through keyboard contact, but now is transmitted through touchpads, touch-tone phones and touchy situations. The virus spreads to the user’s neural pleasure center and produces a massive release of endorphins when the user enters a library. In this state the user listens to reference librarians’ advice, returns stolen items and never rips pages out of journals or books. The PEEK virus has over 100 known sub-species, one of which has been used to treat the pain associated with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

The SEEK (Storage Epidemic Eradication Kindersicherheit) Strain—A remarkable German strain developed in conjunction with Daimler-Benz, this typhus-like virus invades the cyberspace crystalline structure of motherboards in non-Unix based computer platforms and continuously shrinks internal components until they are barely noticeable. The strain has no effect on data or performance, which accounts for the fact that users notice no decline in access speed. The one drawback to the virus is that the user is unable to upgrade their machines because of the lack of miniaturized components. Ingenious librarians have begun the practice of taking the cover off infected machines and inserting books and journals onto the motherboard in order to shrink them to storable sizes.

Unfortunately work on VEEK (Virtual Enhancement and Enlargement Kneipe) has run into several setbacks and the expected release date is unknown.

The WEEK (Worldwide End to Existing Kampf) Strain—Aimed at combating the problem—It’s not mein Kampf, it’s your Kampf—this highly volatile strain was released to unsuspecting visitors and vendors at the 1998 Frankfurt Book Fair. The virus itself was embedded in a file on the official Book Fair CD-ROM that contained all the names and addresses of attendees and exhibitors and was distributed free of charge at the Fair. The strain is multi-lingual in design appearing as a benign warning box on users’ screens indicating that land fill space is growing scarce. Mostly a nuisance at this point in time, the virus strips out the words “It’s”, “Not”, “My”, and “Job” from all word processing documents. Rumor has it that the virus will mutate at the start of the new millennium and anything in computer memory on 1/1/2000 will be lost. Nicknamed the “Fresh Start” virus, its evolution is intended to create select amnesia in the user base that attends the Frankfurt Book Fair and create new cooperation among publishers, vendors, bookbuyers, and librarians.

WARNING: All viruses carry no copyright notices, no authorship information, disappear on contact and are fully recyclable. However, they are fun and are intended to stir up the debate about pricing, ownership, usage and information access. Suggestions for further strains can be sent to your local virus maker or call 1-800-SEE-VIRUS for further information.

Publisher

Bestsellers

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The Eagle Catcher. Margaret Coel. 0-87081-367-6, cloth $22.50, 1995. Subject: Fiction

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“The plot is filled with threats and late-night skulking, against a background of windswept plains and eerie mountain thunderstorms. ... Like the best novelists, Coel teaches her readers something—in this case, the Plains Indians. But she doesn’t go overboard. After all, this is not a history lesson but a mystery, and a fine one.” Denver Post

“Likable, well-drawn characters and a lively pace mark this novel—which appears poised for a sequel—for Hillerman fans.” Publishers Weekly

Bluefeather Fellini. Max Evans. 0-87081-307-2, cloth $22.50, 1993. Subject: continued on page 52

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>