BOOK REVIEW

The St. Francis Effect: By Zach Hughes. Berkley Medallion Books, Berkley Publishing Corp., 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016. 1976. 200 pp. $2.00

The St. Francis Effect is a short paper-bound novelette about mosquitoes as vectors of a fictitious parasite, *Plasmodium barnesonia.* As the author states in his preface:

> "This book is dedicated, in all honest respect and no small fear, to the mosquito. No author could ask for a more convincing villain."

This dedication alone is enough to warrant the interest of most entomologists, but the plot is also good science fiction in the tradition of *The Andromeda Strain.*

From the beginning the reader is immersed in a rapidly moving story that involves not only believable characters, but a series of settings that encompass most of the world, from Greece to the islands of the Pacific. The plot centers around the development of a deep-ocean mining operation managed by Parry-Burdish Industries, a multi-national conglomerate corporation, and the concurrent rise of a strange disease, The St. Francis Effect. The first victims of this disease are found in a pleasure boat adrift in the south Pacific miles from any human habitation. Later, on an obscure island, several natives succumb to the strange malady, but it is not until an entire island's human population is destroyed that the mining corporation expresses concern. The remainder of the story is concerned with the sleuth work needed to isolate the vector relationships associated with this new disease. In the course of these investigations realistic jurisdictional conflicts are described between the need of the corporation to maintain trade secrets and the need of the World Health Organization to investigate. In another instance, inter-agency problems develop between the U. S. Public Health Service and vector control officials in Georgia on procedural methods of mosquito control.

Other attractive sidelights of the narrative include the use of accurate referrals to previous events in the history of mosquitoes and human diseases. The importance of Manson's early work on *Wuchereria bancrofti* and Ross's studies on malaria are clearly related to events surrounding the new investigations on The St. Francis Effect.

The hero of this entomological saga is Dr. Arthur Waters of the World Health Organization (WHO) who becomes involved in the mysterious cases as a result of an urgent (but unauthorized) telephone call from his brother, Alan Waters, an employee of Parry-Burdish. Willa Collier, a "girl-Friday" who knows little about mosquitoes (but is a fast learner) assists Dr. Waters in his work. Willa's role as a neophyte to entomology enables the novice reader to follow the action. Beyond these protagonists, the reader meets a montage of people who, often unknowingly, have a role to play in the solution of the vector riddle. Because this fast-paced story is short, some readers will be somewhat disappointed in the lack of extensive character development.

The parasite, *Plasmodium barnesonia,* is discovered in due course to have a life cycle not unlike malaria except that *Culex pipiens* functions as the vector arthropod. The story concludes with the St. Francis Effect reaching epidemic proportions and ultimately invading the continental United States. But this is not just a story of fiction where science is always clear-cut and simple. Even near the control of the epidemic, the occasional scientific squabbles still remind the reader of the roles of human personalities.

Although sharp-eyed entomologists will spot a few errors, I found the book to be exciting and quick reading. The accuracy is somewhat surprising since the author has no professional training or experience with mosquitoes. Zach Hughes, born in Holdenville, Oklahoma, is currently a free lance writer living in Yaupon Beach, North Carolina. Mosquito abatement personnel and other professional entomologists will find that this short work of fiction fulfills a long-standing need that they have had when asked to recommend a readable book about the *work* of medical entomology and the true nature of entomological research.

Wm. Bruce Ezell, Jr.
Department of Biology
The Citadel
Charleston, S. C. 29409