

# *The Net*: What a Wicked Web We Weave

by Daniel Borchers

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The hit cyber-movie, *The Net*, spawned a summer television series on USA network. Fast-paced and well-executed, the series suffers from the same drawbacks as so much of contemporary TV fare – *politicization*.

The characters are all too conspicuously wearing white or black hats and the heroes habitually favor politically correct causes.

The heroine, Angela Bennett, is on the run (ala *Fugitive*), framed for a murder she did not commit. Angela must avoid both the “authorities” and the terrorist organization which has erased (ala *Nowhere Man*) her life.

A secret cabal of computer terrorists – greedy financiers – use the government with the ultimate goal of *becoming* the government. Their vision is rulership of the whole *world* and their perspective is primarily *financial* (not political, military) power.

Like *Millennium* (FOX), *Profiler* (NBC), *Prey* (ABC) and other television clones, *The Net* uses visible “subliminal” messages written over the opening credits to guide viewers. “She Knows Too Much” is the first, followed by a string of words: “escape,” “praetorians,” “terrorists.” Then the questions: “Who are they?” And “Who are you?” Another string of words tells us about who *they* are: “computer malfunction,” “warning system fails” and “missile accident” all point to actions by the praetorian terrorists from whom we must escape.

Lest we remain in doubt about the us versus them nature of the show, while viewing *those* words we hear the heroine’s voice speaking *these* words: “My name is Angela Bennett. I discovered a group of computer terrorists. They erased my life. They made me into a criminal. I am not gonna stop until I get my life back. If they did this to *me* they could do it to *you*.”

## Leftist Themes

With the exception of Praetorian involvement, the government is generally treated as *benign*. It is *only* because of the Praetorian Guard’s omnipresent malevolent activities that the government *cannot* be trusted. Remove the Praetorians and we can once again trust our public servants.

The mastermind behind the Praetorians is a white, middle-aged, cigar-smoking businessman who was a friend of Richard Nixon. His second-in-command is another middle-aged white guy who “knows the *price* of everything, the *value* of nothing.” The villains in this series are almost exclusively motivated by *profit* and fit the *media* profile of a Republican.

*The Net* is replete with politically-correct victims who are aided by the heroine, Angela Bennett: a homeless girl abducted as an involuntary organ donor, a young black woman falsely imprisoned, a court-appointed pro-bono attorney who helps the poor, a middle-aged post-feminist who had given up her out-of-wedlock daughter for adoption, a liberal state supreme court justice, and the white wife of a black man killed by white supremacists.

## Liberalism is Good

As the series progresses its leftist leanings come into ever-sharper focus. In episode five,<sup>1</sup> the hero is State Supreme Court Justice Mayall who is pro-abortion, favors child care and Medicare, is for a “police-free Internet,” and favors assisted suicide. He even suggests his opponent *personally* consider assisted suicide. The bad guy, Councilman Ayers, is pro-life, tough on immigration and favors policing the Internet. Ayers’ heartless politics is emphasized by Mayall’s words, “you don’t care.”

Justice Mayall (“the people’s judge”) echoed President Clinton’s claim of using government to help the children: “*We* are going to protect our children – *us* – the teachers, the parents, the community.” Notice *which* group is conspicuously first in protecting children from child pornography – yes, *teachers*. Parents come second.

The greedy Councilman Ayers sets Justice Mayall up as a child pornographer to induce him to change his vote on the Net-Censor-Chip [yes, the producer’s views *are* undisguised on this issue] because Ayers wants to become a millionaire in developing this technology. Angela thwarts his scheme.

## Oh, Those Racist Whites

The very next episode<sup>2</sup> dealt with the leftist vision of racism which holds that whites – *only* whites and *all* whites – are racist.

Angela risks her freedom to help the police get evidence against two bad cops (racist white supremacists) guilty of murdering a black man (hate crime).

Notice this dialogue between Angela and an ex-cop who happens to be of Chinese descent:

Chinese ex-cop: “To the Chinese I was white by association and to the whites, well, anyone not like them is less than. ... Am I prejudiced to believe that all whites think that they’re better than everyone else?”

Angela: “I don’t think that I’m better.”

Chinese ex-cop: “Just ignorant of who you are and that’s the heart of prejudice.”

We are also told that the Western World is narrow, close-minded and prejudiced.

Clearly, *The Net* itself offers a very narrow, close-minded and prejudiced view of America and Americans.

## The New Kingdom

Sorcerer is Angela Bennett’s mysterious benefactor. According to him, the Net-Censor-Chip “was never about  *censorship*. It was about palace *walls*. They were used to keep the kings *inside* not to keep the peasants *out*. The Internet is a *new kingdom* looking for a *king*. *Our* job is to help make sure that it’s a *good king*.”<sup>3</sup>

Interesting, huh? It is the job of *these* two people to determine *who* would make a good king for this new kingdom. By *which* criteria? *Whose* values? *What* standards? And who appointed *them* guardians of our society?

Sorcerer says the Praetorian Guard is a “virtual organization” which is “everywhere, nowhere.”<sup>4</sup> This is the danger of the new kingdom which Sorcerer is fighting. Angela herself asserts “Computers control our lives.” Angela’s fears mount in the second episode: “I think they’re out to control everything from NASA to the Internet. ... Our entire lives are on computer. ... These people are *everywhere*. They can find me *wherever* I am.”<sup>5</sup>

This recurrent technophobia reflects not so much a fear *that* computers control our lives but *who* controls the computers. In other words, having computers in control is not such a bad idea if the *right* “king” is ruling the “kingdom.” Yes, folks, if you were looking for any democratic elements, any republican principles, in *The Net*, your quest is in vain.

This concept of a new kingdom not bound by a *geographical* location is growing. Cyberspace is a *transnational* phenomena which empowers individuals and offers an unfettered conduit of information. While the Internet is a globally unifying force, it also encourages isolationism. This new kingdom is inhabited by a wide assortment of computer geeks, many of whom have cyber-relationships over the Internet but dysfunctional relationships in their personal lives.

## The “Enemy”

*The Net* is very much an us-versus-them program which leaves no doubt as to who “them” is – greedy, mean-spirited Republican profiteers who profit off the misfortunes of others. Indeed, in an early episode<sup>6</sup> the Praetorians hawk a phony cancer cure for profit. The head of this villainous organization even says “The last thing we need is a cure for cancer.” Yes, around the same time he says “President Nixon was my friend.”

“Them” also includes the censorship-obsessed, book-burning, baby-loving and suicide-hating Religious Right.

Well then, who is the “us” in *The Net*? Why, any person or group who is left-of-center.

It would behoove us to be very alert to these subtle, and not-so-subtle, messages which invade our homes.

## Endnotes:

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- <sup>1</sup> Episode 5, *The Net*, USA, August 15, 1998.
  - <sup>2</sup> Episode 6, *The Net*, USA, August 22, 1998.
  - <sup>3</sup> Episode 5, *The Net*, USA, August 15, 1998.
  - <sup>4</sup> Episode 1, *The Net*, USA, July 19, 1998.
  - <sup>5</sup> Episode 2, *The Net*, USA, July 25, 1998.
  - <sup>6</sup> Episode 4, *The Net*, USA, August 8, 1998.