

MT VOID 03/10/17 -- Vol. 35, No. 37, Whole Number 1953

```

e e e e e @ @ e e e e e @ @ @ e e e e e e @ @ @ e e e e e e e e e
@ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @
@ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @
@ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @
@ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @ @

```

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
03/10/17 -- Vol. 35, No. 37, Whole Number 1953

Table of Contents

[Space News](#) (comments by Greg Frederick)
[Common???](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
[Superman vs. the KKK](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
[BRIMSTONE](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)
[ATOMICA](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)
[SHARDS OF HONOR by Lois McMaster Bujold](#) (audiobook review
 by Joe Karpierz)
[THE BIG PICTURE: ON THE ORIGINS OF LIFE, MEANING,
 AND THE UNIVERSE ITSELF by Sean Carroll](#) (book review
 by Greg Frederick)
["Stigmata"](#) (letter of comment by Kip Williams)
[CAPTAIN FANTASTIC, Z, INHERIT THE WIND, THE BEST DEMOCRACY
 MONEY CAN BUY, MOONLIGHT and Mahershala Ali,
 EYE IN THE SKY, HACKSAW RIDGE, ADMIRAL,
 THE FINEST HOURS, and ROGUE ONE](#)
 (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky)
[Elections, IN SEARCH OF THE CASTAWAYS, WAY STATION,
 THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE and SIR CHARLES GRANDISON,
 Microbes and Antibiotics, Talented Minority Syndrome,
 ISAAC'S STORM](#) (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky)
[This Week's Reading](#)
 (POPE JOAN) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[Quote of the Week](#)

Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
 Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
 Back issues at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm
 All material is copyrighted by author unless otherwise noted.
 All comments sent or posted will be assumed authorized for
 inclusion unless otherwise noted.

To subscribe, send mail to mtvoid-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
 To unsubscribe, send mail to mtvoid-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

Space News (comments by Greg Frederick):

SpaceX is planning to send two paying private individuals in their new Dragon 2 capsule on a trip around the Moon in 2018. They will use the Falcon heavy rocket for this mission.

From space.com: <http://tinyurl.com/void-spacex-to-the-moon>

NASA has a plan to create an artificial magnetic shield for Mars. This magnetic shield would help Mars to restore its atmosphere.

"This is some truly futuristic stuff, reminiscent of Kim Stanley Robinson's Red Mars trilogy. But it is theoretically possible, and it just might, maybe, be a step toward terraforming Mars for human inhabitation in the next century."

From popularmechanics.com: <http://tinyurl.com/void-terraform-mars>

[-gf]

Common??? (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I always wondered: When ONE MILLION YEARS B.C. played in Israel, was it called ONE MILLION YEARS B.C.E.? [-mrl]

Superman vs. the KKK (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Someone in a local college got in touch with me to ask me for some information. She was doing a paper on something like how science fiction affects society. I could tell her a little, but not a whole lot. I asked her if she knew how in the late 1940s the "Adventures of Superman" radio show dealt a serious blow to the Ku Klux Klan. She had not heard of it.

It seems that in the years after WWII the group the Ku Klux Klan had a giant spurt of growth. A writer named Stetson Kennedy was disturbed about the increasing power of the radically racist Klan. Kennedy knew that the Klan was too popular and strong to attack them from the outside. He decided to infiltrate the Ku Klux Klan and try to get information he could use to hobble the Klan. The Klan must not have been all that big since he soon was in the inner circle. There he could get the secret code words that different Klan members used to identify themselves as Klan members to other members they did not know.

This gets a little James Bondy. He learned, for example he could ask a stranger "Do you know Mr. Ayak?" If things were on the up and up the stranger would say, "I also know Mr. Akai." Using the name "Ayak" is an acronym for "Are you a klansman?" Akai is short for "A klansman am I."

Kennedy brought his new-found information to the police. But this was in the deep South. Many of the police would probably have been sympathetic to the Klan and some of the rest would have been afraid to stand up to the Klan. It probably seemed like Kennedy's efforts had gone for nothing.

By a lucky chance Kennedy brought his complaint to the writers of the radio show The Adventures of Superman. Now those writers had a popular radio program. But Superman had been fighting Nazis during the war. Somehow pitting the Man of Steel up against your common garden variety of bank robber just was not going to excite the fans. There were only a limited number of super-villains.

Now the Klan had real power that some of the fans could see in the streets and read about in the newspapers. Kennedy gave the radio producers a storyline for Superman vs. the Klan. In it Superman could fight an all too real villain. And the program could be peppered with *realistic* dialog for once. It might have someone ask "Do you know Mr. Ayak," and get back a response "Yes and I know Mr. Akai." And then someone would explain the coded names.

Now that was downright embarrassing. The super-secret mystical code words of the Klan had become the fodder for a children's radio program. And the program explained the coded words so the kiddies could use the authentic secret words when they were playing games.

Within the three weeks that the story ran the Klan became a laughing stock and an embarrassment. Nobody new wanted to join and current members decided that perhaps they needed to go home and do a few household chores.

"Klan of the Fiery Cross" can be found several places in sixteen chapters on the web, such as:

<http://tinyurl.com/mtv-super>

Also see:

<http://tinyurl.com/void-mentalfloss-kkk>

[-mrl]

BRIMSTONE (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: Told in four chapters, this is the grim and painful story of a woman dominated by men on the American frontier. The story is presented in Grand Guignol style with a feeling that writer/director Martin Koolhoven is behind it all winking at the audience. Take this film seriously and it is little but a pointlessly harrowing film experience. Accept it as an exaggerated horror story and it will be a considerably better film. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Sadism, bondage, hanging, prostitution, incest, murder, and all manner of cruelty: they are all here. BRIMSTONE is part feminist diatribe, part exaggerated horror film, part Western. Your reaction to the film may well be dependent on how

seriously you take it. This is a Dutch-French-German co-produced Western about the grim and bleak condition of women in the American frontier. In other words it is a bunch of Europeans telling each other how bad Americans are.

A woman--Liz, played by Dakota Fanning--is persecuted because as a midwife she chose to save the life of a mother at the cost of the life of the baby. A preacher called "the Reverend" (Guy Pearce with a deeply scarred face and worse scarred soul) exacts what he considers the proper, scripture-dictated, vengeance of God on the woman. His churchgoers just meekly submit to his will. BRIMSTONE was conceived, written, and directed by Dutchman, Martin Koolhoven. Atrocity follows on atrocity as women are abused and persecuted by the male-run society. The issues are righteous, but the accusations and abuses are laid onto the story a little thickly.

The film requires a strong performance from its villain to take him seriously enough and Guy Pearce is versatile enough to be taken as the evil prime mover of this society. I am unfamiliar with any film in which Pearce has projected malice as he does in this film, even falling to howl like a dog. It is as shocking as seeing Alan Arkin in WAIT UNTIL DARK or Anthony Hopkins in THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS. Dakota Fanning's Liz walks a narrow step between placid and tense. She seems as meek as her neighbors but is ready to take care of herself. There is little doubt who will win in the end, but what will the viewer see along the way of the journey.

The film is 149 minutes long and told in four chapters. The second chapter tells how the first came about; the third chapter tells how the second came about. The final chapter wraps it all up after the first chapter. If the viewer is to sit there and take all of the abuses seriously, this is a very dismal film. This, however, is women's history as seen through a Grand Guignol lens. That says that it needs to be taken with just a little grain of salt.

If the viewer sees BRIMSTONE as a serious look at the treatment and position of women in the American West, this film will quickly dip into a shocking and perhaps nauseating territory. If it is taken as a horror tale intended to do little more than shock this film will not disappoint. As a horror film I rate BRIMSTONE a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10. Those who want to take seriously what is on the screen should take several rating points off.

BRIMSTONE will go into limited release March 10, 2017.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1895315/combined>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/brimstone_2017

[-mrl]

ATOMICA (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: ATOMICA is a science fiction mystery set in the near future and involving the last nuclear power plant and two men who operate it. When its communications go off-line an engineer is sent to restore the connection. She finds more questions than answers. This is a low-budget and claustrophobic film, most of which takes place underground with a plot that develops only slowly. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4) or 5/10

With science fiction films these days being about superheroes, time travel, genetic engineering and nano-technology it has been quite a while since atomic power has been much of an attraction for a movie. In the 1950s there were films like THE ATOMIC SUBMARINE, THE ATOMIC KID, and THE ATOMIC CITY. Six decades later I don't know many people whose pulse will race at the thought of a film inspired by atomic energy. The word "atomic" just does not have the cachet it once did.

A few years into the future there has been a large nuclear disaster including a triple meltdown. Nuclear power is being abandoned and one last nuclear power plant still is running, just where the triple meltdown occurred. To convert the leaked radiation and make it reusable energy is the purpose of this plant. When its communications go unexpectedly offline on Christmas day the government needs to know what is going on. They send in Abby Dixon (played by Sarah Habel) to get the communications operating again. She finds that two operators run the whole plant, Robinson Scott (Dominic Monaghan) and Dr. Zek (Tom Sizemore). But Zek has left the plant days ago and has not returned. Since this is a highly contaminated area, Zek may well be dead from radiation or perhaps murdered by Robinson. Robinson's behavior starts friendly but soon becomes a little threatening. As Abby stays longer and feels not particularly welcome she is having bad dreams, seeing herself as a child. Abby has to find out what has happened here. Did Robinson kill Dr. Zek? Is Zek alive somewhere and if so, what is he doing? The film devolves into a game of "guess who is not what he appears."

ATOMICA takes place mostly underground in cylindrical tunnels and subterranean rooms. This adds to the claustrophobic effect without adding much to the budget needed. (The film's original title was DEEP BURIAL.) The wardrobe decisions are a little weird. For some reason the men wear coveralls, but Abby wears a tight-fitting cat suit and an aerodynamic bike-racing helmet. She does no racing. Dominic Monaghan's character is named Robinson Scott. (Is this a reference to TV's "I Spy?") The reactor plant in question looks a little broken down and poorly maintained for a nuclear reactor. Relative newcomer

Dagen Merrill directs a screenplay by Kevin Burke, Federico Fernandez-Armesto, and Adam Gyngell.

Even at a short 82 minutes this film drags with too much wait for too little payoff. And too many questions are left apparently unanswered or answered with mysterious visual sequences. I rate ATOMICA a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale or 5/10.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2449638/combined>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/atomica>

[-mrl]

SHARDS OF HONOR by **Lois McMaster Bujold** (copyright 1986 Baen, 2009 Blackstone Audio, 8 hours 46 minutes, ISBN-10: 0-671-65574-4, ASIN: B0028MK7TC, narrated by Grover Gardner) (excerpt from the *Duel Fish Codices*: an audiobook review by Joe Karpierz):

When I reviewed *GENTLEMAN JOLE AND THE RED QUEEN* last year, I stated that I did some research into just how long Bujold has been publishing Vorkosigan novels. The answer, as of the writing of that review, was thirty years, as *SHARDS OF HONOR* was published in 1986. One thing that I knew about *SHARDS OF HONOR* was that I had never read it. I remember reading *FALLING FREE* back in 1986 or 1987 poolside at the apartment complex I lived in back in those days. But there were several that I did not read from the late 1980s and early 1990s, so I recently decided that maybe it would be time to go back and fill in the holes of my personal Vorkosigan universe. And so, I dropped into the audio book library for *SHARDS OF HONOR*. With the book being thirty years old, I feel that the statute of limitations has run out on spoilers for this book, so while I don't plan on dropping any major unknowns for folks who haven't read it, I might. After all, one can nearly completely deduce what happened in *SHARDS OF HONOR* just from reading later Vorkosigan novels and simply paying attention.

To summarize though (because as I write this I realize this piece is going to be more of a comparison between the first book in the series and the most recent, which may or may not be useful but may allow the reader to speculate on what's next), Captain Cordelia Naismith is the captain of a Betan astronomical survey ship. She and her team have landed on what is to them a new planet, and they are doing what survey teams do when her camp is attacked by what turns out to be a Barrayaran team which has landed on the planet before them. She meets Aral Vorkosigan, who is in the middle of a bit of political turmoil within his own unit. Cordelia and Aral become friends while on the planet--which is surprising to Cordelia as Aral is the famed "Butcher of Komarr"--and they end up with a deep mutual respect for each other. Cordelia is taken up to Aral's ship as a prisoner who will be allowed to go home after the ship returns to Barrayar. There is, of course, one more surprise to be sprung: Aral proposes marriage to Cordelia. She never answers the question, but it's clear that Cordelia is smitten with Aral.

I really don't need to go through the rest of the story in even that amount of detail. Aral and Cordelia encounter each other again during a Barrayaran attack on Escobar, and after all is said and done, he proposes again. She turns him down this time, and returns to Beta Colony to find it changed. The authorities believe she is the victim of Barrayaran brain-washing, and make her life miserable. She eventually escapes, gets transport to Barrayar, marries Aral, and they live happily ever after.

Well, not really. Those who have read the novels know that life in the Vorkosigan universe never allows things to end up happily ever after. But the couple does okay, really they do.

What happened in between *SHARDS OF HONOR* and *GENTLEMAN JOLE AND THE RED QUEEN* is the stuff of science fiction legend. Miles, his family, and their escapades are all among the most beloved in the field. Miles' exploits are well known, and there is typically great anticipation of the next "Miles book".

Except, of course, that the next Miles book really doesn't have to have Miles in it (*CAPTAIN VORPATRIL'S ALLIANCE*, for example), for these are books about the Vorkosigan universe, not just Miles. Even those that have Miles in it don't necessarily center on Miles (*JOLE/QUEEN*) is a good example of that. I really wanted to like *JOLE/QUEEN*, but after I listened to *SHARDS OF HONOR* I've decided that while I may like it, it wasn't that *good*. I've heard the word "disappointing" used to describe it, and I think I agree with that now. And I wonder, in fact, if we've seen the last of the Vorkosigan books.

Bujold has indeed come full circle with these novels. *SHARDS OF HONOR* introduces us to Cordelia and Aral, and without them falling in love and getting married, none of the rest of the books could have happened. *SHARDS* is full of action, intrigue, romance, character development, and story. We came to like those two characters (and the rest of the people that inhabit the Vorkosigan universe), and they were a wonderful springboard to the rest of the story. *JOLE/QUEEN* had ... romance. There was no story, no conflict, no intrigue (well, not much, anyway) and in retrospect, it felt a little old and tired. In the beginning, Aral and Cordelia were young and vibrant, feisty, and ready to take on the universe. At the end, Cordelia is ... comfortable. She's lived her life, done her thing, and is ready to sail off into the sunset; she's done with all the adventure.

And so, I suspect, is Bujold (mind you, this is speculation--I know nothing about future plans for Bujold's writing). I think we've come around front to back, and as fun and exciting as SHARDS OF HONOR was, I think (as I mentioned at the end of my review of JOLE/QUEEN), there really isn't any obvious place to go from here.

If you've read SHARDS OF HONOR, I urge you to go read it again. If you've never read it, I urge you to read it soon. If you've never read the Vorkosigan universe books, start here at the beginning and work your way to what I think is the end. You'll not regret it.

Grover Gardner was the narrator for this book as well as GENTLEMAN JOLE AND THE RED QUEEN. While in that book I thought he did a workmanlike job, I think he is now starting to grow on me. I enjoyed his narration of SHARDS OF HONOR, and look forward to hearing him read more of the Vorkosigan books I haven't gotten to yet. [-jak]

THE BIG PICTURE: ON THE ORIGINS OF LIFE, MEANING, AND THE UNIVERSE ITSELF by Sean Carroll
(book review by Greg Frederick):

Sean Carroll who is a theoretical physicist and an acclaimed author of modern physics books has written a book that covers the big picture. That is this book discusses the workings of the world on the quantum level, the cosmic level and the human level. The author provides us with some thought provoking ideas. One such idea is that the observable Universe began in a very low entropy state. As the Universe evolves it goes from this low entropy state to one of higher entropy. Entropy is usually defined as the amount randomness in a system and that it increases in an isolated system such as the Universe. But in an intermediate medium entropy condition the Universe can have increased complexity. Therefore, you can have solar systems and planets forming possibly with life on them in an intermediate entropy state. You can see this concept when you mix cream into your coffee. The initial state has cream separated from the coffee so there are two layers. This is a low entropy and simple condition. When you mix it you see intermediate entropy but increasing and also interesting complexity. Finally, the coffee and cream mixture exhibits high entropy but it is simple again and therefore has low complexity. On another subject, Carroll relates how some modern research studies in evolution are following the idea that RNA preceded DNA as the information-carrying molecule that helped life to start. And that bilayers of fatty acids which naturally line up in a regular fashion when exposed to water solutions could have been a primitive membrane for early one celled life forms. Looking more into the big picture view of things Carroll discusses the multiverse concept as a prediction that came about based on string theory and cosmic inflation. Physicists have wondered how we have the exact physical constants in this Universe to make it amiable to the creation of life forms such as us. This multiverse idea allows many universes to come into existence; even one like ours. Subjects as diverse as information theory, quantum mechanics, microbiology, philosophy, evolution, morality, and other areas of physics are covered in this wide ranging ideas book. And finally, the interest people have to find purpose and meaning in their lives is also addressed in this book. Sean Carroll has written a book which many readers will find very enjoyable. [-gf]

"Stigmata" (letter of comment by Kip Williams):

In response to [Kip Williams's comments on the title of "Stigmata"](#) in the 03/03/17 issue of the MT VOID, Kip Williams writes:

A fair question for the author to have asked (and I'll pretend this has happened for rhetorical reasons) would be, "Okay, smart guy, what would you suggest?"

I keep remembering this when I'm where I can't write to you. My replacement title would be "Holier Than Thou," because it fits as a title during the setup, and even later. [-kw]

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC, Z, INHERIT THE WIND, THE BEST DEMOCRACY MONEY CAN BUY, MOONLIGHT and Mahershala Ali, EYE IN THE SKY, HACKSAW RIDGE, ADMIRAL, THE FINEST HOURS, and ROGUE ONE
(letter of comment by Taras Wolansky):

In response to various comments on films (other topics appear in the next item) in the last nine issues of the MT VOID, Taras Wolansky writes:

I'm sitting by a muted phone while some people at the other end try (and fail) to install some software on a mainframe. As I wait for a request for assistance that may never come, this is a good time for me to catch up with some of my mental notes for LoCs.

[#1952](#): In the end, the father (Viggo Mortenson) in the movie, CAPTAIN FANTASTIC, realizes that the life he's giving the kids, for all its positive aspects, puts them in danger, and he leaves the kids with his more conventional in-laws (so the kids can pursue their educations, for example). The final sequence, in which the kids unexpectedly (and impossibly) come back to

him, is obviously a fantasy he is entertaining, not unlike the final sequence of LA LA LAND. Unless you believe the kids can pull a coffin out of a grave with their bare hands (the film discreetly looks away when they do it); and that the authorities wouldn't descend upon that idyllic family scene at the end to take them all into custody!

[#1951](#): The great irony about Costa-Gavras' movie, Z, is that it was used to attack the military junta even though the events it dramatized occurred four years before the junta took over.

[#1948](#): I remember feeling disillusioned when I learned how much of INHERIT THE WIND is bunk; there's a reason why it doesn't use the participants' real names. In reality, the trial was a publicity stunt; the scenes with the defendant behind bars are a joke. Clarence Darrow was amoral: after giving his own summation he pled his client guilty so William Jennings Bryan couldn't deliver his. It was published in SKEPTIC magazine a few years ago: Bryan pointed out the dangerous, "eugenic" implications of Darwinism. Eventually the Nazis made him look like a prophet, but he didn't live to see it. [-tw]

Mark responds:

I think the play you really want is "The Great Tennessee Monkey Trial" by Peter Goodchild. While a little less dramatic than INHERIT THE WIND, it is a good deal more faithful to the actual trial. [-mrl]

[#1945](#)::On THE BEST DEMOCRACY MONEY CAN BUY, currently the Dems are trying to head off the purging of illegal registrations from the voter rolls: convicted felons who lost the right to vote, citizens of countries other than the U.S., and deceased Americans; that is, three major Democratic voting blocs. [;)] Not enough to explain away Hillary's popular vote majority, but it's likely some states she carried narrowly were actually won by Trump.

Few people realize that the Dems raise much more money than the GOP. In the last election, for example, Hillary raised \$1.4 billion; Trump, less than \$1 billion (according to the Wash. Post). N.B.: Small donors accounted for about 3% of the gap.

[#1944](#): I haven't seen his performance in MOONLIGHT yet, but Mahershala Ali's winning an Oscar really gave me a warm feeling. I loved him in the TV show, THE 4400, where he played a dignified Korean War-era soldier abruptly dumped into the 21st century, who can hardly believe it's OK when he falls in love with a white woman.

The sadly un-nominated EYE IN THE SKY: Helen Mirren and Alan Rickman--you can't do much better than that! I suspect this film is actually SF, as they are not yet deploying drones that small (I think).

HACKSAW RIDGE: unusual for its frank depiction of Doss' deep religious faith (says this old atheist). In movies and TV shows, devout Christians are usually revealed as hypocrites or rapists or serial killers.

ADMIRAL: de Ruyter is a name to conjure with, as far as I'm concerned. Given what the public knows about history, of course, perhaps the movie should be marketed as a fantasy--like that recent THREE MUSKETEERS in which Buckingham leads a flotilla of airships against France!

THE FINEST HOURS: A brave captain, played by Chris Pine, breaks all the rules to rescue people in peril; a brilliant engineer contrives the impossible to keep his ship alive. The latest installment in the new STAR TREK series? No, a true story more thrilling than fiction. It's a comment on contemporary movie audiences, or something, that true heroism did far less at the box office than fake heroism.

Implicit in your review of ROGUE ONE is the film's major problem: among all the battles, the characters never come to life, so no one cares when they're all killed. One reviewer pointed out that the film is an exercise in global marketing: cute but unthreatening girl; handsome Hispanic guy; Chinese warrior; Japanese samurai, etc.

I take that back: One character did come to life--Forrest Whitaker's "Saw Gerrera". But Whitaker can make you feel the weight of the world on his shoulders with no dialogue or direction at all, so all the credit belongs to him, not the filmmakers.

I see my colleagues have given up for the night, and backed out the new software. So this is a good place to stop. [-tw]

Elections, IN SEARCH OF THE CASTAWAYS, WAY STATION, THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE and SIR CHARLES GRANDISON, Microbes and Antibiotics, Talented Minority Syndrome, ISAAC'S STORM (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky): In response to various comments in the last nine issues of the MT VOID, Taras Wolansky writes:

[#1952](#): There's something richly comical about people who insist in a huff that they will leave the country if the candidate they oppose wins the election. Supporters of that candidate then have great fun egging them on to keep their promises--but they never, ever do, alas. [-tw]

Mark responds:

I too take with a grain of salt people claiming they will flee the country for Canada if they do not like the candidate who is selected. I think they are first cousins to people who say they will *never* vote for X, but just mean not until their party endorses X. [-mrl]

[#1952](#): Jules Verne's THE CHILDREN OF CAPTAIN GRANT was one of my mother's favorite novels when she was growing up in the Soviet Union. Like Jack London, Verne's socialist tendencies may have made him acceptable to the commissars. I doubt it was a pre-revolutionary edition: her father, a high-school teacher, had been put to death when she was seven, for sharing pre-revolutionary books with some of his students.

[#1950](#): An amusing moment in Simak's classic WAY STATION is when the National Geographic Society raises questions about just how long Enoch Wallace has been subscribing to their magazine!

The longest novel I ever read was probably Dumas' third volume of the "Musketeers" trilogy, THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE (of which THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK is an extract). Unless it's Jane Austen's favorite novel, Samuel Richardson's SIR CHARLES GRANDISON. This had a distinctly modern method of composition, as Richardson worked out the story, corresponding with noble ladies who were fans of his work.

I do not see antibiotic resistance as a long-term threat. We're sequencing pathogens' DNA and learning exactly where the weak points are, and we're only going to get better at this. (I compare it to reading the enemy's mail during World War II.) Of course, if it takes 10 years and \$500 million just to get approval to start selling a new drug, it's obvious a lot of drugs will fall by the wayside.

[#1947](#): I'll have to read Greg Egan's "The Four Thousand, The Eight Hundred". It appears to be an example of what I call Talented Minority Syndrome: Indians in East Africa (driven out), Jews in Germany (killed), Chinese in Malaya (driven out), Armenians in Turkey (killed), Christians in the Middle East (all of the above). The majority is humiliated by the minority's success and cuts off its nose to spite its face (as it were).

In Erik Larson's ISAAC'S STORM, as I recall, the Cuban meteorologists whose warnings the U.S. Weather Bureau chose to ignore were Jesuit priests and monks. (Paging Brother Guy!) In 1900 Catholics were still not well-regarded. [-tw]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

POPE JOAN by Lawrence Durrell (ISBN 0-14-00-3760-8) is described on the back cover as "Durrell's adaptation of the notorious Greek classic PAPISSA JOANNA" by Emmanuel Royidis (a.k.a. Roides), published in 1886. (Durrell's book was published in 1960; I suspect that under the copyright laws of the time, PAPISSA JOANNA was in public domain.)

There is a lot of snarkiness in Durrell's work, which derives from the original work. (Indeed, Royidis was excommunicated from the Greek Orthodox Church because of this novel.) For example, Durrell writes, "The happy Emperor spent his days with little to do but ... to track down guilty murderers and bandits on whom he imposed a small fine: while those of his subjects who ate meat on Fridays or were caught spitting after Communion were hanged from the branches of trees."

Or, speaking of the chastity required of monks, he says, "The Franks, however, after a term of self-sacrifice, gave it up and appeased the legates of lubricity, in order that they might, in calmness and tranquility of spirit, concentrate on salvation. St. Anthony quitted temptation with a cold bath. But according to the wise Archigenes, temperance is itself the most violent aphrodisiac. How wise, how very wise, were the Franks, then, to outlaw such methods in the monasteries."

[For what it's worth, the story of Pope Joan is now almost universally considered to be a legend. For one thing, stories differ on when she presumably reigned. Some say 1099, and some say between Leo IV and Benedict III in the 850s. Record for both dates reveal no gaps between known (male) popes that Pope Joan could have filled.] [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

Nothing is more miserable than man,
Of all upon the earth that breathes and creeps.
--Homer, Iliad

[Tweet](#)

Go to [our home page](#)