



Maybe we took a little more positively the idea that dinosaurs had all died out one million years ago. Later the number of years was fine-tuned to be more like sixty-five million years ago, but it was just a whole lot of years if it was one or sixty-five million. At least they were all dead. Even the more knowledgeable of us might have trouble squaring with the fact that some of us have live dinosaurs in our backyards and on our telephone wires. Most kinds dinosaurs died in what was probably the result of a meteor strike and/or possibly the eruption of a volcano. But whatever killed most of the dinosaurs left a way for some, the ancestors of birds to live. So there are dinosaurs alive today.

But I have avoided it long enough. I should get to the point. I want you to close your eyes and picture the state of Louisiana. You know, the teacher who taught you about Pluto being a planet had that map of the United States up on her blackboard that showed you what the fifty states looked like. (Well, maybe it was forty-eight or maybe forty-nine.) Can you picture what Louisiana looks like on the map? Kiss that picture good-bye. I am sorry but I really doubt that you can picture what Louisiana looks like right now. How you are picturing it will never look like again. That shape is a thing of the past. The coastline has always been complex, but I had some idea of the shape of the state as being something like a high shoe or a boot. That shape is a thing of the past. Take a look at this. It is the picture on the right:

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

It sure looks different.

What you are seeing is what is left of Louisiana. What you are seeing is happening many places in the world. The disappearing land is the result of erosion, global warming and storm damage. It is climate change that is not supposed to be happening, according to some (poorly chosen) politicians. I wonder how much longer the people who print maps of the United States will print the out-dated shape of Louisiana. More details at:

<https://tinyurl.com/void-louisiana-shape>

("Louisiana's Changing Shape Before Our Eyes")

My nice comfy feeling that I knew the shape of all the states is gone. I will no longer recognize the shape of Louisiana. That worries me more than that Pluto is no longer a planet for me. People that I know will be hurt if the oceans keep rising. And they ARE going to keep on rising. [-mrl]

**Greece and RHINOCEROS** (letter of comment by John Hertz):

In response to [Mark's comments on Greece](#) in the 06/02/17 issue of the MT VOID, John Hertz writes:

Thanks for the VOID as ever.

You went to Greece, hurrah! But where in your report is architecture, sculpture, poetry, drama, philosophy, food, drink, costume, song, dance?

This country while small in acreage (50,000 square miles, like Alabama) has easily a half dozen recognizable folklore regions. I could do Cretan, Macedonian, Peloponnesian, Pontian, Thracian, dance into the wee hours, and have.

Though not a member, nor even a Christian, I admire the beauty and inspiration of the Orthodox Church.

"Philoxenia" is Greek--the opposite of xenophobia.

Not to mention Aristotle, Plutarch, Sophocles--oops. [-jh]

Mark replies:

Travel to foreign countries would frequently leave the tourist with a lot of time to kill. We would plan our own trips and that would of necessity leave us with a lot of unused time. Out of desperation we would fill the empty hours describing the trip to a pocket notepad or a palmtop computer. Time has taken its toll on our poor bodies. No we go on guided tours and lest the tour company carry our heavy bags. Tour companies can use leverage to give us more time in the day touring or in social activities. Hence there is less empty time. And my writing speed has slowed down over the years. I still start a log for each trip, but after a day or so I spend my spare hours resting my weary bones. I have a great collection of logs of the first 48 hours of a trip and that is about as far as they go. [-mrl]

And Evelyn responds:

What was written in the MT VOID does not constitute our (my) trip report; a link to that will appear when I finish it. (It's currently about 10,000 words long and not finished.) It got put on hold so I could write my NASFIC report, since there were

actual requests for that.

"Apophasis" is Greek also. [-ecl]

In response to [Evelyn's review of RHINOCEROS](#) in the 05/19/17 issue of the MT VOID), John writes:

About RHINOCEROS (E. Ionesco, 1959; incidentally, you typo'd the poor playwright's name: I wonder if therefore the cosmic Joker will cause a typo here), Evelyn says it's supposedly a parable. I can't stop her from supposing. Once I'd have told her it's a parallelogram. But I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now.

I tried out for Jean. I'd even practiced turning into a rhinoceros. I was turned down. The director asked me to read Berenger so he could cast Daisy. At the end he said "Congratulations, you're Berenger." I said "But you've already cast him." He said "So we'll double-cast." However, things ganged agley and the play was not produced. To me this always seemed existentially correct. [-jh]

Mark responds:

You were so much older? Perhaps that is hyperbole. [-mrl]

And Evelyn replies:

Yes, I typo'd "Ionesco" as "Ionescu"--I was misled by his Romanian background.

I would not confuse a parable with a parallelogram, but I might confuse it with a parabola, at least in Spanish. [-ecl]

**Henry Ward Beecher** (letter of comments by Sam Long):

In response to [the quote from Henry Ward Beecher](#) at the end of the 07/28/17 issue of the MT VOID, Sam Long writes:

I prefer this literary remembrance of Henry Ward Beecher:

The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher  
 Called the hen a "most elegant creature."  
 The hen, pleased with that,  
 Laid an egg in his hat,  
 And thus did the hen reward Beecher.

[-sl]

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

THE ASSIMILATED CUBAN'S GUIDE TO QUANTUM SANTERÍA by Carlos Hernández (ISBN 978-1-495-60739-4) is a great collection. According to the Introduction, the author is an assimilated Cuban who lives in Queens. The collection has a dozen stories:

"The Aphotic Ghost": The narrator's son, a diver and photographer in the aphotic zone (the level of the sea so deep that there is no light) had taken up mountain climbing and died on Everest, and the narrator begins to train to be able to climb Everest and recover the body. But why is he so insistent about it?

"Homeostasis": An operation lets people with severe brain damage live normal lives, but what does it do to their personhood?

"Entanglements": This is a story of parallel worlds, though ultimately it is about how people deal with this one.

"The International Studbook of the Giant Panda": Is this a story of waldos (telepresence) or of virtual reality or something else entirely? It is also a reminder of the bizarre lengths to which devoted researchers will go to save a species. This is the first of the stories with reporter Gabrielle Real.

"The Macrobe Conservation Project": Children's perceptions of the world are often very different from adults'. Not only that, but they also form these into a picture of the world that is not always congruent to reality. (It is like the old story of the young child saying the Pledge of Allegiance and wondering who "Richard Stands" was, that the Republic was for.) This story involves that idea and an almost completely distinct thread about intelligent plants and their symbiosis (?) with humans.

"Los Simpaticos": If you thought reality television was bad in our world, wait until you read this story. And you may think

you know where this is going, but I would not count on it.

"More Than Pigs and Rosaries Can Give": A tale of possession and politics and loss. If I had to give it a label, I would call it magic realism`

"Bone of My Bone": This is an example of literalizing a metaphor.

"The Magical Properties of Unicorn Ivory": It sounds like a fantasy, but it is strictly science fiction. Trust me. This is another Gabrielle Real story.

"American Moat": First contact does not always turn out the way you expect, or even the way they expect.

"Fantasie Impromptu No. 4 In C#min, Op. 66": If we can upload a person into a computer, what happens to their soul? If we destroy the computer, is that murder? And what if ... but that would be telling?

"The Assimilated Cuban's Guide to Quantum Santería": This story is just what the title says. The narrator is the assimilated Cuban, who is trying to use santería to bring about what he wants--but it is difficult to get all the obscure ingredients in suburban Connecticut, so there is a level of indeterminacy in the santería. Warning for monolingualists: there is a fair amount of dialogue in Spanish. Reading it with Google Translate at hand might be a good idea.

The styles of these re varied, but three of them are tied together by having reporter Gabrielle Real as the main character.

The book is very easy to read from a physical standpoint, but that is in part because all the pages have wide margins and are almost double-spaced. Okay, that is a slight exaggeration, but there are 25 lines to a page, while the average book of this size has about 35. Each line has about 10 words, which is about average. So the 271 pages are really closer to 200. I am not sure if the intent was to make it easier to read, or to pad out the book, but I appreciate not having tiny, close-set lines.

The "high concept" description for THE COLLAPSING EMPIRE by John Scalzi (ISBN 978-0-7653-8888-9) would be "Asimov's Foundation books with a climate change stand-in." Instead of the "Galactic Empire" there is the "Interdependency". Rather than generic faster-than- light travel, the Interdependency is tied together by "the Flow": wormholes (I guess) that make it possible to get from point A to point B in a matter of weeks or months, but only is there is a Flow from point A to Point B. Otherwise, it takes however long conventional ships take (years, decades, centuries, ...). There is even a chamber where holographic images of previous Emperors appear and give advice.

The Flow has been stable for the several hundred years it has been known. But now it is shifting, and if it shifts away from a place near planet Whatever, then planet Whatever is effectively cut off from the rest of the Interdependency--getting there would have to be done the old-fashioned way, slower than light. Physicists and some politicians are trying to alert the Interdependency, but other politicians are convinced it is all paranoia, or a hoax, and refuse to believe it (hence the climate change parallel).

There are differences from Asimov, of course. The main one is that there is no gender inequality in this future, and so ship captains, CEOs, and even Emperors are as likely to be women as men. (In fact, the title is not Emperor, but Emperox.) And for what it is worth, Scalzi does not overlook some of the usually ignored aspects of this, like cramps. (Susan Calvin had a lot of problems, but apparently never had cramps.)

Scalzi writes in an easy-to-follow manner, with names lacking superfluous apostrophes or unpronounceable diphthongs; his characters' names actually also have an Asimovian sound to them, while still maintaining a connection to Earth names. Ghreni, Amit, and Nadashe Nohamapetan's names seem to have their origins in south Asia, while Blinnikka appears to be Finnish.

My only hesitation in recommending this is that, just like Asimov's FOUNDATION, this is the first of a series. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

I have studied many philosophers and many cats. The  
wisdom of cats is infinitely superior.  
--Hippolyte Taine

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