

# MT VOID 03/22/19 -- Vol. 37, No. 38, Whole Number 2059

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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
03/22/19 -- Vol. 37, No. 38, Whole Number 2059

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## Free SF Anthology about the Future of Solar Power:

THE WEIGHT OF LIGHT has four stories by Brenda Cooper, Andrew Dana Hudson, Corey S. Pressman, Cat Rambo, as well as a dozen essays.

Available in multiple formats: <https://csi.asu.edu/books/weight/>

## Measles (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

(This comment was written February 27. Things might have changed by the time you read it. In fact, I sure hope they did.)  
There is an old public service message that says if you think that education is expensive, try ignorance. I see that the problem is that the cost is not directed at just one person, the ignorant one. Someone infected by the measles is forcing infection on people who have fully cooperated with established procedures.

Now we can see that happening in Texas right now. The focal point is the conflict for science vs. ignorance in Arlington, Texas. Republican Texas State Representative Bill Zedler is fighting for his constituents' right to choose. Normally that would make him a good guy. The question is what do they have a right to choose. What they are choosing is to allow parents and caregivers the right for their constituents to opt out of getting their childhood vaccinations, in specific their anti-measles vaccination. Zedler is telling his constituents that our healthcare system is so good that we do not have to worry about diseases like measles because they have what he calls "antibiotics and stuff like that."

Zedler says that our medicine is strong enough that nobody would die of measles in the United States. He says we have antibiotics and "things like that" to fight the disease. Measles is a viral and virulent disease. The treatment for it is roughly the same anywhere in the world. If you say that sounds like it is sitting around and not doing much, you are absolutely right. The current treatment prescribes not much to do. It is to wait the disease out and see what happens. If your kids show signs of the disease, well good luck to you.

Zedler suggests we can fight the disease with antibiotics. Sadly, antibiotics are essentially useless for fighting viruses. There are vaccines that can be used prior to exposure. Once a victim is exposed there is nothing that can be done but wait and hope. And the prevention is a vaccine anyway so people of Zedler's persuasion would have to be vaccinated in any case or face the full strength of the disease.

Children all over the country are being put at risk in part by Zedler's ignorance of the difference between what diseases can and cannot be treated at all effectively. As of this writing there have been six outbreaks of measles in the United States.

There is significant risk that children who are not vaccinated will get the measles and pass it along to other children. Measles is highly contagious. Currently the numbers of children is relatively small, but Zedler's legislation could easily cause a great deal more deaths. It may well be that Zedler will get pressure from other Republicans who are concerned about the welfare of their children, but I am not expecting that to happen. [-mrl]

**THE FATE OF ROME: CLIMATE, DISEASE, & THE END OF AN EMPIRE** by Kyle Harper (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This recent history book looks at the Roman Empire and its development thru the years. But particularly it studies this great civilization's long struggle as it was affected by disease, climate change and war. The Romans had health problems for many years, due to sanitation issues and a population density which aided the spread of communicable diseases in their cities. Romans had public baths and toilets, but soap and toilet paper were non-existent and untreated human waste from public toilets in Rome went into a storm sewer system that would empty into a river.

Records exist for only certain regions of the empire, but we do know that the Romans in Britain only attained a height of 5' 4" for men and 5' 1" or 2" for women and in Roman Egypt females lived to around 27 years of age and males till around 26 years. They would grow taller and be a bit healthier in Britain soon after the fall of the Roman Empire there. The diseases that plagued them as part of the closer connected Empire and at times more densely populated cities disappeared.

Around 144 A.D. a major plague came to the city of Rome. This was probably smallpox and though it killed a significant percentage of the population the Roman Empire would survive it. From 200 BC to 150 A.D. a period of climate called the Roman Climate Optimum occurred. This was a period of warm, wet and stable climate conditions across the Mediterranean that allowed for improved farming crop yields that helped the Empire to grow. But from 450 A.D. to 700 A.D. the climate turned much worse; this period is called the late Antique Little Ice Age caused by volcanic activity that released dust into the atmosphere that blocked some of the Sun's radiation and lowered the average temperature.

When in 541 A.D. the bubonic plague arrived and stayed for about two hundred years what was left of the Roman Empire which was mostly concentrated around Greece, Asia Minor and North Africa was decimated. This Eastern Roman Empire was fighting major battles with Persia and then had the bubonic plague killing millions and the climate turned bad.

And all this occurred just before the rise of Islam. This major force from Arabia would capture much of the Eastern Roman Empire which would never fully recover from these effects. This well written book is a great essay on the major disease and environmental conditions that influenced this once great empire. [-gf]

**What Is Good-Looking?** (letters of comment by Kevin R and Keith F. Lynch):

In response to [Mark's comments on James Bond](#) in the 03/15/19 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

I'm no expert on what women consider to be "good-looking" in a man, and personal charisma, talent and wealth have been known to bias the judges.

The "Lewis" series, spun off from "Morse," had Laurence Fox as Det. Sgt. Hathaway. He's also played Palmerston on "Victoria."

Here's his wiki page:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurence\\_Fox](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurence_Fox)

and Google images:

<https://tinyurl.com/void-laurence-fox>

In real life, he was attractive enough to wed Billie Piper!

This may be his talent, charm, etc having more to do with it than his "unconventional good looks," as it were. He can sing a

bit, too.

Male actors who veer a bit from looking like George Clooney or Jon Hamm aren't tagged "ugly," but "rugged" or "interesting." Humphrey Bogart and Spencer Tracy got to be cast against beautiful women, and audiences bought it. Maybe they just "acted" so as to convince the audiences that these babes would give them the time of day? :-)

Keith F. Lynch responds:

It breaks my suspension of disbelief when any male smoker attracts a beautiful woman, or when any female smoker attracts a wealthy or powerful man.

As usual, I'm just ahead of my time. The idea that smoking is a marker, not for glamour, sophistication, and attractiveness, but for being disgusting, ugly, sickly, and foul smelling became mainstream only with the Simpsons and Malcolm in the Middle. [-kfl]

**Dilbert** (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Mark's comments on Dilbert](#) in the 03/15/19 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Thanks for the Dilbert reference in MT VOID last week (<https://dilbert.com/strip/2019-03-03>).

This is one of Scott Adams' best strips, which hits a lot of points in "our-verse" (though some may focus on it's apparent allusion to THE MATRIX).

Adams' best work was done while he was still at Pac Bell. In the mid-90's his new supervisor took up his standing offer to leave. Since then his consistent brilliance (in the Dilbert strip) has regrettably tarnished.

The current Wikipedia entry on him touches on his very cogent (if cynical) 2016 assessment of the current POTUS--a truncated version of which made the national news. This suggests that his best work does not make it into the strip.

The entry also makes reference to "The Dilbert Blog," which I will soon peruse.

Thanks again for the Dilbert reference. [-js]

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

Well, it's spring book sale season again and last weekend was the Bryn Mawr book sale, held at the Princeton Day School.

Over the last couple of years, the size of this sale had been decreasing, but it seems to have come roaring back, with all the tables full of books. That may mean people are getting rid of more books, but the number of people also seemed up from last year, and parking was almost impossible.

Media prices were lower this year, as many people move away from physical media. The result was that all DVDs--even multi-DVD sets--were only \$1. So we got six of the seven boxed sets of THE SOPRANOS for a total of \$6. Even buying the seventh set on-line, we will end up getting the entire six-season series (plus extras) for under \$25. Now that's an offer you can't refuse.

We also got a dozen movies, two boxed sets of FOYLE'S WAR, and two Teaching Company courses (C. S. Lewis and economics) so before I even got to the books, I had a full duffel \*and\* a half-full shopping bag.

But I did get some books (although I will admit to not looking at as many areas as I have in past years). They had a huge science fiction section, with a lot of good stuff that we already had. I didn't even look at general fiction, or mysteries, or history, or literary classics, all of which I usually at least peruse.

My "prize" find was an edition in the original Spanish of Jaime Alazraki's "Prosa narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges" (1968). Most of the rest of what I bought were also lit crit, but in English: a book about Herman Melville, yet another study by Leslie A. Fiedler on Jews in American literature (apparently his specialty, though he also did a small book about Olaf Stapledon), and collections of essays by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Neal Stephenson, and Edmund Wilson.

By this point I had filled the shopping bag as well, so there was very little room to add more books, and my back was starting to bother me. (Could it possibly have had something to do with carrying a duffel and a bag full of books and DVDs?) I looked through the philosophy--there was a lot, but I found nothing for me. There was such a large religion section that I didn't even try.

Check-out was very confused. When I got into line, there were two lines, one for cash and one for credit cards, and both long. Then they changed (or clarified?) it--everyone should start in the cash line, where one of the five cashiers would total up your purchases. Then you could either pay in cash there, or get into the (now much shorter) credit card line to pay the one cashier there. One big advantage is that you could wait until you knew the total before committing to cash or credit card.

The main problem, of course, is way more people than they can handle, both in parking, and in checking out. Unless they add more volunteers, or direct people to more distant lots, things will not improve. (A lot they had several years ago has been converted into a playground, which hasn't helped.) But given what a great deal books are here, people will continue to put up with this.

Two weeks from now is the Cherry Hill Friends of the Library book sale. We combine this with a trip to Second Time Books in Mount Laurel, where we hope to sell enough books to at least result in no net increase in book volume in the house because of the sales. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Delay is the deadliest form of denial.  
--C. Northcote Parkinson

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