

# MT VOID 09/22/17 -- Vol. 36, No. 12, Whole Number 1981



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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
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## Wilmington and Riverwine River Art Museums Report (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

My trip report on our two-day trip to the Delaware Museum of Art (Howard Pyle) and the Brandywine River Museum of Art (Andrew, N. C., and Jamie Wyeth) is available at:

<http://lepers.us/evelyn/trips/brandywine.htm>

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## Cassini, RIP (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Cassini ended its mission shortly before 7:54 a.m. EDT (1154 GMT), September 15, when NASA received its last transmission. Contrary to popular speculation, it was not, "My God, it's full of stars!"

NASA has released a free e-book, THE SATURN SYSTEM THROUGH THE EYES OF CASSINI, available for download in various formats at:

<https://www.nasa.gov/connect/ebooks/the-saturn-system.html>

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## Keep Away, Boys (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I visited the Brandywine River Museum of Art, a museum that had a great collection of paintings by N. C. Wyeth. One book he illustrated was THE BOY'S KING ARTHUR. I always thought the title implied they had play up the action and adventure

parts of the story so it would more appeal to a boy. It only occurred to me today that it had that title not for what it included but for what it omitted. [-mrl]

### **Fooling with Infinity** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Mathematics is serious stuff. It allows you to have a feel for where a satellite is in space. You measure the amount you have to pay the government in taxes this year. You use it to tell how much alcohol in a person's bloodstream before he is too impaired to legally drive. Mathematics is a serious toolbox. But there are some tools that have a fun side. One of the fun tools is infinity. Whatever I think of as big, infinity comes along and trumps it for me.

How many millimeters is it to the star Polaris? No, let's get really big. How many millimeters is it to the farthest star ever observed? Multiply that by the largest integer anybody has ever conceived of until just a second ago. (You see we are conceiving of a larger number right now.) That is a really large number. Well, no, it really is well below average for positive integers that are out there. Think how big infinity must be. It is really huge. Now I think that kind of size deserves some respect.

Then again, I use to look at my father's old camera. You used to twist the lens to set how far away the object you were photographing was. There was a scale around the lens with distances marked. I do not remember the shortest distance you could set the lens for, but I do remember the greatest distance you could set the camera for. It was infinity. This scale only went about a third the way around the lens and it went up to \*infinity\*!!! You could actually set this camera to take pictures of objects out as far as infinity. That was way further (WAY FURTHER!!!) than the furthest star that humans have ever detected. And this scale went only about a third the way around the lens. Sadly the camera maker designed the lens so that the scale only went about that third. The camera range only went to infinity and stopped there. (Only to infinity? That's an \*ONLY???\*) I wanted to "fix" the camera so that it went to infinity and beyond. But even so I could not interest my father in the project. Can you imagine that? He didn't care to take pictures of what was out there beyond infinity.

Funny things happen when you start playing with infinity. Suppose you have an infinitely long strip of farmland with two parallel furrows of infinite length, A and B. And you have two planters, A and B, walking along parallel, each dropping one seed per second. Suppose each is being followed by a bird who is stealing the seed and eating it at a rate of one seed per each two seconds. So on each of furrow A and furrow B there are always the same number of seeds planted. In two seconds there will be a net one seed planted. In two seconds the farmer will have dropped two seeds and the bird will have stolen and eaten one.

So far it seems that each furrow will have the same number of seeds. But while the birds are eating at the same rate, they are choosing seeds to eat differently. The bird on furrow A always eats the seed that has been planted the longest. And the bird on furrow B always eats the most recently dropped seed.

What is happening at furrow A?

In the first two seconds Farmer A will have dropped seed 1 and seed 2 and the bird will have eaten seed 1. In the next two seconds Farmer A will have dropped seed 3 and seed 4 and the bird will have eaten seed 2. In the next two seconds Farmer B will have dropped seed 5 and seed 6 and the bird will have eaten seed 3. After an infinite number of seconds every seed will have been eaten. Seed N will have been eaten after 2N seconds.

What is happening at furrow B?

In the first two seconds Farmer B will have dropped seed 1 and seed 2 and the bird will have eaten seed 2. In the next two seconds Farmer B will have dropped seed 3 and seed 4 and the bird will have eaten seed 4. In the next two seconds Farmer B will have dropped seed 5 and seed 6 and the bird will have eaten seed 6. After an infinite number of seconds every \*even\* seed will have been eaten. But no odd seeds will have been eaten. There will be an infinite number of seeds left planted.

Farmer A will have lost all his seeds, but Farmer B will still have as many seeds as he dropped. Clearly the power rests in the hands of hands of the birds. Or do they have wings? Or is it claws? [-mrl]

**ARTEMIS by Andy Weir** (copyright 2017, Crown, 320pp, \$27 hardcover, ISBN-10: 0553448129, ISBN-13: 978-0553448122, ASIN: B06Y55SB48) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

Unlike most of the general public, I became aware of Andy Weir's THE MARTIAN by listening to the audiobook back in early 2015. I was not only captivated by the story, I was mesmerized by the narration talents of R. C. Bray. Then the secret got out, the movie was released, made lots of money, and won the Hugo for Best Dramatic Presentation Long Form in 2016. At the end of my review of THE MARTIAN back in March of 2015 I wrote the following: "And I think I may just pick up the next Weir novel when it comes out." (And you're all probably saying "wait a minute, it's not out yet". True enough.)

Weir's new novel, ARTEMIS, takes place in a settlement of the same name on the Earth's moon. Jazz--short for Jasmine--Bashara barely makes ends meet as a porter in ARTEMIS, so she has a side job. She's a smuggler, and a pretty good one at that. She plies her trade in typical harmless items; she smuggles what she thinks will make her some money without getting her in trouble. She has repeat customers, and as a result has a pretty good gig going. And while she still doesn't make much money, she makes enough money to survive. Her goal is to qualify for and join the EVA masters--the select group of people who are certified to take tourist out on EVAs to see things like the Apollo landing sights. EVA masters are paid well, so once Jazz gets certified she figures she'll be set. So of course the novel opens with her failing her certification exam because she was wearing a faulty suit that she bought second hand. Jazz had spent most of her savings on that suit, and now she was out of money, out of a suit (at least temporarily), and not an EVA master.

So it was back to smuggling on the side. While she tries to stay out of trouble, she does have some enemies in position of authority, but some friends as well. And she's typically been able to rely on her regular customers for steady smuggling work. So, on a regular visit to one of those customers to drop off a shipment, she catches wind of a big deal about to go down. She is invited to participate in the scam for which she will be paid a handsome sum of cash. The only problem is that her part in the scheme is a very dangerous criminal act. If she pulls it off, she's rich. If she fails, she will either be deported back to Earth, or she just might die.

What could possibly go wrong?

Well, yes, that was a rhetorical question, because everything goes wrong; it wouldn't be much of a story if everything went according to plan. In the process of recovering from the failure of her part in the scheme, she learns way too much about what is going on in the highest reaches of the Artemis government--and that the true reach of the situation is all the way back on Earth. So she has a choice--get deported back to Earth, or come up with an even more crazy scheme to make things right and save Artemis from criminals back on Earth.

THE MARTIAN, both the book and the movie, took everyone by surprise. It was a terrific tale of survival using wits and science, of people all over Earth--and, as it turns out, in space-- working together to save one lone man who is stranded on Mars. It was fun, exciting, even educational--and everyone loved it. ARTEMIS is not THE MARTIAN, and I expect many people to be disappointed by it.

To be fair, ARTEMIS is a fun, light, summer read (never mind that it's going to be released in November of 2017; it's really a light summer read). It's entertaining, engaging, and fast-paced. It's a caper tale set on the moon, and it does need the moon to succeed. And it does succeed, after a fashion. In one sense, it's much like THE MARTIAN in that there are lives in danger and that science is used to save them. Just as in THE MARTIAN, Weir gives us the science lectures we need to get through the story without drowning us in details. All that is well and good, but I'd like to see Weir branch out from that kind of storytelling and into something different, something meatier. The book's idea of a massive conspiracy led by a shady organization on Earth is surely different from the story we get in THE MARTIAN, but it's the type of story we've seen before. It's time to see something different.

I believe that the problem with any book that Andy Weir would have written after THE MARTIAN would have suffered from comparisons with that book. It's inevitable. In my mind, ARTEMIS is not a bad book, but it does suffer from coming right after the success that was THE MARTIAN. Don't get me wrong here; I want to emphasize that I enjoyed reading ARTEMIS and am glad that I did read it. But now that we've gotten through the first two books of Weir's career, it's time to see what he can really come up with. [-jak]

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

While Shelby Foote's CIVIL WAR is generally considered a remarkable accomplishment, there seems to be a consensus that it is slanted toward the South. Well, PARTNERS IN COMMAND by Joseph T. Glatthaar (ISBN 978-0-02-911817-4) might be a good analysis of the personalities of the various military leaders of the Civil War, but it also seems to show a remarkable bias towards the South in very odd ways.

For example, Glatthaar writes, "Although leaders on both sides possessed immense resources to accomplish their pronounced goals of secession or reunion and the end of slavery, ..." (page 3) Note that he attributes to the South only the goal of secession, with no mention of the fact that almost every declaration of secession specifically listed the continuation of slavery as one of the major reasons for secession.

Later, he said, "Some nine million people resided in the over 700,000 square miles that comprised the Confederate States of America. Most of the 5.5 million whites supported the defense of the homeland, although their 3.5 million slaves committed themselves halfheartedly at best, and indeed many opposed secessionist success." (page 3) Well, duh! The problem is this is not the sort of book where one writes sentences intended ironically. (And this is not even addressing the mis-use of the word "comprise".)

And again: "Fortunately, a host of Regular Army and Navy officers resigned their commissions to join hands with their Southern brethren, ..." (4) This may be just bad phrasing, but it would be more even-handed to say "fortunately for the South."

Even some factual statements seem questionable. Glatthaar states, "Most Confederates were a propertied class. They had seceded over the right to own, remove, and utilize property, specifically slaves, as they saw fit..." (page 226) If by "propertied" he means holding at least one slave, then he is wrong, because the 1860 census shows about a third of Southern households holding slaves-- not a majority. (And note that here Glatthaar acknowledges that the South seceded over slavery.)

And you know how some people can completely ruin a punch line but not telling the lead-up with the right words? Not only does Glatthaar do this, but I am pretty sure he gets the people involved wrong. As I have always heard the story, after Gettysburg George Meade told Lincoln, "I have driven the rebels from our soil," and Lincoln responded, "When will my generals learn that it is all our soil." Glatthaar says that "McClellan proclaimed he had driven the invaders from the North," triggering Lincoln to say, "The whole country is our soil." (page 86)

(I have also seen Meade's statement as that the army had driven "from our soil every vestige of the presence of the invader." This might indicate some vagueness, but the exchange is always described as with Meade rather than McClellan.)

The book has to rely on the underlying psychologies of the principals, because the basic outline of the book can be simply summed up: Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson got along, Abraham Lincoln and George McClellan didn't, so things went well for the South. But Lincoln fired McClellan in November 1862 and Jackson died in May 1863. Then Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman (and Lincoln) got along, while Jefferson Davis and Joseph E. Johnston did not, so the tide turned in favor of the North. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

There's one way to find out if a man is honest--ask him.  
If he says, 'Yes,' you know he is a crook.  
--Groucho Marx

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