

# MT VOID 09/07/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 10, Whole Number 2031

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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
09/07/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 10, Whole Number 2031

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### The Beloit Mindset List: (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

On this year's Beloit College Mindset List, my favorite entries (or entries requiring comments) are:

1. They are the first class born in the new millennium, escaping the dreaded label of "Millennial", though their new designation-- iGen, GenZ, etc.--has not yet been agreed upon by them.
2. Outer space has never been without human habitation.
3. They have always been able to refer to Wikipedia.
6. Calcutta has always been Kolkata.
10. When filling out forms, they are not surprised to find more than two gender categories to choose from.
14. They've grown up with stories about where their grandparents were on 11/22/63 and where their parents were on 9/11. [And possibly where their great-grandparents were 12/07/41.]
22. They never used a spit bowl in a dentist's office. [This may mean they never go to a dentist's office, because mine still has a spit bowl.]
35. Lightbulbs have always been shatterproof. [This is not true. For example, CFLs are certainly not shatterproof.]

49. Chernobyl has never produced any power in their lifetimes.

[I didn't think it had produced any power since 1986, well before they were born, but it turns out that the three unaffected reactors were kept running, the last being shut down in 2000.]

The full list is at:

<http://themindsetlist.com/2018/08/beloit-college-mindset-list-class-2022/>

[-ecI]

**The Dubious Wisdom of Mark Leeper** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I have been asked by a reader that I publish some of my aphorisms and pithy comments I have made over the years. Well, perhaps they are not so pithy, but these are the quotes I have collected over the years and have put on my homepage.

I would be greatly obliged to anyone who can remind me of others.

On the war on terrorism: the liberals don't know that the house has radon gas, and the conservatives do but are trying to punch it.

-- Live TV died in the late 1950s, electronic bulletin boards came along in the mid-1980s, meaning there was about a 25-year gap when it was difficult to put your foot in your mouth and have people all across the country know about it.

-- Oh what tangled webs we weave when first we practice to deceive. So if deception doth attract us we must have a lot a practice. -- These days the news media feels comfortable only when they are covering a major trial. That is because it is exciting to some, it sits in one place, and there only too rarely is shooting.

-- When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: and when I was a man I decided how foolish it would be to give all that up.

-- They say that life begins when the kids go away to school and the dog dies. But no man whose wife believes that can rest easily.

-- Give a man a fish and you have fed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you have fed him for life. Give a fish a vote and he will say to give the man just the one fish, preferably one that is already dead.

-- The problem with turning 50 is that dying is about the only thing left that people can be surprised that you did so young.

-- The greatest political opportunist of all time has to be God. Somehow He always manages to say just exactly what His audience is predisposed to believe.

-- Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it. Those who trust history are condemned to be misled by it. Nothing happens the same way twice.

-- [On hearing Freeman Dyson speak...] A sufficiently visionary scientist is indistinguishable from a crackpot.

[-mrl]

**INFINITY'S END** edited by **Jonathan Strahan** (copyright 2018, Solaris, \$14.99 trade paperback, 349pp, ISBN 978-1-78108-575-2) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

All good things must come to an end, and thus it is with Jonathan Strahan's Infinity Project. The Infinity Project was (because it is now complete) a series of (relatively) hard science fiction themed anthologies, roughly following the human race from the cradle of Earth out to the edge of the Solar System and beyond. The penultimate volume, INFINITY WARS, told tales of military conflict, although those stories were told with a very humanistic viewpoint in mind. Sure, it was military science fiction, but not the kind you may be used to reading.

The titles of the books in Infinity Project were meant to give the reader some hint as to what was contained in that volume. INFINITY'S END does not, as the title might lead the reader to believe, contain stories about the end of the universe. Instead, it is self-referential with regard to the Infinity Project. It is saying essentially, yep, this is it. We're done. To get an idea of what might be in this volume, Strahan says this in his Introduction: "I asked the writers creating new stories for this book to try to open up the solar system, to look again at its vastness, its incredible scale, and at how humanity in different ways might fit

successfully and happily into its nooks and crannies."

To that end, the stories in this volume vary greatly in the way they meet Strahan's objective. No two stories are alike in subject matter, tone, characters, or anything else you might think of. In getting that variety, Strahan succeeded. However, I feel that the quality of the stories in the volume is uneven. While any original themed anthology (or, I suppose collection of stories from a particular author) will have some stories that are better than others, the best stories in INFINITY'S END (in my opinion-- remember, I'm a reviewer, not a critic--so your mileage may vary) are head and shoulders above the rest (I want to say "worst" stories, but there are no bad stories in this book, so worst is not the right word by any stretch of the imagination).

It should come as no surprise to anyone that among my favorite stories in this volume is Alastair Reynold's "Death's Door". It is, at its most basic, a tale of two friends trying to convince a third not to check out of this life. They attempt to do so by taking him on a tour of the solar system's most stunning and spectacular wonders. It as if Reynolds looked at Strahan's request and said, okay, I'll make this story a Grand Tour of the wonders of the solar system; now I'd better put a plot around it. For someone that likes big scale sense of wonder stories, I ate this one up.

Stories regarding the manipulation of time have always fascinated me. Yes, I like time travel stories and all the weird things those can entail, but playing with time itself is an interesting topic to me. Fran Wilde's "The Synchronist" tells the story of Beneficence Sand, the "kit kid" of Galen Sand, a trader who seems to have a special relationship with time and who leaves his daughter behind with her mother while he goes on the run from The Consistency, time police of a sort. Beneficence enters a contest called the Synchronist's Challenge and makes some fascinating discoveries. It's not an easy story to explain, but a fun one to read.

I love the work of Peter Watts. It's dark, fascinating, and compelling. When I read BLINDSIGHT many years ago, I know that I wasn't really sure what I was reading, but I loved it nonetheless. "Kindred" is a story like that. I can sit here and tell you about the story, but I'd be scratching my head the whole time. I loved it.

In Naomi Kritzer's "Prophet of the Roads", the Solar System is in tatters. When it wasn't in tatters, it was run by the Engineer, which at some cataclysmic point was broken into pieces. Now the Engineer is trying to orchestrate the reunification of its fragments; the funny thing is that most people don't want to the Engineer to return. This is more a story of two people who are carrying fragments of the Engineer and how they relate to each other rather than a "let's find all the fragments and put them together story". I think the story we get is much better than that latter one.

In Nick Wolven's "Cloudsong", the inner Solar System is seriously lacking water. Anander Flyte is headed to the outer portion of the system to talk to the Darklings, a race of beings who have agreed to help out with Project Snowflake, which is designed to send water to the inner system. Only now the Darklings are saying that the project cannot be done. The reason for that, and how the problem is solved, is fascinating.

Kristine Kathryn Rusch's "Once in a Blue Moon" is a well-written tale of pirates trying to steal a weapon off a space ship and of a precocious girl who is being sent to Earth to a "school that can handle her" that foils the plan. Nothing particularly outstanding, but a solid story.

Seanan McGuire's "Swear Not by the Moon" is another solid story about a young girl from a wealthy and connected family who is kidnapped. The story is a tale of wealth, influence, and bored people who do things just because they have the money and can do them, even though those projects shouldn't succeed. It is also a tale of a family that, despite it's wealth, influence, and privilege, is still a family that loves each other, a family that is protective of each other, a family just like many others.

Other stories that I recommend are "Intervention" by Kelly Robson; "Nothing Ever Happens on Oberon", by Paul McAuley (a story in his Quiet War universe which while not extraordinary makes me want to read the Quiet War books); "Longing for Earth" by Linda Nagata; and "Talking to the Ghost at the Edge of the World" by Lavie Tidhar. I don't believe any of these stories are going to win awards, but they are good, solid, core science fiction.

Stories that I felt didn't quite live up to my expectations were "Foxy and Tiggs", by Justina Robson (oddly enough the lead off story in the anthology--since it's typical that the first story is supposed to be one of the better ones that reach out and grab the reader, I must be missing something); "Last Small Step" by Stephen Baxter (which seems like one long infodump, and certainly not up to the standards of much of his other work); and "A Portrait of Salai" by Hannu Rajaniemi (in which I was lost from the beginning, which in turn may have something to do with all the time I was spending reading in the car during our drive to and from San Jose for Worldcon 76).

Again, as you read this book your mileage may vary. Overall, I didn't think the collection of stories in this volume matched the quality of stories in the other volumes I have read in the series (while preparing this review, I discovered much to my chagrin that I have not read two of the seven volumes--I think I'd better get on that as soon as I can). Still, I also don't believe you can go wrong with this book; there's likely something here for everyone that enjoys these kind of stories. [-jak]

**RODENTS OF UNUSUAL SIZE** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** This is a documentary about nutrias. Nutrias are the world's largest rodents, weighing in the range of 20 pounds or more. They began invading southern Louisiana swamps about 1958. They have driven out aquatic wildlife in that area. The issue of what to be done about them is controversial. Animal protection and fashion sources benefit from the presence of the nutrias. The trappers in the swamp want to be free to trap them to help preserve their lifestyle. **RODENTS OF UNUSUAL SIZE** looks at the nutria, its biology, its behavior, and its history in the United States. It also looks at different cultures in the area and how they interact with it. Directors: Quinn Costello, Chris Metzler, Jeff Springer. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

In the film **THE PRINCESS BRIDE** (1987), based on the novel by William Goldman, Westley must travel through the fire swamp to save his true love, Princess Buttercup. The danger of the Fire Swamp is that it is ruled by the R.O.U.S., the Rodents Of Unusual Size. In the film these are ridiculous looking small monsters that look like 20-pound rats. Could creatures like that really exist? If you can ask that question you need to see this documentary. Looking no less ridiculous are nutrias, the world's largest rodents, somewhere in the range of 20-inches long not counting the tail, which just adds to the resemblance of the nutrias bears to a rat. Nutrias are equally happy on land or in water. They invaded the southern coastland of Louisiana in 1958. In the 1970s trappers could make good money for their meat and fur. And today they are the dominant mammal species in Southern Louisiana.

The nutria is well suited for semi-aquatic life. It has teeth like a beaver. That might not bother most people, but the nutria's teeth are also sharp like a beaver's, but for one difference. Nutrias' two front are red-orange. It looks like two carrots protruding out from under its upper lip. But they give it an uncanny look.

Nutrias started showing up in the United States some time around 1958. They had come north breeding with muskrats. At first this new strange animal was considered to be good fortune for the people of the marshlands. After all, it was a great source for saleable fur. And one animal had a lot of fur. But just about that time animal rights advocates campaigned to awaken people to the cruelty inflicted on animals. The demand for genuine animal fur dropped off. With the profit dropping off nutrias escaped or were released into the swamp with little thought how well they would survive. It turned out that they were well-suited to the swamps. With webbed feet they were agile in the swamps. They out-competed the muskrats.

The nutria is a rapacious eater. It eats water plants down to near the ground. Meanwhile it attacks the roots of plants up from their burrows. With no roots the plants are washed away by rain and stream.

A nutria destroys the habitats of other aquatic species. It will have four litters a year. Its breasts are situated toward its back so it may feed pups while swimming.

The nutria has enflamed various conflicts in Louisiana. The film looks at a golf club operator who wants to kill the nutria because of the damage it does to the turf. We also get a picture of the lifestyle of the Cajun trappers who at once are developing a taste for nutria meat, others who see the nutria as a threat to their livelihood, and others who are learning to like the meat who live in the knowledge they has little protection from nutrias and from storms.

This animal is looked at in this film from cultural, biological, and historical perspectives. I rate the film +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 8/10.

**RODENTS OF UNUSUAL SIZE** will open in Los Angeles on September 14.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2877296/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/Å?m/rodents\\_of\\_unusual\\_size](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/Å?m/rodents_of_unusual_size)

[-mrl]

**A NIGHT IN OLD MEXICO** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** Robert Duvall plays a curmudgeonly Texas rancher who loses his house and land after a period of drought. His estranged grandson visits him. The rancher, never enjoyable to be around, takes his newfound grandson across the border to raise hell in a Mexican bar and brothel. He is funding this trip with literally found money. And the owner is willing to kill to get it back. It seems that the other side of the border is a very different place, easy to appreciate and harder to survive in. Where the script goes wrong is the story is driven forward by far too many coincidences. Director: Emilio Aragon. Writer: William D. Wittliff. Stars: Robert Duvall, Jeremy Irvine, Angie Cepeda. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

I came away from **A NIGHT IN OLD MEXICO** liking it a lot but not respecting it much at all. The plot is awkwardly constructed with far too many coincidences happening at one time and driving the action. Very early in the story the Robert

Duvall character, Red, meets his grandson Gally Bowie and neither much has any use for the other. (Do you care to guess where this relationship is going?) The film is built on ready-made pieces that will be familiar and that fit together in a comfortable and likeable if predictable package. The plot is the cinema equivalent of comfort food.

None of the fault here falls on the shoulders of Duvall, who remains one of our country's best actors. Here he sounds a lot like Gus McCrae from LONESOME DOVE. Some nice style comes from sending the main characters into Mexico on the Day of the Dead. If it is not as stylish as the Day of the Dead celebration in SPECTRE, at least it is much more believable. Border towns are usually dangerous places to be any night, and this not an ordinary night. This is the night of the fiesta of the Day of The Dead (another coincidence). And along the way Red just happened to get himself a sack of mob money. Whenever the plot slows down a coincidence seems to come along and drive the plot forward. That is unfortunate because the best moments of the film are when the plot slows down enough for the viewer to get to know the characters. There is a likeable prostitute oddly named Patty Wafers (Angie Cepeda). Even the crooks seem to have a decent side. And the Mexican border town is enthralling even if it is a good place to get shot.

Supposedly Duvall has wanted to play a character like Red for some time. And it may be easy to see why. The film's major virtues are not the originality of the plot. It is not so much a thriller as a character piece. And it is not so much a character piece as a part that Duvall could take and run with. At 87 Duvall is still creating memorable characters. He still has a gift of creating memorable people on the screen and that is probably more important to him than being in someone else's flashy production.

I rate A NIGHT IN OLD MEXICO a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or /10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2308260/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/a\\_night\\_in\\_old\\_mexico](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/a_night_in_old_mexico)

[-mrl]

**Andre Norton** (letter of comment by Peter Rubinstein):

Last week, Evelyn wrote:

What characteristic do Andre Norton's books have that is not possessed by those of any other science fiction author? [-ecl]

In response, Peter Rubinstein writes:

Might it be that the titles span the alphabet? My background is not as comprehensive as yours, so I don't know of any others in SF. There are several in other fields, though. [-pr]

Evelyn responds:

Correct. However, I was wrong--there is (at least) one other science fiction author whose works span the alphabet. (I heard the Norton trivia long ago.) Who is it? [-ecl]

[When Peter was asked who they were, he replied,] "Admittedly, Grafton leapt to mind, although she died before getting to Z. I thought there was another, but I can't seem to recall the name. Every time I try, Theodor Geisel rhymes obliterate my cognitive processes." [-pr]

**Rufus Lee King** (letters of comment by Paul Dormer, Tim Merrigan, and Dorothy J. Heydt):

In response to [Mark's comments on Rufus Lee King](#) in the 08/31/18 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

A favourite story I heard on the radio many years ago was about an Englishman who was at some sort of banquet in the US. He noticed the wait staff going round the table asking everyone a question. When they got to him, they asked, "How do you like your flaming yonkurt?"

He was totally flummoxed by this, wondering if this was some exotic cuisine he wasn't aware of. Yonkurt sounded Turkish, and he knew there were dishes that were served at the table in flames.

Finally, someone took pity on him and translated: "How do you like your filet mignon cooked?"

And in a similar culinary vein, at Denvention 2 back in 1981, a group of us went out to a Mexican restaurant. I was asked a question that sounded to my ears as, "Do you want [some name]'s mother?" This, I finally discovered, was "Do you want your

tacos smothered?" but as I had never had Mexican food before, I had no idea what I should answer. [-pd]

Tim Merrigan responds:

I wouldn't have either, and I've been eating (American) Mexican food all my life, I've never heard of smothered tacos-- burritos, yeah, but tacos? [-tm]

Dorothy Heydt replies:

Me neither, so I googled and got:

"A smothered burrito is basically a burrito that has been smothered and covered in a red enchilada sauce and melted cheese. It's also called a wet burrito. In the case of this particular recipe the burrito is loaded up with rice, beans, ground beef taco meat, and cheese. Topped with lettuce, tomato, and cilantro."

Sounds tasty, actually. [-djh]

Paul responds:

Well, this was nearly forty years ago, so I may be mis-remembering what it was that was being smothered. [-pd]

Tim replies to Dorothy:

One of my favorites, made with a chili Verde burrito, though I try to get them to substitute chili Verde salsa for the enchilada salsa, and, as I've seen, and had, them served, add cheese and sour cream to the toppings. And sometimes, there's rice pilaf and refried beans on the side. [-tm]

Mark adds:

Another such story involved two men sharing a limousine to the airport. The driver asked one of the men where he was headed. He said "I'm going to see the rabbits." The other man thought this was a very strange pronouncement. Later he got a chance to ask the driver what it was all about. The driver said, "he said he was going to Cedar Rapids." [-mrl]

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

The latest winner of the John W. Campbell, Jr., Award for the best new writer (an the first Native American winner) made me curious to go back over past winners and runners-up and see which winners never seemed to "take off" and which runners-up ended up more popular than the winners in their years, recognizing that popularity is not necessarily the best measure of the "right" winner. And the ballots did not necessarily include authors who went little-noticed their first two years, and then took off. (See my note at the end.)

The award started in 1973. Jerry Pournelle won. Some guy named George R. R. Martin was a runner-up. Octavia Butler never even made the ballot. In 1974 Spider Robinson and Lisa Tuttle tied.

In 1975, both John Varley and Suze McKee Charnass placed below P. J. Plauger. In 1976, Varley again lost, along with Joan D. Vinge. The winner was Tom Reamy, who unfortunately died the next year. His work showed a lot of promise, and it is impossible to judge the 1976 outcome by what the authors produced later.

In 1977, C. J. Cherryh won and indeed went on to a stellar and long-lasting career. In 1978, the winner was Orson Scott Card, another worthy choice (on the basis of his work), even though it meant Bruce Sterling was a runner-up. In 1979, the winner was Stephen R. Donaldson, continuing the "predictive" streak.

In 1980, Barry B. Longyear won, but in retrospect runner-up Diane Duane might have been a better choice. In 1981, Duane was again runner-up, this time to Somtow Sucharitkul (the first winner of non-European descent). In 1982, Alexis A. Gilliland won; Michael Swanwick was a runner-up.

In 1983, Paul O. Williams won, but one might argue that runner-up Lisa Goldstein has had a longer and more illustrious career. In 1984 Goldstein lost again (along with Sheri S. Tepper), though R. A. MacAvoy was a worthy winner. In 1985, Lucius Shepard was a good choice.

In 1986, both Guy Gavriel Kay and Karen Joy Fowler lost to Melissa Scott, but Fowler won in 1987, making Lois McMaster Bujold and Robert Reed runners-up.

In 1988 Judith Moffett won, with no particularly outstanding runners-up (which is not to say they were not good authors, but

none stand out as "how could the voters have missed this one?). One could argue that in 1989, Kristine Kathryn Rusch would have been a better choice than Michaela Roessner, but Rusch won in 1990, leaving Allen Steele as a runner-up.

In 1991, Julia Ecklar won. In 1992, the voters were spot-on (IMHO) with Ted Chiang. Then began a string of years when none of the nominees seemed to become superstars. I have to believe that some major figures started writing during that period, but the winners, while worthy, never achieved the status of a Cherryh or a Chiang. For the record, they were Laura Resnick (1993), Amy Thomson (1994), Jeff Noon (1995), David Feintuch (1996).

In 1997, Michael A. Burstein won, and in 1998, Mary Doria Russell, on the very strong basis of *THE SPARROW*. However, though she did she did write a few more novels, she never reached those heights again.

In 1999, Nalo Hopkinson became the first black writer to win and became an important writer in the field. (Note: Not African- American; she was born in Jamaica.) The 2002 winner, Cory Doctorow, has also fulfilled his promise. For the winners since 2000, it may be too soon to tell. It is certainly too soon for the last few years, but frankly, I seem to be unfamiliar with most of the names since 2000, which means either none of the choices was particularly perceptive, or I am just out of touch.

I will note that N. K. Jemisin, who just won her record-breaking third consecutive Hugo Award for Best Novel, was never even nominated. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be  
anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be  
sufficient for the day.

--Samuel Butler

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