

2018 Week 11: The Week Ending Saturday, March 17th



Figure 1: Word Cloud

Sunday

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Monday

Well, I didn't get anything actually written on Sunday. It's a bit of a blur, sir, although I don't think I punched the bursar. Breakfast was bacon, toast, and pancakes. I took Veronica and Sam to a Socialism 101 program hosted by the Huron Valley DSA. Then it was some rushed podcast prep; Grace studied a couple of articles and I wrote a rough-draft review of *A Wrinkle in Time*. We made it to Mass, only fifteen minutes late or so (that's a victory for us, honestly), and then came back to a Sunday dinner of roasted chicken with a sweet pepper sauce, green beans, and rice. After dinner I sedated the kids with *Doctor Who* DVDs: "A Christmas Carol" (the Matt Smith Christmas special from 2010) and Series 7, Part 1.

Pottscast Audio Experiments

I went down into the basement and started messing around with a Rode NT5 microphone from my matched pair, setting it up to see if I could figure out a

good way to add a live guitar track to the podcast. I didn't get very far with that, but I have an idea of how to do it. I might be able to use the Tascam US-2000 live mixer functionality and send input 3 to the monitor outs, and run the monitor outs into the FA-66. Audio quality may be questionable, since I run this into the unbalanced RCA inputs of the FA-66. Right now I'm just trying it out with one of the microphones. I might try both microphones in a stereo pattern if this works OK, and see if I think it sounds more natural.

I don't think there's a single setup that will let me do Skype/Google Hangouts and live guitar simultaneously, but I will have to think about it further. Using a second computer would make this considerably simpler.

I might also consider running all the live inputs into the Tascam and using the FA-66 as the "secondary" interface for remote guests. That could work well if it turns out the Tascam's microphone preamps and analog to digital conversion sound better than the ones on the FA-66. I don't know if that's true. It would also allow me to avoid using the unbalanced RCA inputs on the FA-66. It could ultimately simplify my setup, but it would require a completely reconfigured Logic project, so it will take some time and thought. It would be nice to use the zero-latency mixing in the Tascam for a control room mix, rather than creating the control room mix in Logic. But that might not work because I'm not sure I would get the separate "mix minus remote" mix to send to the input of the FA-66 for routing to the Skype call or Google Hangout.

It's all something I could probably work out with a few hours free to reconfigure and test it, but I rarely get time to do that. This past weekend was particularly difficult and busy. Between losing an hour to the time change, working most of the day on Saturday, and taking the kids to a movie and Mass, and the work on the podcast, there just wasn't a lot of free time.

Our podcast recording session was a bit of a marathon — another two-and-a-half-hour show. I was working on the show until about 1:30 a.m., and got to sleep about 2:00 a.m. My alarm was set for 7:00. The time change is always unsettling to my system. I feel pretty tired and spaced-out, and slightly queasy, today. But I feel like we did a pretty good show. It's definitely not of interest to most people, but I feel like we are slowly growing an audience. I hope that's not just self-delusion.

At work today our production staff assembled the last prototype unit. I was dismayed to discover on testing that this box was triggering more odd failures in the demo code, failures that didn't show up on the box I tested with on Saturday (because it has a slightly different set of parts missing). I found and fixed a long-standing firmware bug, then a couple more issues with the LCD screen firmware. That box will go out today to serve as a demo. I also spent a little time wrestling with a giant Dell server. I am hoping for a low-key evening and early bedtime to help unscramble my sense of what time it is. It is often the case that after a bad night's sleep, I feel worse on the *second* day after. We'll see.

If I get a little down time and a burst of energy I'll try to turn my notes on A

Wrinkle in Time, written for the podcast, into a full review.

Tuesday

Unwanted I. T. Work

I had a headache and was feeling a little nauseated when I got home last night, and so we did mostly have a low-key night. There were some messes, though. I found that Benjamin had torn some keys off one of the kids' loaner laptops. Another one wouldn't boot, and instead just dropped into GRUB. I didn't even know that GRUB was installed on those laptops. This probably indicates that the Windows boot partition has been trashed, although I don't know how; either that, or the hard drive is failing.

I hear that the kids insisted on reinstalling Roblox. I spent most of a weekend a while back cleaning up those laptops and so I'm kind of dismayed that they keep installing garbage. I have configured our router to block a few of the sites that we don't want them to access, but it will not allow me to configure access via whitelist rather than blacklist, so this is a losing proposition. I could set up a proxy server, but honestly the last thing I want to do in my evenings and weekends is more network administration. So we're just not sure what to do. We want the kids to have access to some online educational resources, but they won't police themselves and we don't want to have to become internet cops, and can't put a lot of time and money into it. So for now they get broken computers.

Revenge of the Cybermen (1975 Doctor Who Serial Fan Edit)

We ate a shepherd's pie from Costco, and watched a couple more *Doctor Who* fan edits. The first was *Revenge of the Cybermen*, a Tom Baker serial from 1975. This one features the cybermats. Cybermats are small fish-like creatures, either robotic, organic, or some combination, that have been used in a few stories. Their exact shape and behavior has been reimagined a number of times. In this serial, they seem to be mostly robotic. They can be controlled by remote-control devices. The leap onto people (which looks pretty laughable) and deliver a bite which immediately infects them with a visibly glowing venom.

The fan edit certainly makes this one more bearable, but it is pretty confusing. Voga is a small planet that contains a lot of gold. Apparently the Cybermen are vulnerable to gold, for some reason, and so they want to destroy Voga, so no one will be able to weaponize its gold against them. There's a race of people on Voga with giant plastic heads. Overall, the action is pretty incoherent, but there are some funny lines and some entertainingly cheap visual effects. According to Wikipedia the serial was partly shot in Wookey Hole Caves, which makes it a little more visually interesting than one of the usual rock quarries. Sarah Jane pilots a little motorboat in one scene.

There's another companion character, Harry, played by Ian Marter. Marter wasn't a companion for very long, appearing in only eight serials, but he went

on to write novelizations of a number of *Doctor Who* serials. And, as Ian Don, four volumes of Disney's Gummi Bears children's books, adaptations of a TV show I never knew existed. Apparently that show ran for six seasons. Marter, though, sadly died of a heart attack at age 42.

In this serial, the Cybermen have little stun guns on the tops of their helmets, and I kept thinking that it must have been painful to wear those costumes all day while little pyrotechnic charges were firing off from your helmet. That seems like a recipe for a migraine and ringing in the ears for sure. But maybe due to my own headache, I just had headaches on the brain. I kept asking the kids to quiet down.

***Silver Nemesis* (1988 *Doctor Who* Serial Fan Edit)**

We had a little more time so I decided to watch another fan edit, *Silver Nemesis*, a Sylvester McCoy serial from 1988. Wow. This one seems to have a fairly high budget, at least for explosions, but the story is extremely hard to follow. The fan edit is only about 30 minutes long, but since it's so hard to follow, I can't really recommend it. This is the last old *Doctor Who* serial to feature the Cybermen until they showed up in the rebooted show in *Rise of the Cybermen*, a David Tennant Tenth Doctor story from 2006.

We have watched almost all the old Cybermen stories. I think the only ones I've never seen are *The Five Doctors* and *The Wheel in Space*. I'm going to listen to the audio fan edit of *The Wheel in Space* today. I've seen *The Tomb of the Cybermen* before, but not in fan edit form. I don't think I can get the kids interested in listening to audio-only shows, but we'll probably watch the fan edits of *The Tomb of the Cybermen*, *Earthshock*, and *The Five Doctors*. Maybe later we'll work our way through all the old Dalek stories.

I managed to get a reasonably good night's sleep and felt considerably better this morning. I had coffee, toast, fried eggs, and avocado for breakfast at home. My cough is *mostly* better, but still frustrates me a little. I want to be completely better. I'm not coughing up green goo morning and night. In fact I haven't seen any evidence of infection for a week or two. But I still wake up with my chest crackling when I inhale. Heathline says:

Crackles occur if the small air sacs in the lungs fill with fluid and there's any air movement in the sacs, such as when you're breathing. The air sacs fill with fluid when a person has pneumonia or heart failure.

Well, my chest x-ray was clean, and I don't have any other symptoms of heart failure. And the crackling sound goes away after I've been up and moving around for a little while. I can't afford a gym membership right now, but I'm wondering if a treadmill routine would help.

I've been trying to stay off my albuterol for a few days to see if I notice a difference, and I do. It's not dramatic, but it is a bit harder to fully exhale.

Am I going to need albuterol indefinitely? And why did I never need it before now? I'm going to have to talk to another doctor. I want to find some kind of a treatment or daily regimen that will allow me to get back to being symptom-free, if possible.

We had light "bursts" of snow this morning. My commute was very slow. On I-94 there was a long traffic backup because a sedan apparently slid right off a straight and otherwise unremarkable stretch of road and flipped on its side. So while we drivers crept by, we were looking at the bottom of that poor schmuck's car, thinking "wow, I'm glad that wasn't me."

Wednesday

I'm writing this on Friday. I wound up spending all my scarce bits of writing time for Wednesday and Thursday working on what has turned into a monstrously long review of the movie, *A Wrinkle in Time*. It was very prominent in my thoughts this week. I wound up working quite late. When I left, Grace asked me to pick up some pies so we could have pie for dessert, to celebrate pi day (3/14).

I think we ate leftover pork medallions with rice with salad for dinner. I wanted to watch an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, called "Masks." I'm pretty certain I've never seen this episode, and the description makes it sound so awful that it promised to be deeply entertaining in that "oh my God, this makes no sense, we're watching a train wreck!" way. But as soon as they were done eating, the kids put on another episode of *Doctor Who*, a Matt Smith episode from the second half of series seven. So there wasn't time. I still haven't seen "Masks." Maybe this weekend.

It wasn't a good night's sleep; Elanor was very cranky and active for some reason, and kept waking up, bellowing.

Thursday

Aside from waking up with crackling lungs, and having to sit in backed-up traffic, Thursday was a pretty good day. Having worked late a couple of nights this week, I decided to leave work early. I went to Nicola's Books to pick up a book that I had special-ordered for Joshua, and ordered one for Veronica. I drove through town to get home, which always takes forever, but still got home just before 5:00, which never happens.

A Wrinkle in Time (2018 Film)

I took grace to see a 7:05 showing of *A Wrinkle in Time*, so that I could see it again, and so that she could see it, and so that we could talk about it. At this point I had just finished draft 4 of my long review, and decided to hold off posting it.

In my second viewing, I had a much different reaction to the movie.

Knowing what was going to happen, I was much better able to appreciate the movie as a piece of storytelling distinct from the book, rather than a badly botched adaptation of the book. It became clear to me that apparently I was very, very attached to the book. If you had asked me, before I saw the movie for the first time, if I was open to seeing an adaptation that did not stick close to the book, I would have said “of course I am.” The book was something I loved in childhood, a “book that wrote me,” but I felt that I could be objective.

Apparently I couldn't be. And so in retrospect, most of my review was me working out my dismay and, yes, anger at what DuVernay and her writers had done to the book. To that end, I came up with a lot of very elaborate justification. By draft three, they amounted to over 9,000 words (fourteen pages printed).

The only way out is through, so I'm going to write draft four, in which I talk about seeing it twice, and including the text of my first review, and then adding in a second review, after seeing it a second time, and having a chance to let me feelings about it settle.

It's still a flawed movie, but after a second viewing I can see it as a mostly-successful “small story,” rather than a mostly-failed “big story.” I still think that, basically, DuVernay and her writing team didn't understand or appreciate the complexities of the book. Nor did they care to appeal to fans of the book. Instead, they pulled out a much-simplified story and told that.

That simplified story is not a bad story, and it works pretty well, emotionally, although I still wouldn't consider it completely successful.

I'll comment on this at more length (as if I could stop myself from doing so even if I tried) in my finished review.

After dinner we brought home food from King Shing, further up Carpenter road. We had their wonderful ribs again, along with sesame balls, orange chicken, sesame beef, and dumplings. No complaints. I think we've figured out our favorite things from their menu. We'll probably try some additional dishes, but I can't imagine going there and not getting a large order of ribs.

***The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Chapter 16: “A Thief in the Night”**

Last night I read the kids chapter 16 of *The Hobbit*, the chapter called “A Thief in the Night.” Things are moving again after some fairly slow chapters. Bilbo sneaks out to the encampment of the Elvenking and Bard, and gives them the Arkenstone so that they have a bargaining chip to use with Thorin. It's one of the most important and fascinating parts of the story. Bilbo is watching the dwarves deteriorate into madness and greed and dragon-sickness, especially Thorin. He has to do something to try to prevent a siege and a war, even if it means giving up his share of the treasure.

It occurs to me that *this is what it meant to be middle-class*. Bilbo doesn't need his reward to survive, so he's free to make moral choices without putting his

future ability to put bread on his table at risk. In this sense, he's "disinterested" in the dragon-hoard (not "uninterested.") In our historic wars, we have people like Nicholas Winton who organized homes for 669 children as part of the Czech *Kindertransport*. He was not a government official. He was able to do this kind of work because he had the time and money available to take on such a project without risking his personal safety.

Since the war, it seems to me, almost the entire preoccupation of the American economic elites has been to destroy the middle class's ability to perform left-wing, dissident activity such as this, by destroying their economic security and making them beholden to employers for their daily bread and for their health care.

Bilbo doesn't prevent a war, but he's done what he can. And he finally meets Gandalf again, although only briefly.

Friday

Again, I didn't get anything written for the weekly post yesterday. After work, I went to Costco for a huge grocery run. We were out of a lot of things. Grace was at a meeting, so we had dinner without her. We ate salmon and salad; the kids had rice, but I have been trying to cut down on carbs.

Terror of the Autons (1975 Doctor Who Serial Fan Edit)

Later, we watched the fan edit of *Terror of the Autons*, a *Doctor Who* serial from 1971 featuring John Pertwee as the Third Doctor. The fan edit makes this serial fairly entertaining. It's dumb in parts, but fun. The early color actually looks quite good in restored form. The original color videotapes were junked, and so some of these early Third Doctor episodes required elaborate restoration:

Although the BBC wiped the serial's original 625-line videotapes for reuse, they kept 16mm b/w telerecording film prints. In 1993, these prints were combined with the colour signal from an off-air 525-line NTSC domestic videotape recording, resulting in relatively high-quality colour masters for a VHS release.

The story has some strange elements. At one point, The Doctor is visited by another Time Lord, in a suit and bowler hat, who materializes to talk to him without, apparently, arriving by TARDIS. I don't know if this time lord is ever used in the show again. Roger Delgado as The Master is particularly fun to watch in this serial. I've watched this one before in its uncut form, and the fan edit, which I believe includes some added music, is much more fun to watch.

Grace and I didn't get a very good night's sleep Friday night; Elanor was all stuffed up, so she kept waking up to complain (which she does by bellowing at the top of her lungs).

Saturday

It's Saturday night and I finally, finally, finally finished my long review of *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Breakfast was an open-faced omelet topped with leftover salmon, and toasted English Muffins. We got out of the house for a great walk at Rolling Hills Park. It was sunny and almost 50 degrees today, so I desperately wanted to get out. I tired myself out carrying Elanor on my back for a few miles, but it feels good. It's supposed to be good weather tomorrow, too, so maybe we can get out again.

For dinner the kids had frozen pizzas and Grace and I had stir-fried cabbage topped with sliced corned beef. It's sort of an Irish-Asian fusion dish, I suppose.

We're not very well-prepared for the podcast. I guess we'll have to figure something out tomorrow. Maybe we'll succeed in making a shorter show tomorrow.

I think tonight I'm reading the kids another chapter of *The Hobbit*. We're almost done!

Winter will soon be over!

***The Wheel in Space* (1968 Doctor Who Audio Fan Edit)**

I think I forgot to describe the audio fan edit of *The Wheel in Space*, from 1968. This is a "mostly-missing" serial and the BBC only has video of two of the six episodes in its archives. I listened to it earlier in the week. The fan editor did a nice job, adding music and tightening up the show. It's largely a pretty basic *Doctor Who* story involving the Cybermen. There are some interesting little science-fictional ideas about mind control, but overall it seems to be mostly notable for introducing Zoe, one of my favorite companions. I'd like to see this one in video form. It would be terrific if video was found. But barring that, I think this one is a good candidate for an animated reconstruction.

Media Discussed This Week

This list does not include books, chapters of books, or other works that I only mentioned briefly in the text above.

- *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Chapter 16: "A Thief in the Night"
- *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018 film)
- *Revenge of the Cybermen* (1975 *Doctor Who* serial fan edit)
- *Silver Nemesis* (1988 *Doctor Who* serial fan edit)
- *Terror of the Autons* (1971 *Doctor Who* serial fan edit)
- *The Wheel in Space* (1968 *Doctor Who* audio fan edit)

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

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