

Thursday, January 17th, 2019



Figure 1: Word Cloud

It's been strange, not writing about each day for a while. I sort of miss it, although towards the end of the year I was feeling less inspired and more burdened.

Since the end of 2018, there have been only a few developments.

Grace

Grace has been taking her heavy-duty blood pressure medication. This leaves her very tired and not able to safely drive, at least not until later in the day when some of the sedating effect has worn off. Fortunately our friend Joy has been able to come and stay with us a number of days recently. She's been driving Grace and our housemate to appointments, and helping a lot with meals.

We really need Grace to be mobile and active again, alongside Joy, but that isn't happening yet.

Our housemate will be having another baby by C-section shortly, in just under a week. We just heard that her boyfriend's car was repossessed. So — I'm really not sure what is going to happen on those days. Who will transport her, who will be her support person or support people in the hospital, who will get her home, and meet her immediate needs after surgery? We'll just have to do our best.

Our housemate has been much more engaged recently in putting meals together, and eating with us. So it's been good to have her helping as well, and it's been more pleasant in the evenings. Although it is also very chaotic, with up to ten kids and up to four adults at meals. It's perhaps no wonder that I need to be on some medications.

A New Development Cycle at Work

Work is starting to pick up again, with some more opportunities to interact with co-workers, and even start the development cycle for a new product that will involve software development, so that seems encouraging. I was somewhat surprised to find myself actually in a good mood one afternoon at work, actually feeling happy. Buried under stressors and worries, I haven't felt that way in some time.

I went ahead and ordered a treadmill. The installers are supposed to come and install it our basement next Wednesday. I need to check out the wiring — it should be alone or nearly alone on a 15-amp breaker, ideally on a 20-amp breaker. So I have to investigate the wiring and try to figure out what goes where. If it looks like that outlet is wired to a breaker with too many other things on it, I'll ask my co-worker Patrick if he can come out and help rewire it.

The government shutdown has been going on now for almost 27 days. Commentators in the media are starting to say, truthfully, that the effects of this kind of shutdown don't grow linearly over time, but exponentially. I don't think that's perfectly accurate, but it is definitely true that people who aren't getting paid face some hard deadlines, and the consequences of not getting paid increase dramatically as those deadlines blow past. I keep asking myself "is this when the wheels really come off?" Not because of the Mueller investigation, not because of impeachment, not because of indictment due to Emoluments violations, or 25th Amendment concerns, but because of a partisan impasse over funding? Maybe, although the idea that exhausted, sick, broke Americans will take to the streets, and engage in a general strike or *Gilets Jaunes*-style protests on a wide scale, seems hard to believe.

A Follow-up Doctor Visit

I had a follow-up appointment with my doctor. The news was mostly good. My weight was actually down a couple of pounds, which surprised me. He is very happy with my cholesterol numbers. My blood pressure on the single 25mg daily dose of chlorthalidone seems very well-controlled. I'm also happy with the effects of tamsulosin. He had me do some quick screenings for anxiety and depression. My anxiety score has gone down noticeably, on Celexa. My depression score was a bit higher. That wasn't really a surprise to me given the time of year. He noted that I've had a couple of blood sugar readings that are higher than they should be, and wanted to put me on a medication for that. I asked him to let me try using the treadmill regularly for a few months and see if that improves

it. He agreed to that. I also want to get back to the bulletproof coffee and, if possible, a weekly 24-hour fast. So we'll follow up at my next appointment.

I also got a shingles vaccine. They warned me that this one might give me a few days of muscle aches and flu-like symptoms, and it did. I think it peaked yesterday. I had a mild fever and felt nauseated and exhausted, with aches and pains all over. I didn't feel like eating dinner and went to bed when I got home, although given the number of kids in the house it was quite a while before I could actually get to sleep, and of course I was woken up a few times during the night by baby Chi.

Baby Chi

Speaking of baby Chi, he's doing very well — plumping up, drinking all the breast milk he can possibly slurp down, and impressing everyone with his extremely loud baby farts and belches. (Grace is going to lay off the brassicas for a while and see if that makes him a little less gassy.)

Today, I'm feeling a little better. I took an Aleve to bring down my fever, but I'm still not at 100%. I can feel myself becoming a bit feverish again as the day goes on.

Pippin, age eight, has started reading my copy of *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, which is an interesting development, and he's been asking me to read it as a bedtime story. His developing brain seems to have hit some kind of milestone. We haven't gotten a lot of quiet time for bedtime story reading recently, but I read the kids part of one of the dialogues, called "Little Harmonic Labyrinth."

There's a lot going on but I don't want to start going down rabbit holes, so I'll just mention what I've been reading and viewing.

***Doctor Who* Series 11, Episode 10: "The Battle of Ranskoor Av Kolos"**

The last regular episode in series 11, this was one of the better of the series 11 *Doctor Who* episodes. Finally, we get to see a villain again, even if it is only "Tim Shaw" from the beginning of the series. There are a lot of nice moments. Graham has to wrestle with the morality of killing, in a way that feels pretty convincing. The telekinetic aliens seem interesting. But this episode also seems to borrow a lot from "The Stolen Earth," and not in a good way, and also from the Tom Baker serial "The Pirate Planet." And it doesn't really wrap up the season arc — for example, what became of the reference to The Doctor as the "timeless child," when The Remnants spoke to her in "The Ghost Monument?" That seemed like a bit of setup that would be developed over the arc of this season — but nothing came of that setup.

***Doctor Who* 2019 New Year’s Day Special: “Resolution”**

In the New Year’s Special, we finally got an episode that lives up to some of the best episodes of the rebooted series. “Resolution” is a real banger. In fact, I’ve really got no criticisms of this episode at all. It does go go emotionally over the top quite a few times and require some pretty hard suspension of disbelief, but the rebooted *Doctor Who* has very often leaned towards the sentimental and fantastic. This episode features a classic enemy, several great scenes, some real watch-it-from-behind-the-couch moments, and some arty cinematography that fits the scenes perfectly.

In fact, the quality of this special makes me mad — if Chibnall’s team could do **this**, why couldn’t they have done better jobs on more of the Series 11 episodes? It makes me feel cheated out of better episodes that could have been.

Now we just have to wait until Series 12 to see if it lives up to “Resolution.” Series 12 is supposed to start... *checks notes...* in 2020. Sigh.

Maybe copies of some of the 97 missing “classic” episodes will be uncovered in 2019. That would be good news! But I’m not holding my breath.

***Spider Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018 Film)**

I took the three older kids — Veronica, Sam, and Joshua — to see this movie in the theater and they enjoyed it a lot. We all enjoyed it. I think it moved a little too quickly for Joshua, who is ten years old, to unpack all the plot elements that are hinted at or suggested in flashback scenes, so he was left unclear on a few plot points. But everyone else figured it out. The animation in this movie is absolutely amazing, and I expect it to sweep all the awards that it is eligible for. Really, I was quite impressed.

***Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami**

Going through my books, for some reason I felt that I wanted to re-read some Murakami, and in particular his novel *Kafka on the Shore*. I read this years ago, and I enjoyed it, although it always seemed to me like a lesser work than *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, which I think is Murakami’s masterpiece. So I wanted to give it another chance. So I’m back in Murakami’s spooky parallel words. I think I’m enjoying this one a little more than I did the first time.

***The Labyrinth Index* by Charles Stross**

A few days ago I stopped into Nicola’s Books for the first time this year, and happened to come across the newest Laundry Files novel. I had not even been

aware that it was out. So of course I had to take it home, and I couldn't do much else in my spare time until I had finished it. I have enjoyed all of the books in this series quite a bit, some a little more than others, and I have eagerly looked forward to each new volume.

This one is told from the perspective of Mhari, a PHANG — a human infected with V-parasites. The mechanism of this vampirism is a little bit complicated, but it means that a person whose blood is drunk by a PHANG inevitably dies. And as Mhari works for a government agency, the agency has to supply the victims, which means that the United Kingdom has brought back the death penalty. So Mhari and the other PHANGs face a constant moral dilemma — others must die so that they can simply continue to live.

We met Mhari a few books ago, and she's changed. She's still full of self-doubt, "impostor syndrome" to go along with her *moral* doubts, but it's clear that she's now actually a supremely competent administrator as well as a terrifyingly dangerous field operative, capable of making optimal and brilliant decisions under extreme stress. There's an especially grueling moment when one of the Auditors invokes "supervisor mode" to discover what drives Mhari, and learns that she actually gave up all hope some time ago. This is troubling but also feels very convincing in these dark times.

There is a lot going on in this book. The climactic scenes are complex, with many pieces on the chessboard. And so there's a lot of setup required, and a lot to keep track of. To make this work, Mhari's chronicle of events jumps around in time an awful lot, jumping between multiple teams and locations. This sounds complex, and it is, but Stross manages to make it work, and I never found myself confused, lost, or disengaged. Stross makes the story so engaging that watching him put all the pieces in place and teach the audience about each one never feels like a chore. Stross really has developed considerable expertise in telling complex stories and writing convincing, morally conflicted characters.

I'm not going to discuss the main driver of the plot of this book, except to say that it's both superficially funny and *also* darkly satirical and timely. Stross is really good at these jokes that make you laugh, and then make you think, and then, hours or days later, think a lot more.

We see Mhari's organization pull out all the stops, and pull off an incredibly daring rescue using a secretly maintained and operated Concorde aircraft. Stross clearly did a lot of research to write these scenes, and I found myself digging into Wikipedia articles to learn more about this incredible plane. From the very first Laundry Files novel, *The Atrocity Archive*, I've always loved the way Stross blends the cosmic horror elements along with extremely realistic portrayal of the experience of working within a bureaucracy, and he makes the impersonal horrors personal; it's one kind of dread to feel the cold indifference of the Elder Gods scheming to consume our souls from the realms beyond all light, and another to face a zombie actually chewing on your jugular. Stross gives us both!

If there's one element in these stories that is a little bit too fantastic to find

convincing, it's the way that, to Mhari's surprise, the people above her in the organization actually pulled off their plan, and the things she thought of as her failures turned out to be pretty much the best possible choices under the circumstances. She's given reason to hope again. It's a nice fantasy — that competence might be rewarded, and adults might be in charge, and have a workable plan to get us out of the mess we're in. Isn't it pretty to think so?

I highly recommend this whole series and I'm eagerly looking forward to reading Stross's next installment.

Media Discussed

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

- *Doctor Who* Series 11, Episode 10: “The Battle of Ranskoor Av Kolos”
- *Doctor Who* 2019 New Year's Day Special: “Resolution”
- *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018 Film)
- *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami
- *The Labyrinth Index* by Charles Stross

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Thursday, January 17th and Sunday, January 20th, 2019

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