

2018 Week 9: The Week Ending Saturday, March
3rd



Figure 1: Word Cloud

Sunday

As often seems to happen, Sunday went by in a busy blur. In the morning it was pancakes and scrambled eggs. Then Grace and I got out late to a Huron Valley DSA event in Adrian, Michigan, about 45 minutes away. When we got to the donut shop there (at about 2:15 p.m. for an event that was supposed to run from noon to 3:00), no one was there. So either I got it wrong, or folks went home. But Grace and I had a rare chance to talk about the house and other critical money-related issues for over an hour without interruptions. This almost never happens. So we weren't disappointed.

After we got back, we recorded a quick (well, quick for us) podcast episode, called “Hot Take: Defining Death.”

Maiz Mexican Cantina

Then Mass, and we were very late for Mass, getting in just before communion. Then dinner at Maiz Mexican Cantina. Grace wanted (again) to try the flan, and (again) they were out of flan, but they had their chocolate flan, which was an uninspiring lump of flan on top of a lump of chocolate cake. Grace trying dessert apparently meant that everyone had to order dessert, which made the

bill much higher than usual. Next time: no desserts, or the kids can get the one-dollar children's ice cream scoops, but can't all order \$6.00 desserts like fried ice cream and fried oreos, which they couldn't finish eating anyway.

I had their carnitas tacos, which were fantastic. Grace had their pozole entrée, and enjoyed that a lot. Veronica managed to finish an entire grande quesadilla, which is *enormous*, so we were impressed. The big kids are getting bigger. But since they have a deal on Sundays for up to two children's meals free with each regular meal purchased, the kids that ordered from the children's menu (I think three of them this time) got their entrées free, which is very helpful when we are feeding eight.

In general we like Maiz quite a bit. All their basic specialties are very nicely done. The flan situation is disappointing, but then again, whose flan situation is not disappointing? The children's menu items don't look too inspiring, but they aren't for me. Benjamin will order nothing but chicken fingers with ketchup. He will make clear to the server, very loudly, that he wants ketchup. He also caused us some confusion because for a while he was mixing up the words "restaurant" and "rest room." He had to go to the restaurant really badly. Fortunately, he made it in time.

I think this is our Sunday routine until further notice. We'll try this unless we're too broke in a given week to feel like we can eat dinner out, or we get tired of Mexican.

Wednesday

Well, yes, I've definitely been busy.

On Monday night I got home and we had pork medallions from Costco with roasted broccoli. That's a great combination. No starch, which works for me.

I was planing to watch the second half of *The Invasion*, but the kids could not get their shit together when it came time to get ready for bed. Benjamin wound up in the bathroom cutting up a deodorant stick and putting it into a glass of water. So I ruled that because I had to spend time cleaning that up and no one noticed what he was doing, despite the fact that they were all supposed to get ready and help him brush his teeth, there wasn't time left to watch the show.

I read chapter 2 of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* to Grace. Jackson is a terrific writer. In this chapter there is so much going on, but it is very tightly edited, and every line of dialogue contributes to the unnerving tone. I'm hoping we'll be able to read more chapters soon.

***The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Chapter 13: "Not at Home"**

At some point we made more progress in *The Hobbit*. We've read up through chapter 13, "Not at Home." There are a couple of points at which Tolkien explicitly uses the word "magic" to refer to the "back door," the secret door that

Thorin and company open. This surprised me a bit as it does not seem to be in keeping with what we know about dwarves. The harps in the dragon hoard (gold strung with silver strings) are also described as magical, and so are in tune after sitting around for many years as part of the dragon's hoard. Who made the secret door? Who made the harps?

This got me thinking about magic in *The Lord of the Rings* as well. I recall that Gandalf can wield magic power, and the elves have some magical abilities. For example, the ford of the river Bruinen can be turned into a trap, when Elrond makes the river flood and wash away the Nazgûl, while Gandalf adds the wild water-horse effect. The door into Moria is magical, too. But somehow it seems like the back door into the Lonely Mountain doesn't *need* to be magical, and it would be more interesting to me if it wasn't. I guess, to me, the astronomical effect combined with a hidden keyhole makes for something is *more* magical than something that works by magic, which is not really explained.

Last night (Tuesday night) I got home relatively late. Grace got the ingredients started for chana masala, because Veronica had put in a special request for chana masala. So we made that. It takes time and last night Grace did most of the work.

Yesterday at work I worked on a presentation on how the instruments we made rely on software, and how we configure them, with EEPROM data, bootloaders, and the like. I did a test run of the presentation last night for the kids. It was not a huge success. Joshua fell asleep, and Sam was very upset, as he often is when he doesn't fully understand something. I'm not sure how to help with this because, it seems to me, progress in learning always starts with a lack of understanding.

Today at work I finished a round of revisions on the presentation, but it turns out that Terry is out, so I won't be giving the presentation today. So that's disappointing. But at least I got to do a thorough revision for a second draft.

And on the positive side of the balance sheet, we got our Federal tax refund. So I can use a chunk of it to pay our state tax.

Last night we had a conversation with our seller's agent, trying to look again at options for the Saginaw house. I'll no doubt have more to say about that later.

I reached out to a former Wooster classmate, Elise Geither. She's written a book on teaching writing to autistic students, so we would like to pick her brain on the podcast. We'll see if we can make that happen.

In Which I Prefer Noble Barns to Barnes and Noble

Tonight after work, I stopped at Barnes and Noble to look at a few things. There are a number of Criterion Collection movies I'm interested in, and they have a large selection. But they are all at least \$40, even for single-disc sets. That just seems too high. (If I still had a membership, they would be a bit cheaper, but I

let it lapse; it doesn't really seem worth it.) I couldn't find, well, pretty much anything in the way of books I was interested in.

They had exactly one book by Stephen Brust, whose Vlad Taltos novels comprise, currently, fifteen volumes. They had exactly one book by Cixin Liu. I was looking for some of his short stories, either in a single-author collection such as *The Wandering Earth*, or a multi-author anthology, *Invisible Planets*, recently reviewed in the London Review of Books. Nothing. They had exactly one book by Gene Wolfe, author of at least 30 novels and maybe a dozen story collections, and one of the most honored science fiction authors in history.

Anyway. Maybe I should just give up on Barnes and Noble.

I finally picked up a copy of a new edition of T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*. The text has been reset, rather than just reproduced from older editions. I've been reading my paperback copy, which is probably from around 1979. I don't remember for sure, and I don't have a receipt, but it is very likely that I bought it at the Waldenbooks in the Millcreek Mall in Erie, Pennsylvania. The pages and the cover are both now so brittle that the edges are chipping and the whole thing is probably about to come apart. It's a bit unnerving to watch one's old books disintegrate, not because they were handled until they fell apart, but mostly just because of age (he typed, as he looked down at the slightly wrinkled skin on the backs of his liver-spotted hands).

The new copy also has slightly larger print, and I have to say that my eyes will appreciate that. However, what I don't appreciate is that this trade paperback costs \$26.00. And the paper isn't very good; it's just soft light-gray newsprint, not acid-free or anything like that. I doubt it will last very long. Honestly I mostly wanted it because the text is more legible.

And this edition confuses me because it says it's an Ace book, but also has the Penguin logo. I don't understand the intricacies of publisher brands and the details of who owns what imprints (nor do I want to know, honestly).

My paperback from 1979 was priced at \$2.95. Adjusted for inflation, that would be about \$11.00 in 2018. Not \$26.00. Sure, I expect a little price premium for a trade paperback, which is larger than a mass-market paperback. But it's not like other trade paperbacks suddenly cost nearly \$30.00. the new trade paperback of *Elysium Fire* by Alastair Reynolds has a list price of \$16.00. Where does this \$10 premium for a book published in the nineteen-fifties come from? Is it because this book is being used as a *textbook* and so it is given textbook pricing?

Penguin's deluxe trade paperback edition of Moby-Dick, with the deckle-edged pages, and higher-quality paper, and the nice illustrated cover with flaps, lists at \$19.00.

Really, if I'm going to pay full price, I should pay full price at Nicola's. I just don't think Barnes and Noble has anything to offer me any more.

***The Queen of Air and Darkness* by T. H. White**

I've been very slowly chipping away at *The Queen of Air and Darkness*. (This is a re-read; I read all of *The Once and Future King* way back when, but I don't remember most of it that well, except for some very vivid scenes, such as the passage where Morgan Le Fay boils a cat alive — I remember that very vividly, it turns out.

I've been re-reading, but it would probably be best if I started it over, since my progress has been so broken that I've been forgetting what is happening. This book seems to start relatively slowly, but once we get back into the interactions between an older King Arthur and Merlyn, we're back in very rewarding territory. White portrays the young king with deep sympathy, as a person who is not brilliant, but who is really trying his best to make the best moral choices he can, and exercise leadership. The world view Merlyn has tried to instill in him is a bit problematic in 2018, but I can still really appreciate Merlyn's reaction when Arthur says something that proves he's been paying attention in class (as it were):

The knights in my order will ride all over the world, still dressed in steel and whacking away with their swords — that will give an outlet for wanting to whack, you understand, an outlet for what Merlyn calls the foxhunting spirit — but they will be bound to strike only on behalf of what is good, to defend virgins against Sir Bruce and to restore what has been done wrong in the past and to help the oppressed and so forth. Do you see the idea? It will be using the Might instead of fighting against it, and turning a bad thing into a good. There, Merlyn, that is all I can think of. I have thought as hard as I could, and I suppose I am wrong, as usual. But I did think I can't do any better. Please say something.

The magician stood up as straight as a pillar, stretched out his arms in both directions, looked at the ceiling and said the first few words of the Nunc Dimittis.

The Nunc Dimittis

I'm quite sure I didn't understand what this meant back when I first read this book as a pre-teen. This time, I looked it up. The Nunc Dimittis refers to a famous passage from Luke. In Latin, it begins "Nunc dimittis servum tuum." This is the King James version:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Merlyn is watching Arthur move towards fulfilling the hopes placed on him. It's a fascinating scene in part because *The Sword in the Stone* established the idea

that Merlyn lives backwards in time, and that he has been given magic to train up Wart. But it is a bit paradoxical. Merlyn is given this role and power because of what Wart *will become*, but yet he is still needed to somehow help make that happen. So in one sense Merlyn doesn't seem to have free will in the matter, and his success is guaranteed. But yet, as he watches Arthur speak, he seems obviously concerned, and grateful when it seems to go the way he hopes. So for Merlyn, it isn't a "done deal" at all; he's balanced on a knife-edge of success or failure.

It's a fascinating book. I am looking forward to reading the strange story of Lancelot again, as an adult; I'm sure there is much I didn't understand in 1979!

Meanwhile, I'm at home alone taking advantage of a little quiet time while Grace drives back from Saginaw. But she should be here shortly. The pot pie just came out of the oven. So I'll wind this up for tonight. If we can get through dinner, maybe we can still watch a little old-school *Doctor Who* tonight.

Thursday

Well, we didn't get a chance to watch *Doctor Who* and we didn't really even get a chance for a story. Veronica went to bed, Pippin fell asleep, Sam was reading a different book; there were constant interruptions. I had an audience of one, Joshua, but between my coughing and the noise and disinterest, I gave up after a couple of pages. I had started to read *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. It's the next book, since we finished *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. That one was a slog to get through. This one may just be too slow-moving for most of them, to be honest. Even I find it a little painful to read out loud.

Another Blizzard

We are in the middle of another blizzard. I left work early to try to get home before dark. We're getting a lot of wet, heavy snow and it took me an hour to drive home. We'll remember it as the March 1st blizzard. So I've come home and we've put a fire in the fireplace and the kids are watching Matt Smith episodes of *Doctor Who*.

I didn't get to give my presentation at work. In fact it seems that Janis told everyone but me that it was canceled, so I went down to start, Terry told me that Janis had canceled it because the production staff was so busy.

Friday

There are power outages here and there, and trees down, and the plows have torn open new potholes overnight. But the roads are passable. I got in at 9:12. These days I wake up feeling nauseous. I'm not coughing much during the day, and not coughing up much, but something is still going on, like maybe post-nasal drip combined with reflux, or something. I got what seemed like a reasonably

night's sleep last night but I did not wake up feeling very rested. I might have some kind of sleep apnea, I don't know.

Got a shower and headed out and didn't get breakfast. At work, had some cold brew mixed with water, some beef jerky, and some of those unpleasantly sweet coconut flour crackers from Costco. I won't get those again. I'm going to go out for lunch, I think. I want to enjoy a little bit of sun while it's here.

***The Invasion* (1986 *Doctor Who* Serial Fan Edit)**

We watched the second part of *The Invasion* (note that the fan edit version is called *Invasion of the Cybermen*). It's quite strange. There are some fight sequences with a small army of Cybermen that must have been quite expensive to film. There are some special effects shots of Cybermen satellites in orbit that look moderately impressive for 1968. The Doctor-as-action hero theme is back in the second part to some extent, as he infiltrates International Electromatics headquarters by way of the sewers, convinces Vaughn he's been betrayed, and even teams up with Vaughn to destroy a transmitter. The ending stays quite busy, but there are strange moments. Vaughn's squinty eye goes away at some point and he has both eyes wide open. I have no idea what that's about. At one point the Doctor is fleeing a Cyberman attack, running zig-zag down an alley, and this is played for laughs as he seems to out-jump each shot each time he changes direction. And right in the middle of the fighting, Sally Faulkner as Isobel starts pointing her camera at everyone, and this then turns a little dark as she starts snapping pictures of fallen Cybermen. In the fan edit, we move quickly to the end, and a "feeling around for the invisible TARDIS" gag.

While I appreciate that the fan edit is fast-moving, it seems to me like maybe the edit cuts out a little bit too much, and some of the explanation of what is going on is lost. But if the alternative is slogging through all eight 25-minute episodes (3 hours 20 minutes, as opposed to under half that for the fan edit), I'll still heartily recommend the fan edit.

I read a bit more of *The Queen of Air and Darkness* last night, including the episode in which the young Gawain and his brothers kill the unicorn. That's a pretty amazing, grotesque passage.

That Old House

I heard via e-mail from a neighbor of our old house in Saginaw. She tells me that one of the second-floor windows is "out." That's bad news. I'm not sure which one. I know that one window was close to falling apart. Maybe it is that one. How do we get a window replaced urgently on a Friday in a locked, unheated house 90 miles away?

I got to give my presentation. The first half, at least. It went pretty well, although Janis noticed typos in my code sample. Fortunately they were only in comments. I'll have to do the second part in a few days.

Saturday

The Tenth Planet (1966 *Doctor Who* Serial Fan Edit)

Last night after work I made a grocery run to Costco, buying a load of groceries and also renewing our membership for another year. When I got home, we had a little *Doctor Who* mini-marathon. We watched *The Tenth Planet*, another partially-lost serial, in fan edit form. This one has quite a short fan edit, only about 30 minutes, while the original serials were an hour and 40 minutes. So clearly a lot was cut, but the show that remains is not incoherent. Yes, the old *Doctor Who* serials really are sometimes so slow and padded that removing two thirds of the runtime leaves an understandable story.

The Tenth Planet is special because it is the first *Doctor Who* story to feature the Cybermen. These are Cybermen from Mondas, a lost duplicate of Earth. In the retroactive continuity they were later known as the Mondasian Cybermen, to distinguish them from the more modern Cybermen design used in the rebooted show. Anyway, I found this early episode interesting. The low-budget Mondasian Cybermen have a real “killer clown” vibe going, and so while hardly scary, are quite creepy. I think this is true in part because the old black-and-white video is not very clear, and so at times it looks like we might be watching a crime caught on surveillance tape.

The Enemy of the World (1967-1968 *Doctor Who* Serial Fan Edit)

We also watched the fan edit of *The Enemy of the World*. This was a mostly-lost serial (only one episode of the original six survived), but copies of the lost episodes were later returned to the BBC and so there is footage of the whole thing now. The story was broadcast from late December 1967 through January 1968, and set in 2018 — fifty years in the future!

It’s a strange story, in which Patrick Troughton plays a second character, called Salamander, a sort of half-mad scientist, half-warlord. Salamander is Mexican, which makes this a brownface role for Troughton. Such casting is now generally considered offensive. It doesn’t seem to me that Troughton uses obvious stereotypes as he plays Salamander, but I’m not the best person to judge. I’m not sure how offensive the portrayal would seem to Mexicans today. Troughton gets to do some amusing, bizarre, and even subtle acting work here: The Doctor has to impersonate Salamander, and he has to seem to get better at this with practice. Then at the end, Salamander has to impersonate The Doctor. The portrayals are so over-the-top that they actually cross over into good acting, because even while chewing the scenery, Troughton uses subtle cues to help us figure out whether we’re watching Troughton as Salamander, or Troughton as The Doctor as Salamander.

The story itself is over-complicated and muddled, but that’s where the fan edit comes in. And this one really does it up right! The fan edit has turned the six-episode story into a Bond movie. No, really. There’s an elaborate animated opening credit sequence that is a wonderful pastiche of the Bond style. There

is Bond music throughout. It's been altered to widescreen instead of the usual television aspect ratio, which must have been a bit tricky, but this does make it feel more like a movie. Together with the snappy editing these things really bring up the energy level of the whole thing and makes it much more fun to watch.

I'm not gonna lie and tell you that the result is a spy movie up there with *Goldfinger* or *Doctor No* — it just isn't, in part because a lot of the footage looks pretty bad, despite some creative *noir*-style shots, and in part because the sets and script really just aren't up to the Bond level. But this is certainly a more bearable way to experience one of the odder, more creative, and historic *Doctor Who* serials, and I'm glad we got to see it.

In Memoriam: John Paul Knapp

Today we went to a memorial service for my friend Regan Knapp's father. It was a really touching service. They asked for guests to share memories and I said a few words, unprepared though I was and a bit nervous as I was to be commenting in that setting. John Paul Knapp was a very kind and friendly man. I did not know him well, but in the early 1990s I was invited to dinner at the Knapp family home. Mrs. Knapp made some great meals and we had wonderful conversations, then sat around the piano and sang hymns. I remember that Mr. Knapp was a huge fan of classical music and literature. He was, in his way, a "culture warrior," a gentle defender of civilization. Since I was an English major, I loved to talk to him about the books I had just been studying and thought I knew something about. He was very patient with me and did not try to push his opinions on me, even if I was being ridiculous and trying to show off mine. But always had a lot of insight. And when he and Mrs. Knapp learned that I was a fan of *Ulysses*, for one visit they actually prepared a whole pile of Joycean jokes and puns to spring on me.

He was a very humble man. I remember that he worked with consumer advocacy organizations for many years. He described what he did in very self-deprecating terms, saying it was his job to pick Ralph Nader up at the airport. Of course he did *far* more than that, but it was just his habit to not claim a lot of credit for himself. I wish I had known him better, but I'm glad I got to know him even as well as I did. I have not had a lot of men in my life that I really considered good role models, but he was one of them.

Grace and I also got the chance to chat with his wife Janet Knapp, who was also an English and writing teacher, and I always enjoy talking to her as well. I was reminded just how long it has been. My cohort is reaching the age where we are losing our parents. I lost my mother earlier than most of us, when she was 70. But there will be more losses. And it really won't be all that long before we start to lose each other. So it was a sobering visit, too.

The Moonbase (1967 Doctor Who Serial Fan Edit)

Tonight we watched one more *Doctor Who* fan edit. The fan edit of *The Moonbase* from 1967 takes a somewhat lackluster Cybermen story and turns it, stylistically, into an episode of *Space: 1999*, borrowing the music and creating a very convincing title sequence that imitates closely the style of the original show. One might call it *Space: 1967*. This is another partially-lost serial, with animated sequences filling in for lost footage. The animation in these sequences is really quite good! Not the motion *per se*, but the drawings. And this edit, again, made what was a typically slow-paced serial into a much more enjoyable action-oriented show.

It might be presumptuous to say so, but somehow I think Patrick Troughton would have approved of both of these fan edits. I like to think that he would have been happy to see both the animated reconstructions and the recovered episodes. It must have been demoralizing for him to realize that large portions of his work had been given so little regard that it was actually thrown away.

See *The Enemy of the World* fan edit.

And *The Moonbase* fan edit.

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 13: “Not at Home”
- *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson
- *The Queen of Air and Darkness* (book 2 of *The Once and Future King*) by T. H. White
- *The Invasion* (1968 *Doctor Who* serial fan edit retitled *Invasion of the Cybermen*)
- *The Tenth Planet* (1966 *Doctor Who* serial fan edit)
- *The Enemy of the World* (1967-1968 *Doctor Who* serial fan edit)
- *The Moonbase* (1967 *Doctor Who* serial fan edit)

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, March 3rd, 2018

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