

# Cyborg Evangelical

Notes on America and Christianity  
from My Future Self

Matt Mellema

## Letter One: Florbulations From the Future

Dear Matt,

Howdiroozy green slix, how's it florbulating?

. . . I shouldn't have tried that. My grandkids told me that's the newest slang, but now I'm pretty sure they made it up. Xenon is always playing pranks on me. Danielle says I deserve it for all the jokes I used to play on my mom and grandma. That is to say, *your* mom and grandma....Or is it *our* mom and grandma?

You're wondering who I am. That's simple: I'm you. The more interesting question is *when* I am: the year 2074.

That's right, I'm you at age 88.

Before I explain, I'll rip off a couple band-aids:

- They've made 237 new Star Wars movies since 2019. And they keep getting worse.
- The Patriots stayed good until Tom Brady retired in 2042. Actually, I shouldn't say "retired," so much as he "was discovered to be the latest in a series of clones used by Bill Belichick since 2015." More on that later....
- You still haven't found Bigfoot, but you've come reeeaaaaal close like twenty times.

I can write to you because of micro-wormholes. Scientists think they emerged shortly after President Kanye West installed a giant bug zapper along the US-Canadian border during the Great Syrup crisis. The Great Zapper was a national disgrace for the few years America remained its own nation. But its side effect of creating micro-wormholes was pretty cool.

Micro-wormholes connect one section of space to two different sections of time. That means anything I throw through the wormhole will end up in the exact same place, but at a different time. They're incredibly rare: only a dozen or so appear annually across the five independent nations that used to comprise America.

So you can imagine my surprise when I came home from a bigfooting expedition to find the acorn-sized wormhole swirling azure from the front porch. It used to be hard to determine the other time connected by the wormhole, but now Xenon has an app for that. And he says it's between late 2018 and early 2020 your time. Not knowing how long the wormhole will last--it could be anywhere from a few minutes to a few weeks--I started scratching out a message straight away. I've never written longhand with my robotic hand, so it's been a bit of a struggle.

I'm getting ahead of myself.

Yes, I'm a robot now. Or at least, mostly a robot. A couple decades ago, scientists in Lagos developed the first ever human-robot fusion. Within a couple years, people were getting robotic legs, arms, and even organs. And five years ago, after my doctor told me that my body was a "bag of withered organs and liver spots," he recommended me for a full robo-transfusion. Since 2070, my head has been attached to a full robot body.

I don't mind it most of the time. But a body of gleaming orange and whirring gears does draw attention in public. Danielle would point out that I could have had my body covered with synthetic skin so I look like a normal human instead of a transformer. She means well, but I'll tell you what I've been telling her for years: I'm just now getting used to the metal body. I have no desire to get used to another one. Plus, I love making jokes about being Krang from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, even if nobody else gets it.

Speaking of Danielle, you're probably wondering how the rest of the family is doing. Danielle is going strong--and even in her own body. That's because of one of the great discoveries of the early 21st century. You know those disgusting pumpkin spice lattes? It turns out the greatest anti-aging compound ever developed was Starbucks' pumpkin spice latte blend from 2013 to 2022. Everyone who drank it regularly is still as fit and vital as when they first drank it. Science, however, did not discover this until 2065. By then Starbucks was long gone, and its formula gone with it. Rediscovering the lost secret of pumpkin spice is the modern alchemist quest.

Your sons are doing well too--I'm happy to report that none have become criminals or Lakers fans. Sam has become an Anglican priest. I like to think this was, in part, because I read the 39 Articles of Religion to him every night as he went to sleep. So don't listen when Danielle tells you that's weird. After his ordination, he went to head a parish on the new moon colony. This is farther away than Danielle and I would prefer, but he visits us a couple times a month using the new lunar magna-bus, so I can't complain.

They other two boys are closer to home. Noah has become a full business partner with his Uncle Brian. Forty years ago, your brother developed a way to create pet llamas the size of hamsters, and pet hamsters the size of llamas. For reasons that still baffle me, this earned him a small fortune that he parlayed into a state of the art ranch outside of Woodland Park. Noah is apparently close to his own genetic breakthrough: a giraffe the size of a labrador.

Henry is the closest to home. He's entering his twelfth season as the head coach of the Colorado College quidditch team. I should probably mention that quidditch has surpassed soccer as the world's most popular sport, and Colorado College has made the college quidditch tournament for the past ten years. Danielle and I are very proud--both of Henry, and the fancy box seats Henry managed to swing for us.

Speaking of quidditch, a friendly word of advice. In the year 2028, your friend Adam will offer you an ownership interest in a quidditch club called Rocky Mountain Hippogriffs. Please accept his offer. And those lines: invest in luxury zeppelins as soon as you can. And pumpkin spice-flavored dog bones.

But I'm being silly. From what we've learned of wormholes, the past is nearly impossible to change. For a fuller explanation, please read the philosopher Nadege Hakizimana when her first book debuts in three decades.

Instead of magical keys to life or the winning lottery numbers, the best I can offer you is perspective. Some of the things you and your cohorts are wrestling are still difficult issues today. Others have stopped being issues--either because the argument has been generally accepted, or because it has become quaint and silly.

If nothing else, knowing this in advance will keep that knot out of your stomach whenever you scroll through Twitter. It will also give me an excuse to avoid Noah's offer to take a ride on his giant hamster.

I need to take a break now to walk Manning. Thylacines get so irritable if they haven't had their exercise.

In the meantime, keep it florbulating,  
Matt

## Letter 2: A Briefer Political Talk than You Wanted

I'll start with an apology. I just returned from taking Manning and Nikola for a walk around the neighborhood. You read that correctly in my last letter. Manning is a thylacine--though I prefer the term "Tasmanian Tiger." And they did indeed go extinct in 1933. But a few decades ago, scientists in Costa Rica discovered a method for using old DNA fragments to bring the species back. They did the same thing with woolly mammoths, and also dodo birds for some reason. Go ahead, make your *Jurassic Park* jokes.

A few years after their return, people realized that thylacines make wonderful pets--they're affectionate, enthusiastic, and tidy. But it took me two more decades to convince Danielle to get one. And that only happened because of the Nikola fiasco.

As you know, Danielle is a fan of little foo-foo dogs. You managed to resist for years, but in 2078 you finally succumbed, buying a Yorkshire terrier puppy from one of Brian's neo-rancher pals. For the first couple days, Nikola seemed fine--cute and cuddly and all those other words that shouldn't apply to proper pets.

Then Nikola sprouted wings.

Here's what we think happened. Gene-splicing used to be trendy in the pet-breeder community. Then it was banned internationally after an orca-gorilla hybrid destroyed downtown Pittsburgh. Nikola must have come from one of these designer animal lines that slipped through the cracks. As best we can tell, she's a mix of Yorkshire terrier and fruitbat. We reported Nikola to the Mutant Task Force (yes, that's a thing that exists now). They told us we could either keep Nikola, or hand him over to be destroyed.

We kept him. So now we have a pet Yorkie-bat monster.

So anyway, I was walking Manning and Nikola around the neighborhood. Or rather, I walked with Manning, and held onto Nikola's leash as he flew in circles above me catching moths. As I walked past the local magna-bus station, the storage container in my robo-body popped open (a glitch I've been meaning to fix). My stack of letter-writing papers flew into the air, where Nikola devoured them like they were moths. I only managed to rescue a couple sheets. And paper is so rare in 2074 that I'll have to make a special order to get more.

Fortunately, these few pages are enough to say everything I need to about the political developments of the past 60 years.

You're probably wondering why I'm not giving you action points to change the future. There are a few reasons for this. Some practical, some personal.

Practically, as I explained earlier, you can't change the past with a wormhole. As much as I might urge you to accept Adam's offer, you're destined to turn it down only to watch the Rocky Mountain Hippogriffs surpass Real Madrid as the world's most valuable sports team.

Beyond wormholes, there's an even simpler truth that bears repeating: you're only one dude, with almost no power to influence world events.

But the personal reasons are more important. Focusing on the details with an eye to preventing them only causes anxiety. And there's no point in it. That's not because the future is some utopia that's reached the end of history. There's been plenty of history.

Some of it has been cool, like the emergence of Lagos as the world's tech epicenter.

Some of it has been odd, like discovering that the Loch Ness monster exists, but is only a twenty-foot salamander that spends 99% of its life asleep on the loch's bottom (after learning this, I spent two weeks deciding whether this was exciting or disappointing).

And of course, a great deal of history has been serious and troubling. Like the crisis in Europe and Japan after the population became so old that their economies collapsed. Or the revolution and counter-revolution in China that left Westerners struggling to keep track of shifting loyalties, and Christians fretting over our fellows who were caught in the crossfire.

America had its share of drama too--that is, until America stopped existing.

Here's the CliffsNotes version. You know how Amazon announced its new headquarters in Queens and Arlington in late 2018? And how creepy it was that cities nationwide were prostrating themselves before Jeff Bezos so he would bless them with his business?

All your concerns were justified. A couple decades later, Amazon combined with Google to form an uber-super-mega company. That was bad. So bad that nobody noticed that this new company called itself the "Googo-Amazonian Empire," and that Bezos had assumed the title "Generalissimo," and bragged about his new weaponized delivery drone. This new empire conquered the entire West Coast within weeks. Actually, "conquer" is the wrong word. Most cities were begging the Googo-Amazonians to take them over first so they would be first in line to get a new drone factory. The East Coast (from Queens down to Arlington) soon followed.

Around the same time, Walmart joined forces with Chick-fil-A and Bass Pro to form something called Heartland for a more American America!, or HAA!. This, in turn, joined with Trump Oil, a global oil giant. Trump Oil formed in 2023, during the end of Trump's second term (sorry). America allowed Putin to form his own American oil company that could drill anywhere and was free from any regulation. In return, Putin agreed to name the company after Trump. The President touted this as a "great deal."

Using the slogan “Make America American Again” (which was actually coined by Putin), HAA! took the the territory from Texas across the South up through Missouri and Kentucky.

Because Colorado was one of the few areas untouched by either coupe, I spent much of this time pacing on my porch and scrolling feverishly through the news. (By the way, Twitter goes under in 2029, but it’s replaced by something waaaay worse. I won’t spoil the surprise).

Both sides became more and more terrifying. Generalissimo Bezos revealed that he had genetically engineered his body to be ten feet tall with giant pteranodon wings so he could fly among his drones into battle. He also may have breathed fire, but that was probably a rumor.

HAA!, meanwhile, established Branson as its imperial capital, constructing an enormous palace next to the Yakov Smirnoff theatre. The palace was designed by Bass Pro, and open to the public. Your in-laws went on a tour soon after it opened. They reported that the Russian propaganda was off-putting, and the fifty-foot statue of Putin crushing America under his feet was in bad taste. But on the plus side, there was a giant indoor waterfall, and several aquariums showcasing Missouri’s native fish.

Then one morning in October, I heard an odd buzzing when I left the house for work. As I opened the door to my hydrogen car, a drone the size of a volleyball landed on the car’s roof. Another landed in the yard. Then another. By the time I ran inside and checked my worse-than-Twitter social media app, the skies above Colorado were hosting the world’s first all-drone battle.

Danielle and I spent the following days huddled in our home and wondering which corporation we’d prefer as our feudal overlords. On one hand, Amazon Prime wasn’t available in HAA! territory. But on the other hand, the combination of everyday low prices and Chick-fil-A’s ten-piece nuggets was hard to beat.

When the smoke cleared and we swept the drone wreckage from our driveway, the result was a stalemate. The two empires agreed to make the Mountain West a non-aggression zone, and withdrew their drones. Generalissimo Bezos flew back to Seattle on his leathery wings, and Putin hit the “return” key from Moscow.

That all probably sounds terrifying, and sometimes it was. Things are still uneasy politically. In Googo-Amazonia, every time somebody says something critical of Generalissimo Bezos, a drone follows them for the rest of the day. There’s also a rumor that Bezos, stronger than ever at age 110, has just given himself x-ray vision. Meanwhile in HAA!, it’s a felony to tell someone “thank you” instead of “my pleasure.”

And despite their official statements to the contrary, both empires have eyed our little non-aggression zone with a ravenous gleam. Many of my neighbors think it’s only a matter of time.

As much as you may be tempted to fret over this, and as much as I'm often tempted to fret, one thing is imperative: don't be anxious.

In your time, some folks on Twitter view this attitude as a sign of privilege. Sure, they say, a middle-class white man has the luxury of seeing life outside of politics, but the downtrodden and oppressed don't have that luxury. There's truth in that. Politics are important, and have real consequences for real people. The people most affected by changing political conditions are the ones who are already the most vulnerable. Please, stay involved in politics, and work to affect change in any way you can.

I'm not giving you carte blanche to become apathetic about politics. I'm telling you to stop being anxious about it.

It's amazing how often I've gone from one extreme to the other: either viewing politics as being too important, or of no importance. During your firebrand conservative days in college, you viewed politics as a life or death struggle with the evil Left. In your current time, as both parties move to the extremes and you feel abandoned in the center, you're tempted to view politics as a lost cause.

That cycle keeps repeating in years to come. When the two-party system collapsed in the final years of America, you became convinced that a re-invigorated third party was the key to unifying the country and staving off the threats of both Russia and the technocrats. Sneak peek: you were wrong.

Later, when the non-aggression zone kept failing to form a constitutional convention and the whole thing seemed beyond deadlock, you washed your hands of politics and threatened to move to Zeelandia (that's a new country that emerges from the South Pacific in 2035). Guess what: you were wrong again. The constitutional convention eventually happened, and made important decisions that affect you to this day.

The in-between balance--working to shape the political process while not wrapping your hope in it--is hard. Christians have been striving and failing to do this since they first got political power. Each imbalance has its own dangers. Too much emphasis leads to constant anxiety over each micro-step, and a willingness to sacrifice your principles for short term victory. Too little emphasis leads to apathy, and a blindness to the needs of others who don't have your comforts.

I still don't have the answer to finding the balance. Sorry. But I do suspect it centers around one concept: hope.

I don't mean this as a pious frivolity or a sappy refusal to look at life as it is. Instead, I mean it as focusing on the bigger picture instead of the obstacles right in front of you.

Let this hope sustain you as you wait (spoiler) in vain for a viable third party challenger in the 2020 election. Heck, let this hope sustain *me* as I fret over what Mark Zuckerberg has been doing all these decades in his fortress at the bottom of the sea.

Hope is about the most practical thing any Christian can have. The refusal to take your eyes from the grand final destination of the world, and the constant reminder that even the worst troubles are light, and soon to be outweighed by a greater glory.

And now, after dropping this letter through the wormhole, I plan on walking to the antique store to order more paper. You should be hearing from me again soon.

Hopefully.

### Letter Three: We're STILL Arguing about It

Good news. My order of paper finally came in--thirty whole pages! What's more, Xenon assured me that the wormhole will be open for at least another week, and I'm pretty sure he's not pranking me. So I decided to write at a leisurely pace.

It's a beautiful November evening. The sun is setting behind the mountains, shining gold against the passing dirigibles and magna-pods. A California condor is circling overhead, but not in an ominous way. When the condor protection program grew so successful that the birds expanded to Colorado, I was really creeped out. But now that I've gotten used to them, they're a serene presence in the sky--from a safe distance.

This evening is so perfect that I'll set my legs to power-save mode and light up my....

Uh-oh. No, I didn't mean it like that! I just wanted to....Sigh. Okay, fine.

I should explain. As her "one last gift" to the family, Mom installed her cyber phantom in the house. It's a computer program that lives in the house's digital system, and casts a 3-D hologram following certain prompts. At first, this was a lovely tribute. Mom's cyber phantom would pop up before meals to join the family in prayer, or greet the grandkids when they came back for the holidays.

But when I got my robo-body, one of the first things I took up was smoking a pipe. I know it's bad for your lungs and all, but I don't have lungs anymore, so what do I care? It turns out that pipe-smoking triggers the cyber phantom. Now whenever I light up around the house, the digital ghost of Mom appears to scowl and sigh.

I only smoke during walks now.

But that's not why I'm writing you. The decades started blurring together around 2060, but I'm confident you're at a time when you're struggling mightily over the term *evangelical*, and whether it applies to you. The reason I'm so confident is that you've been struggling with this since you were a teenager.

You'll want to know when the struggle ends and you make peace with the label. Let me put my answer this way--yesterday morning I unplugged my robo-body from the charger, fed Manning his kibble and Nikola his mixture of guava and raw heifer, and wondered how to feel about the term *evangelical*.

It seems weird that the battle over a single word could last through 2074. But when you step back, it's not surprising at all. By the time 2020 was rolling around, *evangelical* had been a hotly-debated term for over a century.

In one sense, this happens to every word in every language. Meaning shifts over time, accreting new connotations and shades of metaphor. Look at people who can't walk on their own. In the early twentieth century, the polite term was *cripple*. Then *cripple* started sounding like an insult, so we shifted to *handicapped* around the middle of the century. The same thing happened to *handicapped*, which gave way to *disabled*. You, I think, are living toward the end of *disabled*, where using the term feels uncomfortable, but you aren't sure what else to say.

Don't worry. In the late 2020's we settle on *uniquabled*, which is an abbreviation of "uniquely abled." That lasted until about 2060, when most every "uniquabled" person started getting robotic parts. Well-intentioned sticklers developed the term *robotically-aided-American* to address this new phenomenon, and to counteract the term *cyborg* (which officially became a slur around 2070). This term is clunky and awkward, but it's where we stand right now. On the plus side, because you have a robo-body, you're allowed to say *cyborg* without anyone getting mad.

The term *evangelical* is like that. Its meaning keeps shifting back and forth from someone passionate about the gospel to someone who fits a certain race and class of Christians.

In your time, *evangelical* means different things to different people. For white Christians, it still has an essentially religious meaning. To everyone else, it means a vaguely-religious Trump supporter.

This leads to two interconnected questions. First, whether the (mis)understanding of the term has become so prevalent that the term now does more harm than good. Second, whether Trump has finally destroyed the term by associating it with himself.

As of 2074, the answers to those questions are: (1) I'm not sure, and (2) not quite.

While Trump didn't destroy the term *evangelical*, he gave it a heck of a shot. You know that queasy feeling you get whenever someone calls you an evangelical? The feeling like someone covered you in orange spray tan? You still haven't seen the worst of it.

Through the 2020's, evangelicals and Trump were fused in the secular mind. So much so that a popular apologetics series by Taylor Swift (long story) had an entire episode addressing the accusation: "Aren't Christians just a bunch of Trump supporters?"

And yes, at that same time you and your crowd of self-styled Christian intellectuals spent (maybe too much) energy making it clear that you had been against Trump from the start, and that you lamented trumpiness in the church and hoped it was waning. You also revelled (way too much) in the modicum of respect this gave you among thoughtful secularists.

But things started turning after Trump's death in . . . actually, I'm not going to tell you when Trump died. Besides being morbid, the information is dangerous. The sort of thing the FBI would send its Amazon-brand surveillance drones to discover.

More practically, I'm not telling you the date of Trump's death because there's still controversy about whether he actually died. In the last months of Trump's life, some of his craziest supporters hatched a scheme to preserve his body until science could make him immortal. At a hidden compound somewhere in the mountains of Idaho, they allegedly froze his body while uploading his memories into an iPhone. Some claimed to also outfit him with rocket boosters and laser weapons. As far as we know, his body remains at the compound to this day. Publically, we all say that Trump is obviously dead, and those crackpot schemes can't possibly work. But then we old people think back to the 2016 election, and shudder.

At any rate, after the (purported) death of Trump, things started calming down for evangelicals. The association became weaker, while other world events breathed new life into the term *evangelical*.

For one thing, the dichotomy of Republican and Democrat finally broke. This last sentence probably made you giddy, so let me burst your bubble--it's going to get worse before it gets better. Eventually, both sides dispensed with calling themselves *Republican* and *Democrat*, and simply used *red* and *blue*. This distinction flowed to most every area of life: there were blue coffee shops, red restaurants, blue apartments, red suburbs, blue soccer teams, red football teams. Each side started its own social media platforms, banning the other side's views as either "un-American" or "hate speech." Some of us started joking that reds and blues should put marks on their foreheads to show their allegiance. Then some talking heads actually started doing it, and we got really freaked out.

But then the Googo-Amazonian drones started fighting the HAA! drones, and everybody's priorities shifted. For a while many of us worried that *evangelical* would become code for "vaguely religious person living in HAA!," but that never materialized. For those glorious next few years, the political landscape was too much in flux for *evangelical* to stick to any particular movement.

When this combined with other world events, I was actually optimistic about the state of *evangelical*. The high water mark was when it became popular among young Nigerian Christians during a period of spiritual awakening centered in Lagos. Me and my fellow evangelical-ish Americans watched in wonder as a new generation of leaders claimed the term for its core gospel message, and in a context that had nothing to do with Trump or 1950's white America.

But then, as always happened, things changed. In Nigeria, the term got adopted by a Nigerian nationalist party that was suspicious of outsiders and hostile to change. White American evangelicals like me were about to condemn this. Then we looked in the mirror and thought better of it. However, the subsequent generation of Nigerian Christians thought the term *evangelical* had become more trouble than it was worth, and we old-timey American evangelicals sighed and welcomed them to the debate.

*Evangelical* started getting misused by Americans again, too. Though not welded to red politics anymore, too many evangelicals still get way too wrapped in their political identity. And some of them are just wacky. To take one example, there's currently a political movement in rural Nevada called the Evangelical Trumpbot 5000 Brotherhood. Though they're a small group, social media talks about them all the time because they're so easy to mock.

Are there any lessons from this? It depends on how loose your definition of *lesson* is. For one thing, it shows how words change and warp over time. This doesn't mean the term *evangelical* is inherently wrong or right--it just means it's used in human language. It also means that predicting how a term will be used by others today, tomorrow, or sixty years from now is impossible.

So rather than fret about tomorrow, maybe we should look to the past. Before the term got clogged by sin and human frailty, Samuel Johnson defined "evangelical" as, "Agreeable to gospel; consonant to the Christian law contained in the holy gospel."

I'll drink to that definition. In fact, under my desk here I have a bottle of . . . oh, sorry, Mom. I didn't mean I was going to drink the . . . understood. I'll get a root beer.

## Letter Four: The Right Side of Aliens

What a day! The sky is blue, the air is crisp, and Danielle and I just got back from the Elwaylia independence festival. Everything you'd expect: seven cannons firing footballs over the mountains in honor of Elway the Magnificent's arm. The city-wide toast of "This one's for John!" as we all took our ceremonial first drink. And this year had a special surprise: the announcement that Lady Bella Pattinson would soon enter the royal family with her marriage to Elway Von-Jokic IV, crown prince of Elwaylia.

And all of it with that orange and blue Elwaylia flag blowing in the breeze, with its insignia of a bronco rampant riding a snowboard and flying on thunderbird wings. I know it sounds cheesy, and that patriotism isn't cool with people your age, but days like this make me proud to be Elwaylian.

I should probably explain.

Remember how the drone armies of Googo-Amaonia and HAA! reached a stalemate in Colorado? This created a power vacuum in the region, which eventually led to Colorado and portions of other mountain states forming an independent country. The constitutional convention stalled for months, leading pessimists like me to predict that one of the empires would swoop in and crush us as we bickered. Then one great man stepped forward to unite the people.

John Elway.

There's no sense going into details--there are too many epic ballads of the constitutional convention already--but by the time the convention ended, we had a new nation with a new constitution and a new constitutional monarch. Of course, we named the nation in honor of our new monarch.

King Elway (now known to history as Elway the Magnificent) was a wise and just ruler. If there was any doubt as to succession, it was put to rest when Elway's son married a woman who was both an American Ninja Warrior champion and the founder of a Craft Beer Empire. A royal house had been formed. Our current king is Elway Von-Jokic the III--Elway's grandson.

History certainly winds in odd directions. That's important for someone in your position to understand. You live in a time that's preoccupied with being on the "right side of history." We're still preoccupied with this in 2074.

The 21st Century is hardly the first to feel this way. Look at the Victorians. They honest-to-goodness believed that they had achieved the pinnacle of human civilization. Heck, look at the Romans. The main message of the *Aeneid* was that Troy--and by extension, Rome--ended up on the right side of history.

On a universal scale, there's nothing wrong with talking about the arc of history--assuming you believe in a God who is making all things new and preparing a final restoration of all things. But in the micro sense that our societies mean it, the concept is useless. It simply guesses that our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will agree with our side instead of the other side.

Sure, the occasional cherry-picked example fits the narrative. People who supported the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's have certainly been vindicated by history. In both your time and my time, every person wishing to be seen as right-thinking has to praise them.

But does the fact that we all agree with the Civil Rights movement change anything? Of course not. The Civil Rights movement wasn't good and right because future white nerds agree with it-- it was good and right *because it was good and right*. It was objectively right then, and it will remain objectively right even if future society takes a horrible turn and condemns it.

More practically, caring about the "right side of history" is silly for one simple reason: it's impossible to predict. If there's one thing we can learn from history, it's that people are really bad at predicting the future. Just look at what's happened to me in the past several decades.

There's not enough paper to address every cultural shift in the past sixty-five years. So I'll focus on a few that have been especially heavy on your mind lately.

Some issues looked like they'd be quite serious for a while. You heard a lot about cloning in the mid-2000's. Then it fell off the radar and you started wondering if some scientist pressed the wrong button on his calculator and this whole thing was overblown.

Cloning came back to the forefront in the early 2040's. Remember I mentioned that this is when the Patriots stopped being good? That's because we discovered that "Tom Brady" was actually Tom Brady version 5.0. That's right--Coach Bill Belichick had been secretly cloning him for decades.

And he would have gotten away with it if he hadn't tried cloning himself as his own assistant coach. The young Belichick clone had no intention of learning under old Belichick, and staged a coup to take control of the team.

When police drones entered New England headquarters, they made a grizzly discovery. It wasn't just Brady. Belichick had been creating genetically-engineered football players since 2003. And rather than turn himself in, Belichick set his creations loose on the world. By the time the National Guard finally subdued the mutant Patriots, half of Boston lay in rubble. The other half was running for their lives at the realization that Gronk 15.0 was carnivorous.

For reasons that seemed inconceivable even moments before Gronk 15.0 stormed out of Belichick's headquarters hungry for blood, public opinion turned irrevocably against both cloning and genetically engineering humans. Anybody who dared speak in their favor suddenly looked as monstrous as Belichick.

But the issue in your time that's most polluted with "right side of history" rhetoric is sexual ethics. I'll be honest--this remained a hot-button issue even as the Googo-Amazonians were sweeping through Oregon. But on March 5, 2037, something happened. It had implications not only for sexual ethics, but also for life, the universe, and well...everything.

Remember Quartzite? That creepy town between Los Angeles and Phoenix you used to drive through to visit Grandma? It didn't changed much over the decades--a hodgepodge of elderly hippies and failed prospectors in the middle of the desert who gave the impression they may be goblins in disguise who are planning to trap you.

One clear evening, a Quartziter was sitting in his home--a giant rv surrounded by hubcap statues and a peyote patch. For a while he thought about polishing his fools gold collection, because that's the creepy sort of thing Quartziters seem to do. Instead, he decided to watch the Big Bang Theory (then in its 30th season) on a satellite dish that was ancient even back in 2018. This decision was the single most important moment in Western sexuality since the invention of the birth control pill.

Twelve minutes into the show, at 7:42 local time, a shrieking static signal cut into the broadcast. The clearing static revealed a small figure. Its shape and color were difficult to determine because the television pixels pulsed and blurred--almost as if they were incapable of reflecting it.

The Quartziter's call to the cable company got forwarded to the electric company, then the police station, then the local community college before a research assistant agreed to come check it out. When the assistant realized the signal was coming from the Carina Nebula, he was so shocked he broke a hubcap sculpture. Then he called his boss, who called the mayor, who called the governor, who called everyone. The next morning, the alien in the television was the talk of the world.

As journalists and scientists descended on Quartzite, everyone scrambled to fit this new information into their mental bookshelves. This included evangelicals.

I'm sorry to say that many evangelicals decided that the alien must be a hoax. Relying on vague Scripture references and modernist platitudes, they convinced themselves that the Bible somehow foreclosed intelligent life anywhere else in the universe, and that the alien must therefore be fraudulent. Over the next few months, it became embarrassingly clear that the alien was real. But those evangelicals remained intractable (and remain so to this day).

For their part, the "liberal establishment" crowed that the discovery was the final victory of secularism. The aliens, they claimed, held the key for humanity to expand its horizons and become good citizens of the galaxy. We were obliged to learn everything we could and emulate their example. For reasons that escaped me, they also argued that the aliens were the final

proof against revealed religion (though to be fair, many evangelical alien-deniers seemed to agree).

While all this was happening, scientists finally learned how to communicate with the aliens. Or more precisely, the aliens learned how to communicate with us. Here's what we learned:

They're called the \$##^ians (the sounds in their language are so unlike human speech that we had to invent new letters). They live on a cluster of moons orbiting a planet in the far corner of the Carina Nebula. Their physical attributes are hard to pin down. This is partly because their bodies are a shade of infrared far beyond what humans can detect. But it's also because their bodies are almost gelatinous. Roughly speaking, they're the shape of Gumby crossed with an amoeba. And they're about the size of a carpenter ant.

Because their home is more than 10,000 light years from earth, they could never travel to us in person. But they can accelerate radio signals through some method I couldn't begin to understand. This lets us communicate with them . . . sort of. It still takes about a month for a signal to travel from our world to theirs. So both sides have to plan out their message carefully.

After the information swapping on physical traits and home worlds, the humans and \$##^ians shared about their cultures. The \$##^ians, it seemed, had no concept of war, or even of violence. And less tangible evils such as greed and covetousness were only explained to them with difficulty. For those of us raised on *Independence Day* and *Halo*, this was a shock.

As for me, I was quick to chide evangelicals who claimed it was a hoax. I also grumbled at secularists that alien life did nothing to contradict historic Christianity. But despite my posturing, the \$##^ians made me deeply uncomfortable. Rather than stare out at the stars, I spent my nights playing my kids' new quidditch video game.

Secularists lauded the \$##^ians' ethics, speculating that it derived from a love of science and an absence of religion. But just before the secularists drowned out all other voices, something odd happened.

Earth scientists had sent a message describing human sexuality from every conceivable angle--both in its scientific and cultural implications. A month later, the \$##^ians responded with utter revulsion. Though \$##^ians seemed to have a form of sexual reproduction, they viewed the subject as too sensitive and intimate to discuss in public. They further condemned any sexual action for any reason other than the bare necessity of procreation.

This left humanity in an awkward position. The sexually-traditional thought about agreeing with the \$##^ians, but worried it would look too anti-sex. At the same time, they worried the \$##^ians would think they were sex-crazed. It was a weird time.

Secularists were in an even bigger pickle: how could they emulate these enlightened aliens if they had stricter sexual restrictions than a monastery? A few radicals suggested (after looking

over both shoulders) that the \$\$\$^ians were wrong about sexuality and should be condemned. Others said they should keep with their prior stance and seek to learn from the \$\$\$^ians--even when it was uncomfortable.

Secularists eventually landed at a surprisingly nice place. They declared that there may be disagreements between humans and \$\$\$^ians regarding sexual ethics. However, the differences should be respected in a free society, and nobody should be made to feel excluded or condemned for having stricter sexual standards.

The sexually-traditional applauded, and then asked where that attitude had been for the past four decades.

Things changed again a couple months later. Toward the end of a \$\$\$^ian message, they mentioned their belief not only in a higher power, but also in one true religion. And they did so in an offhand way that assumed everyone would of course agree with them. Then their message ended.

Earth scientists hadn't asked the \$\$\$^ians about religious beliefs. And confidentially, many religious folks worldwide seemed nervous to try. But the \$\$\$^ian message brought the issue to the forefront. Through some combination of crowd-sourcing and fairplay, the scientists decided to let each major world religion present their beliefs to the \$\$\$^ians in order to gauge their reaction.

Religious leaders worldwide assured their adherents that the truth of their beliefs was in no way affected by the opinions of creatures half a galaxy away. My own pastor preached a beautiful sermon that Sunday about how the love of God reached all the way to the \$\$\$^ians, whether they realized it or not.

All around the world, the faithful nodded along, and then made sure their religion made the best case possible. Within a week representatives of every major religion--and a few non-major ones--composed briefs explaining why their religion was the most similar to the \$\$\$^ians', and therefore true. The most confident bunch were the Dawkinists, who promised that their brief would conclusively persuade all creatures in the universe. (Yes, followers of Richard Dawkins founded a formal religion in his honor in 2025. They not only have weekly assemblies, but codified holy texts, taboos, and even holy tattoos on their shoulders which they pat ten times each day. Pointing out the irony only makes them mad.).

Personally, I felt good about our Anglican brief. It was drafted by the Archbishop of Nigeria, and a filmmaker from Honduras who had just written a gorgeous memoir on her conversion from materialism. It contained all the proper references to Scripture, the Church Fathers, and the 39 Articles of Religion. It even had a CS Lewis quotation or two.

In the weeks that followed Earth's transmission, the world awaited the \$\$\$^ian response with varying levels of anxiety. The press declared it the Battle Royale of Religion. For my part, I

downplayed the significance publically, and spent my private moments in a fretful combination of prayer and panic.

Despite my words to the contrary, I watched the \$\$\$^ian response live. Leaning toward my screen with pulse pounding and hands shaking, I muttered incoherent prayers. After the \$\$\$^ians made their usual pleasantries, they expressed bafflement at all the incorrect statements about the purpose of the universe. However, they assured us, one of the briefs did contain a true articulation of religion. And that was (I held my breath):

The Celtic Church from the 4th century AD.

When I came to a few minutes later, the world was a flurry of questions. The foremost was how an ancient form of Christianity had slipped into the briefs. We later learned that it came from Akron. A recent college graduate with a degree in theology and no job had composed it from the garage attic he sublett from his parents.

A few of us decided that this was an independent verification of our religion, and declared total victory. This included we Anglicans, of course, who pointed to the Celtic Church as an authentic expression of the faith which we inherited. Roman Catholics claimed the same thing, and for the same reason. The Eastern Orthodox joined in too, citing the special influence of the Greek church on those ancient Christians.

Other evangelical Christians mostly made peace with it, either saying that the \$\$\$^ians were close enough, or minimizing any differences. More than a few evangelical churches declared they were pleased with the determination, and affirmed their own faith regardless of what aliens might say. Then they quietly slipped in some liturgy with an Irish accent.

Many secularists went through a crisis of belief, whether they admitted it or not. Their desire to not offend the \$\$\$^ians collided with their desire to discredit traditional religion and sexuality. The less friendly decided to disregard the \$\$\$^ians and maintain the same old views. But they were quickly derided as radicals.

Others were verbally still in favor of sexual liberation and secularism, but quietly made accommodations that appealed to alien and traditionalist alike. And of course, the friendlier secularists admitted that they may have forgotten what it meant to be truly "liberal," and welcomed this larger view of the world.

We Christians slowly saw that the \$\$\$^ians' declaration did not end the debate forever, but rather opened the door to conversations with curious people around the world. It also gave us freedom to wonder at the possibility of holding a common faith with creatures light years away. To the extent the \$\$\$^ians' beliefs about culture and morality conflicted with our presuppositions, that simply meant we had much to learn from each other.

What's the point of this all? A simple fact that has been true since the beginning of recorded history: we humans are terrible at predicting the future. I'm confident that nobody anticipated a tv signal in Quartzite would lead the world to completely re-evaluate its public views of war, poverty, sexuality, and religion. But we're still living in its repercussions.

Because we have no idea what the future holds, it's ridiculous to use it as a basis for what we believe. So care about what is true, not what might be popular in the future.

And start practicing your Irish accent.

## Letter Five: Millennials Aren't the Worst Anymore!

Fine, I'll admit it: I'm having a great time. Everything is great--the food, the view, the company. Fantastic even! Now can I please go back to being miserable?

Sorry. You know your habit of getting into arguments with yourself that spill into the outside world? It gets worse as you get older. And this current self-argument is occurring thousands of feet above the Rocky Mountains.

Remember I mentioned your friend Adam offered a part-ownership of the Rocky Mountain Hippogriffs quidditch team, and I turned it down? The reason I turned it down--which I repeat to myself in the mirror every morning--is that this early version of "muggle quidditch" was lame. People ran on the grass with a broom between their legs, throwing volleyballs at each other. And sure, the Hippogriffs were the best quidditch team in the area, but wasn't that like being the world's coolest gerbil?

Two years later, some nerd at Princeton developed the hoverbroom--a hover board the shape of a Harry Potter broom that flew just like in the books. Because actual quidditch was now possible, it skyrocketed in popularity overnight. And clubs like the Hippogriffs were in perfect position to capitalize.

Within ten years, quidditch rivalled the other major sports in popularity. Within twenty, it was consistently getting better ratings than the NFL. Within thirty, the World Cup of quidditch was more important than the World Cup of soccer.

At the forefront of this meteoric rise was the Rocky Mountain Hippogriffs. Through Adam's keen business acumen and innovative coaching hires, the Hippogriffs became the gold standard of the WQL (World Quidditch League). They've won 18 Rowling Cups. That's more than any other team--in fact more than the Tokyo Tengu and London Owls combined. And they're currently celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary of surpassing Real Madrid as the most valuable sports team in the world.

I can't emphasize this enough--Adam has been great. He offers me luxury box tickets whenever I want them, invites me to his palatial complex in Aspen, and gives my grandkids (who are all massive Hippogriffs fans) mountains of autographed team gear.

He also invites me to travel to games on his luxury zeppelin. Which is what I'm doing now.

As I write, there's a grand ballroom below me with a dance floor, full bar, band, and giant ice sculpture of a hippogriff which is shooting bourbon from its beak. Flitting around it are the rich and beautiful, all dressed in their elegant best. On every side of us are the three-story crystalline glass walls, revealing a panorama of Rocky Mountains.

Holding court is Adam, still dapper at age 87. His moustache, untrimmed since 2017, is curled into ten loops and laced with shimmering thread in the orange and blue of the Hippogriffs. Chatting with him are Danielle and Henry, his other special guests. Adam just introduced Henry to Vanko Konstantinov, the recently retired captain of the Hippogriffs. He led us to 6 Rowling Cups, and is widely considered the greatest seeker of all time. Henry is speechless with delight.

I'll rejoin the party soon. Really. They're serving roast dodo, which is one of my favorite foods (sometimes I miss having a stomach). Plus, there's no point in sulking when everything is so beautiful. There's also no sense in second guessing my bad business decision that cost me ownership of the greatest team in--I'm doing it again. Sorry.

I do want to talk about a different kind of second-guessing: generational battles.

If I've done my math right, you're still at the stage where the biggest generational sparks come from baby boomers making fun of millennials. And you're irritated by baby boomers' constant drips of criticism. *Millennials are lazy. Millennials are entitled. They're afraid of real work. They've had everything handed to them and don't have respect for anything.* And on and on and on.

This sort of thing is nothing new. They used to say the same thing about Generation X. And as much as your version of baby boomers may scoff, back in the day older people said the exact same thing about *them*. Heck, wherever you go from the Gilded Age to Restoration England to probably Ancient Mesopotamia, the older generation says that "young people these days" are lazy and entitled.

With that in mind, you want your generation to put an end to the cycle. I remember moments around 2020, sitting on my porch and stewing over some sarcastic boomer Facebook post, when I resolved to be more understanding when I got older.

I have good news. Your resolution only failed partially.

You tried. You really did. It's just that the younger generations got so.....I don't want to say spoiled, because that would be too accurate. ARRRGGG! I'm doing it again. I may as well lay my cards on the table. Here's a list of things I've done that current you would be ashamed of:

- In your late thirties, you made your first comment to a coworker that new college graduates don't have the "drive" that you had at their age.
- In your mid-forties, you speculated that new video games were making kids soft. You also claimed (implausibly) that your childhood was spent outdoors in the dirt and the rain.
- In your early fifties, you made your first joke about the feigned terror you felt at the prospect of the younger generations governing the country one day. Two years later,

you made your first comment on the genuine terror you felt at the prospect of the younger generations governing the country one day.

- In your late fifties, you remarked that “today’s NBA players” don’t play the game “the right way,” and declared that the 2019 Nuggets would stomp any of today’s teams into the ground. Your son asked how the Nuggets would cover Gantulga Gundegmaa--the 7 foot 6 point guard from Mongolia who shot sixty percent from the three point line, forty percent from the four point line, and had an X-Men-level mutation to look behind his head with echolocation. You grunted that Nuggets center Nikola Jokic would “eat his lunch” before complaining about the length of basketball shorts nowadays.
- In your sixties, you waited an extra five years before ditching your antique iPhone for the newer iLens. You gave the same phony line as other stubborn iPhone users that some “study” proved it was “healthier” to have the object you’re reading in your hand on a screen, rather than projecting onto your retinas like the iLens. Yes, this is the same made-up excuse people used to give for liking paper books over Kindles. And probably for liking scrolls over paper books...
- In your mid-seventies, your oldest grandchild chided you for the comments you made against her generation (which we call the “bloinger” generation for some reason). You responded with something along the lines of “your generation just doesn’t get it.”
- In your early eighties, you stopped listening to any song recorded after 2009, and refused to play any video game except the original *Halo*. You also concocted some “principle” against your grandkids’ virtual reality games. You explained that you prefer to “feel the controller in your hands” or some crap like that. They nodded politely, but everyone knew you were just being stubborn.

You weren’t alone. By about age 40, the average millennial was already making snide comments about the average iGener (that’s what we call the generation after yours). And by age 60, millennials were rivalling baby boomers in terms of generational grumpiness.

But enough on the mistakes. In your more sanguine moments, you reflected to your grandkids that millennials sure could be cranky sometimes, and urged them to make sure their generation did a better job.

You also reminded your fellow millennials about all the flack they took from baby boomers back in the day. But weirdly, most millennials ignored this argument. They convinced themselves that they handled the criticism with more grace and aplomb than iGeners or bloingers ever did.

And finally, you never became a bad driver. Granted, that’s because driving a car by hand has been illegal since 2031, but still . . .

Why does each passing generation grow old and cranky toward younger generations? A few reasons. First, generational differences can and do exist. Just look at the Bible: a faithful generation of Israelites often gave way to a rebellious one that forgot God.

Major events can also shape different generations. Think how much it shaped you to graduate from college as the economy tanked in 2009. Those months you spent back at your parents' house, scouring the internet for jobs that didn't exist, left an impact on you that (sorry) you'll still have in 2074. It did that same thing for others who graduated at that time.

Relatedly, each generation tends to (over)react in response to the previous generation. Maybe that's why attitudes toward church are cyclical. Your parents' generation reacted against a church they saw as too straightlaced and rigid with the seeker-friendly movement. By the time they were finished, churches were meeting in strip malls and pastors were preaching in Hawaiian shirts.

Your generation responded by emphasizing tradition and order. By the time your generation reaches maturity, you'll get irritated when you go to an Anglican church that doesn't have incense and holy water.

But then your kids' generation thought we had gone too far and started swinging the other way. Fortunately, it didn't involve strip malls and Hawaiian shirts. But it did lead to broader church sensibilities coming into vogue, along with a suspicion of us stuffy high church people.

Remember how Sam is in line to become Bishop of the Moon? That's obviously great news. But I will warn you (and you may want to brace yourself): Sam is widely considered a "broadchurch" pastor. He does not employ incense or holy water. And he uses electric guitars and drums during worship. He even commented to you once during Thanksgiving that "icons aren't really a point of emphasis" for his daily devotions. When you hear this in thirty years, do your best not to ruin the meal. Remember that it makes sense that your children's generation would react this way.

And if it makes you feel any better, your grandkids will come back to your side.

A second reason for the constant generational war is that there's a kernel of truth in the griping. It's true that young people are often entitled and have unrealistic expectations of what it takes to succeed. It's also true that old people can be cranky and clingy to the benefits they believe they've "earned," and can fear any change from how they've done things.

But notice how I phrased that. It's not because a young person is in a certain generation that they're doing this. It's because they're young, and those are common traps for young people. And I'm not cranky and stubborn because I'm a millennial. It's because I'm old, and those are common traps for old people.

Each generation that starts as the spoiled young people eventually turns into the cranky old people complaining about spoiled young people.

But there's something deeper going on. Generational complaining taps into some nastier sides of us all--whether we're currently young, or formerly young. There's that human impulse to gloss over our own faults, and maximize others' faults. When I complain about young people having less respect for authority than I did at their age, I was probably thinking of times when I listened to my dad or my boss as a young person. My memory conveniently ignored the many counter-examples: complaining about the "corporate system" as an excuse to avoid work, rolling my eyes behind my boss's back, wondering how the older generations had screwed up the world so badly.

Young people do the same thing: viewing their lack of success as a conspiracy of selfishness from the older generations, and assuming that everything older people do is motivated by a stubborn clinging to outdated privileges. As a former young person, I know my early lack of success was only partially the result of circumstances--I had plenty of blame as well. And as a current old person, I know that my stubborn clinging is only partially true. I have good reasons for keeping things the way they are. Sometimes.

But most fundamentally, warring generations stem from a flaw common to humans young and old. It's easier to belittle someone than understand them. Because I'm flying to watch a sport invented by J.K. Rowling, I may as well give a quotation from Albus Dumbledore: "Youth cannot know how age thinks and feels. But old men are guilty if they forget what it was to be young."

Saying that young people are lazy is easy. Remembering what it felt like to be a young person, and trying to see things from their point of view, is hard. Likewise, assuming that older generations are stubborn is easy. Remembering that you may become that old person one day, and acting with grace in response, is hard.

Now if you'll excuse me, the zeppelin is approaching John Elway Memorial Stadium--the home of the Hippogriffs. The lights are gleaming from the elevated stands, and fireworks and holograms are dancing all around us. Adam is about to give a toast, and Danielle is waving me over with her eyes.

I don't care if it does mess up my circuits--I'm having a drink.

## Letter Six: Mooning over Legacy

I took a terrible risk waiting this long. I can only hope I'm not too late, and that this letter finds you before any hope of communication is lost.

That probably sounded more dramatic than it needed too. But I'm feeling dramatic. Not in a bad way. It's just that I'm in a dramatic place--Lunapolis, capital city of the Moon. And I'm here for a dramatic occasion--the ordination of Sam as the first ever Bishop of the Moon.

It's been a whirlwind couple of days. I was actually sitting down to write you when we got the announcement--and with only three days to prepare! The rest of the day was spent packing, booking magna-bus tickets, and arranging for someone to take care of Manning and Nikola. Finding a kennel that accepts Yorkie-bat monsters was rather difficult.

In the rush of excitement, the wormhole slipped my mind. I didn't think to check until we were about to leave for the lunar magna-bus. Xenon assured me that the wormhole had about four days left. Probably. For all his pranks, Xenon's knowledge of wormholes is extensive. He also knows a lot about 1960's basketball and the Loch Ness salamander for some reason. By the way, I caught Xenon slipping joke messages into the wormhole the other day. So if you received a note warning that Melbourne will be attacked by a Godzilla-type monster in 2054, don't worry. That's greatly exaggerated.

Anyway, we arrived on the Moon the night before last. Because I have, as Xenon so lovingly puts it, a "ridiculous fear of space travel," this was my first trip to the Moon. My fear may be ridiculous, but it wasn't the main reason I avoided the Moon. I'm happy to report that the ten hour magna-bus ride was uneventful--mostly because I discovered I could switch my robo-body to "power save" mode and sleep the entire time.

The main reason I avoided the Moon is I heard it was rough and uncomfortable frontier. And as someone with a computerized body, I'm sensitive about getting moon dust in my crevices. Apparently, during the early years the lunar colonies were indeed like that. But a few years ago, settlers discovered enormous reserves of uranium and other precious metals beneath the surface. Overnight, the Moon was rich beyond anyone's wildest dream. It started building a capital city.

Lunapolis is a city so lovely you'd never know it was brand new. Its two leading architects are students of Art Deco and Florentine architecture, respectively. Those two styles of mixed seamlessly in the city, which sits beneath a gigantic pressurized dome. They've imported Earth plants, animals, and landscaping. They've even installed artificial gravity to mimic Earth, which now works about 90% of the time.

Sam's ordination was earlier this afternoon. It took place in the newly-consecrated Lunar Cathedral--a gothic design hewed from lunar stone. In addition to lunar politicians and business leaders, the attendees included our own Bishop of Southern Elwaylia, and the Archbishop of

Singapore. But the surprise guest of honor--and the reason they had to schedule the ordination on such short notice--was the Archbishop of Rwanda, the honorary head of our Anglican Communion.

It should please you to know that Sam's ordination rite borrowed heavily from the ancient Celtic Church. This was likely a show of goodwill to the ~~##^~~ians. But I like to think Sam was also tipping his cap to his cranky high-church dad.

After a celebratory feast of barbecue squirrel ribs (for unknown reasons, squirrels brought to the Moon have started growing to the size of cows), the grandkids have gone to see the Lunapolis Lunatics--the city's new NBA team. Tired from the festivities, I've decided to sit on a veranda and write my final letter to you.

Some back on Earth fear the Moon. They say we should monitor a new civilization sitting on more wealth than all of North America combined. Others are concerned that some lunar children can apparently move things with their minds.

But sitting here, the scent of lunar orchids wafting over the town square, the stars shimmering through the dome and earth rising in the distance, those concerns feel misplaced. I only want to sip my moon juice and write my letter. And no, I don't know what's in moon juice. I'm afraid to ask.

Because this is my last letter, I wanted to address the issue that's been weighing heaviest on your mind while you read my letters (whether you admit it or not). You're wondering how successful you've been--in your career, and as a writer.

My answer is simple: I'm not going to tell you.

This is partly because, once again, you won't be able to change anything. But there's another reason beyond wormhole science. And that's the folly of legacy.

Lots of people worry about how later generations will remember them. Lawyers you work with care about their legacy as a great partner in a fancy firm. Social activists worry about how future social activists will view their political ideas. And you arts-minded types care about creating art that will be important for a long time.

Admit it. You can bluster all you want about loving the act of writing itself, and how beauty is intrinsically good. But you want to be the sort of writer who people talk about and dissect generations after you're gone. Most every artist does.

Because I'm not even dead yet, I can't tell you if that will ever happen. But I can tell you this: making it a focus of your life is ridiculous. After a couple generations, almost everybody gets forgotten.

Every couple years in your time, some MFA professor wrote a viral blog post about what it takes to be a “real writer.” The answer is some combination of maniacal work, constant obsession, and a single-minded drive for greatness.

Maybe that’s how all those professors lived their lives. I don’t know. They’re all forgotten now. I’m probably the first person to reference them in four decades. All that drive and obsession they poured into their art--and the sacrifices to their health and happiness and family that went with it--resulted in a corpus of work that nobody remembers.

Those novelists are far from alone. The vast, vast majority of everything in your time--whether it’s art or politics or money or anything else people use to measure worth--is no longer relevant. Most every film from that era is lost or forgotten. Same with music. If I mentioned someone who was world famous on Instagram to my grandkids, they’d ask me what Instagram is.

Literature is the same way. You know those mountains of contemporary books you work so hard to imitate, review, and belittle in your quest to someday add your own books to the fray? They’re almost all gone. The only ones from your era which are still relevant are the *Harry Potter* books, *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson, and *Birds of a Feather*, a 2021 novel about a genetically-engineered pigeon who runs for mayor of Newark. I’ve spent decades implying that I’ve read it.

Why those books? Partly because of quality. In general, things that stand the test of time are worthwhile. And in this case, the *Harry Potter* books and *Gilead* are both excellent. And (from what I hear) *Birds of a Feather* is too.

But there’s also an element of luck. Take *Beowulf*. We view it as the quintessential work of the Anglo-Saxons, encapsulating their greatest fears and aspirations. Does it really do that, or does it just happen to have survived? Maybe there were other epic poems so brilliant that they made *Beowulf* look like a trifle, but the monastery holding them flooded.

What if the greatest novel ever written never got published because the Victorian-era editor was in a bad mood that day? What if the best love poem ever written was burned with the Library of Alexandria?

Indeed, we only have *Birds of a Feather* because of a fluke. The author was an Emily Dickinson-type recluse who never sent her work to publishers. *Birds of a Feather* didn’t get discovered until after her death, when her nephew turned each page into an Instagram story he read while his cats jumped through hula hoops.

Worse yet, some things endure for reasons that have nothing to do with their quality. The most popular film in Elwaylia right now is *Twilight*. And not in some winky, ironic way. Everybody around me loves it, and it’s driving me insane. Why is it popular again? Because Robert Pattinson’s granddaughter is marrying into the House of Elway, and her name is Bella. Legacy is a tricky thing.

This should come as a relief to all of us. We worry so much about legacy. And it's all silly.

The lawyer working through another weekend to make partner should remember that his grandkids will barely know that he was even a lawyer. And *their* kids won't know who he was. So maybe he should spend the weekend with his family instead.

The social activist nervous about how history will view her? Good news: history won't view you at all. In fact, it likely won't know a single thing about you.

And writers like you who are obsessed with getting your name out there and getting all their teeming ideas on the page? That's still good and worthwhile. But never forget that there's nearly a one hundred percent chance that nobody in 2074 will know you did any of it.

I suppose that's as good a closing sentiment as any. Instead of fretting about the future, focus on where you are now. Love and serve God, care for your family, and do your work without the weight of generations looming over it.

Speaking of family, Xenon just messaged me. The artificial gravity went out during the basketball game, but the refs are making the teams keep playing. This is too good to pass up-- I'm heading there now.

I hope you enjoyed reading these letters as much as I enjoyed writing them. Pass my love to everyone in your time. And between us, stop trying to grow that mustache.

Keep it florbulating,  
Matt