# A Year of Evolution

My yearly theme for 2024, and what's next

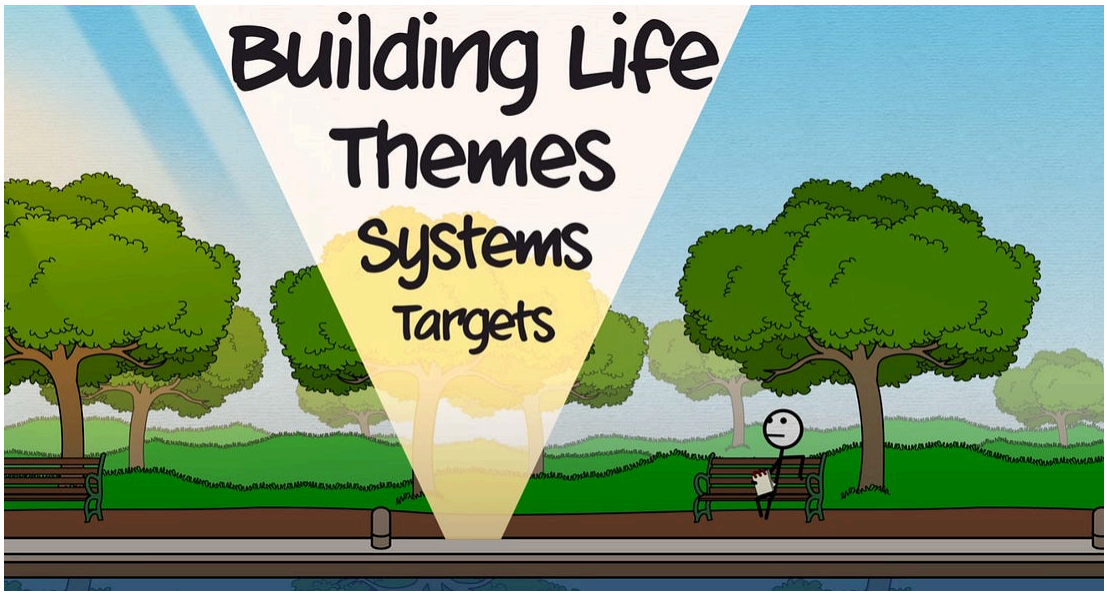


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DEC 31, 2024

I don't do New Year's resolutions anymore.

This makes it all the more awkward and weird to read newsletters from news outlets that make resolutions their main topic. It's so... stereotypical? This...wannabe “agreement” we make with ourselves, that we joke about never fulfilling, to the point of self-fulfilling prophecies.

Back in 2023, I knew I was pretty much over it, and ready to try something new. That's when I uncovered this gem of a video by Youtuber CGP Grey.



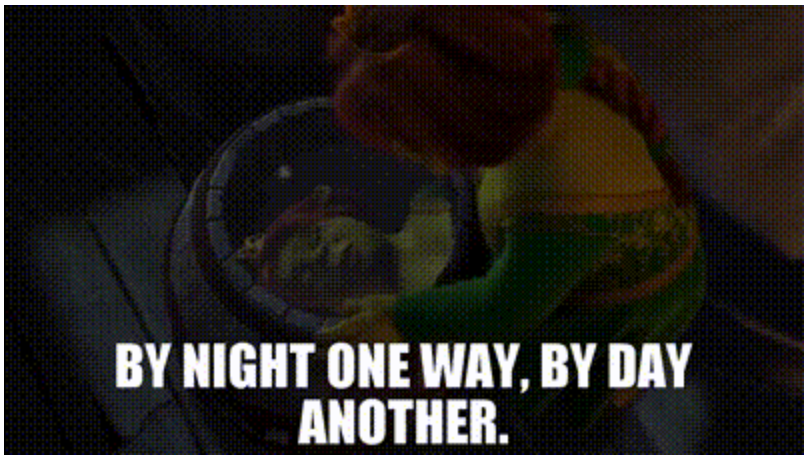

So I gave myself a theme for 2024: The Year of Evolution.

And that's where we'll begin this retrospective on the year I had. Maybe it'll help. Perspective is great!

# What Does It *Mean?*

Okay, so the Year of Evolution as a theme was perhaps this sense of "do better" or "get better" at stuff. But it came on the heels of stagnation in my life, i.e. the malaise of 2023, which really kind of sucked for me and a lot of people I knew. Tragedy struck over and over again, and it seemed as though the routine things were going nowhere. I commiserated with colleagues, friends, gym buddies—seriously, let's never talk about 2023 again.

For 2024, evolving meant making choices and learning new things that would turn me into an improved version of who I was: by day, a software sales professional, by night, artist-at-large.




I literally put this gif in because my fiancé and I are big fans of Dankpods and his love of Shrek is shared by many, ourselves included.

I felt that on both fronts, I could be better, particularly in an environment where other people kept saying (or implying, by their actions, which is worse than saying it out loud) that I wasn't good enough, with a vague,

esoteric "*yet*" tossed in as a last-minute attempt to imply that growth was coming.

Well. It wasn't coming. Which meant I had to go do it myself. Deciding that would be the first evolution.

So I did.

# The Capstone

I evolved a bunch this year. Here's a list.

### I learned Linux

- I'd been meaning to take a break from Windows after my last computed purchase turned out to be a little too small for productivity, a little too unoptimized for music production, a little oddly underpowered when I needed it to matter. This venture was extremely rewarding, as free open-source software (FOSS) and maker/hacker movements always capture my attention, and Linux is where it lives.
- My favorite piece of software was this word processor called WareWolff, which was basically "here's the composer mode from Scrivener. No flashy gimmicks, not even a spelling checker. Just write, dude." It was a significant factor in finishing the *Whiskey Dogs* manuscript.
- By the end of the year, I noticed that even with a Linux laptop for daily driving, I liked to root myself in my home office when it came time to work. This led me to build a whole powerhouse computer (more details below!).

### I started writing 500 words a day.

- This one was a throwback to my days on Patreon, banging out 1000 words in a session. I'm a little...*busy* for that nowadays, but trusting myself to evolve in little ways meant I could step up and take small steps.
- Were it not for keeping to this habit, *Whiskey Dogs* would still be sitting short of the house party. (Wouldn't you like to know the significance of that.)

### I learned how to play piano.

- Kind of. But yes, I learned to play piano. I've known the structure of the keys for almost twenty years, and could produce a nice hook or melody on one. But when *Hazbin Hotel* dropped, and "Loser, Baby" came on, I just had to learn it, come hell or high water.
- That meant learning basic chords, then chord structure, first slow, then figuring it out on the fly, incorporating rhythm and weight—oh look, Mom! I can play piano with the chord tabs on guitar sites.
- I think this was my favorite evolution. I'm no virtuoso, but most people don't know or remember how to play a musical instrument, so figuring out my favorite songs for a quick 10-minute break is extremely satisfying.

### I started seeing the doctor.

- Like so many members of my generation, a fundamental lack of understanding of U.S. healthcare and insurance, mixed with the purposeful obfuscation of what money is to be paid when and how much is due, has left me extremely adverse to doctor visits.
- However, I have an anxiety problem in my sleep that sometimes leads me to kick my partner in bed. One night, I woke up at 4 am to an empty bed. Assuming that I kicked him and he fled to the couch, I bit my feelings back and scheduled a new GP that minute on my phone.

- The secret? I told myself that before anybody took me anywhere, I was asking the receptionist if they took my insurance, and walking away if they didn't. Anyway, they did, I started getting my health back on track in a lot of areas, the works. Boom. Evolution.
- The great irony is that I had *not* kicked my partner out of bed. He was in the bathroom.\

### I built a small form factor PC.

- I haven’t built my own computer in at least 15 years. Embarking on this venture was literally because I couldn’t play *Ghost of Tsushima* on my usual PC, and making a SFF PC was quite the challenge. Rewarding, too!

- Unfortunately, this development sort of superseded my Linux immersion, as Windows is still king in video games, but I'm grateful how well everything worked out, and I'm writing this on my white box as we speak:




"Is that a paracord strap on the back???" Yes. Yes it is.

## I got better at sales and got a new job.

- I started this year at work *proudly* aware that once I had my shot as a closer, I'd make a killing. I grouped up with fellow colleagues I helped out, who were ready to help me. I found mentorship along the way. I impressed VPs and GVPs.
- Alas, it wasn't meant to be. The expectations of three months ended with a promotion to a new position I carved out for myself, but not a significant shift in my work and purpose. At the halfway point of 2024, leadership changes put me in limbo. Nine months in, I got rejected for the promotion I wanted after the first interview, and I realized: the longer you wait, the more you're in denial of reality. (More on this in another newsletter, methinks. It takes time to realize you're waiting for something that won't change, and that kind of wisdom could fill a book.)
- The lesson? Always. Be. Learning. Everything I did in the beginning of 2024 led me to landing the next big break of my sales career in two interviews. And that's how the chapter ended: with a two week break between jobs, a 60-hour PTO cashout, and sales training through the New Year.

There are other, little things in motion that I consider a piece of my evolution. Meeting my new art gallery neighbors, attending the local tech week, eating better (before the blasted holidays hit and ruined my diet, of course), driving to more tabletop RPG games, combining a standing desk with a workbench, building cabinets for my office--lots of things I hope to carry forward to greater success.

I also had some great failures this year, particularly juxtaposed with my goal to evolve:

1. *Human Hawke: First Contact* - Made no progress on putting this manuscript out there. Evolution did not mean production, apparently.

2. *Staring at the Day* by Brother Nico - I aimed to release this music record in July, but performing at a festival led to me pushing this back to August, and then just putting it aside entirely. There were more pressing matters, and I didn't entertain releasing the album a song at a time until late in the year.
3. Stenography - I had it in my head that learning this would help me write faster, and enter flow states easier. It's too steep a learning curve for too little a reward; I think hard when I write, I don't just let things go. Thankfully, this led me to the single greatest hack for my own writing sessions: *turn off the spelling and grammar checks*.
4. 101 Days of Writing - My approach to writing, 500 words a day, led me to this idea as a NaNoWriMo substitute, that I felt was uniquely positioned to catch attention this year, following controversy from the nonprofit. There were three flaws with that line of reasoning: one, everybody has their own ideas of how to write daily, so this was already noisy. Two: nobody gives a shit what you think, so pitching this to writers who were bailing on NaNoWriMo wasn't the slam dunk I thought it could be. And three: these elements, I could've overcome with time and hard work...that I just didn't have time to offer. I will probably save this concept in perpetuity, maybe even run extended workshops with it someday. But for now, this idea is shelved, and I'm okay with that.

# What's Next?

I'm putting the 2024 Year of Evolution in the books as a solid success. I'm so different from who I used to be, in ways that I am proud of, with forward direction.

In the closing weeks of December though, I started thinking about what I missed out on. And I realized that evolution was for me and myself. When I expressed it, I expressed it for myself. As a result, putting what I

did out in the world was very hard. I hesitated in saying "I am here. Look at me!" and that didn't feel great by the end of the year.

Creation isn't the problem. Putting it in a box somewhere, is.

My yearly theme for 2025 is going to be "A Year of Production." It will take my willingness to evolve, and my creative spirit, and bring it forward to a sense of *done*. And in turn, I will hesitate less. I'll be louder. And I won't give a damn if someone tries to chase me back into a hole. I'll just get louder.

Gods know we need that right about now.

That's also why I'm starting this Substack. I do all this stuff, but at the core, I'm a writer. I'm very fortunate to express myself in all these mediums, and it just so happens I can share that with you here, if you'll have me. So thanks for joining with me on the journey.

Come to the dark side. Sorry, I'm fresh out of cookies.

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*"You should be trying to build a life you want to live." - CGP Grey*

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# To Do List

*Whiskey Dogs* is at the middle point of beta reads, where the enthusiasts are done, and I'm weeding out the slow readers from the ones who are pretending to be interested. I need to figure out cover art while I have momentum, but haven't honed in on an artist yet. As a side project, I'm also doing some reading on the AIDS epidemic that I should've done before writing the whole damn book, but so far, I'm pleasantly surprised

that the world I wrote seems like the natural course of the alternate timeline.

*Human Hawke* is basically done, but it's another cover art challenge. If you think you or someone you know could draw the genderfluid space cartoon into a book cover (or the gay werewolves above), hit me up!

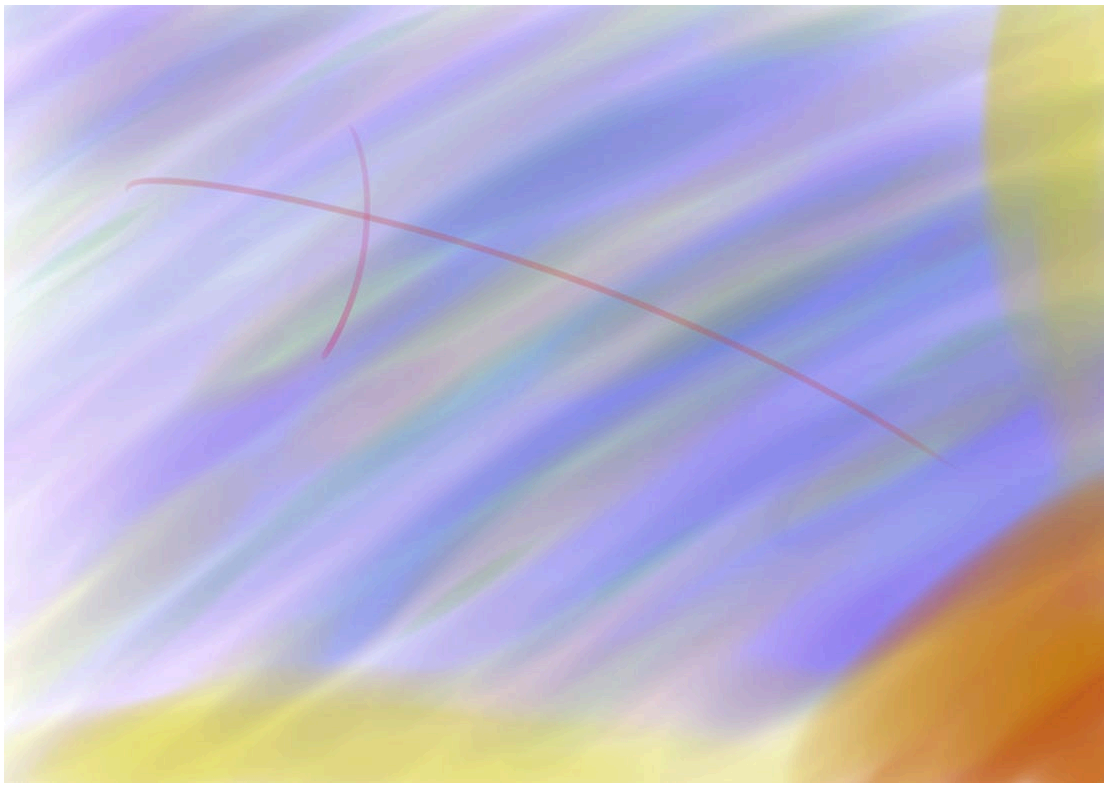
I created a new game in November called “Flick N Fire,” which is Galaga and Paper Football meets my 3D printer. My fellow writer and soon-to-be brother-in-law Liam Gibbons wants me to publish the rule set, so I guess I'll lay them out here soon. Or Itch.io. Or Printables. I’ll decide soon. Hold me to it.

December has been all about doing stuff I put off because of work. I've traveled across NY and NJ, I've been on ferries and done unique experiences, squeezed the trip to Montreal in there. (I have drafted a newsletter about it too!)

It's hard work putting off the creative process to heal, but I'm doing well.

Somewhere in all this, I got started on the Whiskey Dogs sequel. There's plenty of angry Winston left in me, I suppose.

I also painted this with my new drawing tablet.



“Scared of the Spinning World” - Nicolas Hornyak, 2024

Keeping it real and a little salty,
Nico