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Christmas carols trilled through my head in disconnected jumbles — “We wish you a merry Christmas ... jingle baum ... snow is glist’ning” — as the groaning Otis juddered to a grinding halt on the 19th floor of the crumbling old high-rise in the heart of Eugene. I ambled down the Hall of Busted Tiles, past my office door — the pebbled glass misted in reds, greens and ambers — to reach the lone window overlooking the soggy streets below. I peered down on Sears’ Pit, overgrown in blackberries among scattered trash and a fetid swamp. Oddly foreshortened knots of Gen Z kids congregated, shivering and wet, under various awnings, clouds of smoke and steam rising from the clumps. Christmas decorations struggled to assert seasonal spirit in the dispiriting gloom.

As nasty as human behavior ever gets — the greed, madness, murderous wars, disease and destruction — it doesn’t add up to one meteor strike, won’t make an eddy in a stellar wind.

But I was calm, almost blissful.

I had just been to the moon.

Not really, of course. Really, I’d been to the Hubble Telescope website (I keep it bookmarked), to their gallery of images. I’d clicked, awestruck, through Tadpole Galaxy, 420 million light years from us, streaming its tail of stars. I’d stared into the Cat’s Eye Nebula, only 3,000 light years away, with its fearful symmetry of spreading gases, remnants of a dying sun. I’d lingered in Cassiopeia, a mere 10 light years from Earth, a supernova artifact blasting stellar wind. Closest to home was our own moon’s Aristarchus Plateau, a meteor crater 26 miles wide, couple miles deep, a blow that struck with the “energy of a million atomic bombs.”

Those interstellar visions make me feel better about events here on Third Rock. It’s perspective, see? As nasty as human behavior ever gets — the greed, madness, murderous wars, disease and destruction — it doesn’t add up to one meteor strike, won’t make an eddy in a stellar wind. That doesn’t mean we should stop trying to be/do better, but knowing galactic worst cases makes Earth-scale worsts a bit more bearable, at least in my mind. In fact, I felt a glow for the season of giving.

I drifted back to the office, entered, found Mole scampering around in elf green, gleefully stringing lights, singing some old English carol called “The Hedgehog Song,” the only line of which he knew was “the hedgehog cannot be bugged at all.” Love the guy. We went to the lab and the Wines of Christmas:

First business is rectifying: When I wrote a recent piece about Thanksgiving touring,

I’d ended the tour at “Lorane Valley.” I’d meant to write Chateau Lorane. Sure, folks got there anyway and, no, I’m not their PR flak, but the place IS quite spiffy, perched above Lake Louise, and they DO make good wines. Cruise out, drop in. Try their honey mead, a traditional Christmas quaff if ever there was one. Wine-savvy folks also talk nice about the **Chateau Lorane Marechal Foch Port**, available at the winery. Thinking parties and feasts,

more turkey maybe? Two dry white

wines would be welcome on the table or as host-gifts: **Domaine de la Beaucassone 2005 Cotes du Rhone** (\$14), a blend of grapes from the south valleys of France, flavors complex but round, with notes of flowers, citrus, wood. Hard to go wrong, ever, with New Zealand whites: **Saint Clair 2006 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc** (\$16.50) is delish, bursting with tropical fruits and herbal tints, silky smooth and finely balanced, would match with seafood, Asian dishes, even bird.

Got a pinot-head on your list? Frantic end-of-term activities made us miss, but wine mavens we trust report that **Domaine Drouhin 2005 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** rang the bells at a recent massive tasting, and it’s bargain priced at only \$40 “for a limited time.” In the more approachable range, folks liked **Dylan’s Run 2003 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (\$16.50). These are Eugene neighbors out on Briggs Hill Road and they have committed the vineyard to sustainable practices (costly but Earth-friendly), and the wine is superb, still fresh, youthful, with complex berry flavors, good structure and finish.

Ray Walsh, owner/winemaker for Capitello Wines, dropped in the other night and made us taste **Wahle Vineyards and Cellars 2003 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir**: very special, deeply layered in dark fruits and berries, underlying tones of smoky wood, top notes of cherries and roses, oh my. Turns out we can’t have any more, but Wahle’s 2005s are in the markets, with 2006 recently bottled and coming soon. Can’t find ’em? Go on the web, wahlevineyardsandcellars.com, fill your cybercart.

Kat and I soired recently at Chez Mark and Denise Lyon, sipped through a couple dozen top-shelf California cabs, all from the ’97 vintage, most ticked at prices that put them out of our reach, but some were benchmark wines, restored my lagging lust for Napa-cabs. If you’re gifting a cab-fiend, look for reliable names — **Caymus, Sterling, Silver Oak, Heitz** — but steel your nerves for sticker shock. Pals Mike and Mary brought to dinner Rodney **Strong 2003 Single Vineyard Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon**: classic flavors of dark berries, hint of mint, gobs of oak, rich and yummy, jacketed at 30 bux. Gulp.

Time to trip back into space. If I cross paths with Santa, I’ll send him your way. Find me scanning Saturn’s rings or galloping along the Horsehead Nebula. And happy new year to all y’all in the old Milky Way. **EW**