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2017 has been a strange year, and one whose details few people could've predicted. Now that everyone in media-land is firmly in 'Q4 mode,' naturally we find our minds wandering, about what next year will hold, and I'm no different

I don't believe anyone in the country has a particularly high degree of confidence in their own predictions as to what will befall us all as Brexit negotiations continue to unfold. On the other side of the Atlantic, Trump's residency at the White House doesn't appear to be helping matters, nor does his continued battle of 'wits' with a certain North Korean gentleman. These and other political, economic, and geographical issues have rendered many of us in a strangely ambivalent state of concurrent bemusement, fear, anxiety,

anticipation and plain confusion.

That being said, part of living in the 21st century means that we are privy to some genuinely incredible technological and scientific breakthroughs and milestones. Within the last month or so, for example, physicists Rainer Weiss, Kip S. Thorne and Barry C. Barish confirmed predictions made by Einstein one hundred years ago, and observed gravitational waves for the first time. These waves resulted from the collision of two black holes, and took around 1.3 billion years to reach the LIGO project on Earth, where we were able to detect their existence in mid-September. Apart from their confirming a century-old theory of Einstein's, scientists anticipate that (using these 'waves') we'll be able to remotely explore areas and phenomena of the universe that were previously unreachable via our current technology. On 3rd October, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences decided to award the Nobel Prize in Physics for 2017 to Weiss, Thorne and Barish for their achievements.

Meanwhile, entrepreneur and supposed inspiration for Robert Downey Jr's portrayal of Ironman, Elon Musk, has suitably futuristic-sounding ambitions for his SpaceX venture in 2018. Earlier in 2017, he announced that he'll be sending two paying customers (who have already paid 'significant deposits') on a space flight around the moon, and has recently also unveiled his company's new spacesuit design for their other planned crewed missions next year, using their newly upgraded Dragon spacecraft. The two paying customers haven't been named yet, but SpaceX anticipate releasing this information pending the successful completion of various health and physical checks.

And amid all these bleeding-edge scientific and technological advancements, barely a week goes by without many of us being reminded that as artificial intelligence research yields better and better results, it's only a matter of time before we are replaced, at least in our professional capacities, by some particularly sophisticated software. According to some research, AI is progressing so fast that even professions that we as mere humans regard as being especially challenging, such as surgery, have a 50% chance of being replaced by machines within the next 25-50 years.

Needless to say, we aren't omnipotent, there are aspects external to our lives that we

cannot directly affect through our daily actions. Some things about the world will disappoint us, and others will surprise us, but it strikes me that, at the minute, we've struck such a rich vein of sci-fi style advancements that it almost balances out in the end. The world is an interesting place, and we're lucky enough (or unlucky enough, according to the old Chinese curse) to live in interesting times, let's look on the bright side of things, for now. I'm hopeful for an equally exciting 2018.

<http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20170619-how-long-will-it-take-for-your-job-to-be-automated>

https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/physics/laureates/2017/press.html

<http://www.spacex.com/news/2017/02/27/spacex-send-privately-crewed-dragon-spacecraft-beyond-moon-next-year>

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