

2018 Week 6: The Week Ending Saturday, February 10th

Paul R. Potts

Monday

I didn't write anything yesterday, but here's a quick recap. For dinner Saturday night we baked a pot pie from Costco. Grace and I then went down into the basement to record this week's podcast episode. We tried something new this time: a sponsor! (Well, a fake one.)

Yesterday, we all got up at a reasonable hour and I made pancakes for anyone who was awake to eat them. Joshua was a bit sick, and Merry was a bit sick. They both have what seems to be a viral infection of the gums. This may be related to Merry's Fifth disease. I'm supposed to be resting my knee, and it started snowing hard. So I made the call yesterday to just make it a snow day and stay home, and let the sick kids rest.

Pottscast Production Scripts

I went down into the basement and worked on turning Saturday's podcast audio into a show. I also put some work into my scripts. This is something I've been wanting to work on for a while, because it will save me time and hopefully reduce errors when I'm working on the podcasts. I needed to spend a couple of hours working on the scripts in order to have scripts that would do more of the process of generating the podcast feed file entries. What I have now is basically a script template for each show. I can copy the template to make a new show, type in the title, and then select the lines of the script and execute them a few at a time in a BBEdit worksheet. If something goes wrong — say, for example the exported final audio file is not where it should be — I'll see an error at that point in the script.

I'm not an expert in shell programming, so it takes me a while to get things done. In particular the rules for interpolating variables and escaping characters can be a little obscure, and it's easy to get into the weeds. For example “this variable needs to be interpolated, but there's an underscore immediately after the variable name, which is a valid character in a variable name, so for the parser to understand that the interpolated variable name is ending, I need to use dollar sign followed by the variable name in curly brackets.” And “this quoted string

needs to have quotation marks in it, so the quotation marks must be preceded by a backslash.” And “this command result needs to be enclosed in tick marks.” The rules all make sense, but since I don’t do enough shell programming to have the rules memorized, it can be hard to figure out which ones I need to use in context.

So far I’ve needed to dig into:

- Rules for quoting (they get a bit complex)
- Rules for variable interpolation in strings
- Rules for backticks

So, anyway, it took a while but I’ve got a working script. It probably could be written in better **bash** style. But it works, and I’m hoping it will save me up to thirty minutes a week when working on the podcast. Even though I carefully scrutinize my feed file entries, I usually make at least one typo, and so my test feed doesn’t work, and I have to make a correction and upload the test feed file again and test it again. Using a script to *generate* the feed file entries from more readable small pieces that I can type once, like the episode title, should help eliminate a lot of those typos, while putting in things like correctly formatted dates and file lengths automatically.

Putting in time *once*, in order to save time *each week*, ought to be a no-brainer, but setting aside an unbroken block of time is not so easy on me, or on Grace, who has to pick up the slack.

Old Doctor Who

After finishing the podcast and my podcast scripts, I tried to sit still and unwind with the sick kids by watching some old(ish) episodes of *Doctor Who* featuring the Seventh Doctor, played by Sylvester McCoy.

The Seventh Doctor was never “my Doctor” in part because I never saw these shows back when they were new. In theory, Tom Baker (the Fourth Doctor) should be “my Doctor,” since Tom Baker episodes were running PBS when I was about the right age to become a *Doctor Who* fan. But I saw episodes only sporadically, and when I did, I found that while I *wanted* to enjoy the shows, I had a hard time doing it. The slow pace, cheesy sets, weak writing, and over-acting kind of killed my interest in the show. It’s hard to imagine that for a kid who grew up with reruns of the original *Star Trek*, I would be in any position to call *Doctor Who* “cheesy,” but it is, by comparison — yes, I hate to say it, but most episodes don’t even live up to the writing and production values of the old *Star Trek*, and some of the best old *Star Trek* episodes are *much* more enjoyable than *any* of the *Doctor Who* serials from that era. For one thing, *Star Trek* episodes presented complete stories in an hour-long format, instead of stretching a story across many shorter episodes, and that makes a big difference.

I enjoyed Sylvester McCoy in the recent trilogy of movies adapted from *The Hobbit* (in fact, he's one of the more likeable things in those movies, which have a lot of problems). So I thought I'd check out some of his old work in *Doctor Who*. We started with *Paradise Towers*, from 1987.

***Paradise Towers* (1987 *Doctor Who* Serial)**

Paradise Towers has a few good things going for it. It seems to have been inspired in part by J. G. Ballard's novel *High Rise*. That's good source material to be inspired by. There are rival gangs of girls, the Kangs, grouped by color. They have names like "Bin Liner" and "Fire Escape" which is darkly dystopian — with access to the natural world, we might name children things like "Rose," and "Heath," but these girls have only ever known the inside of this giant apartment building. There are "caretakers" who roam the building, and elderly residents ("rezzies"). The able-bodied men long ago went off to war. This all seems like perfectly good building material for a dystopian drama.

Of course, execution is everything. There are some good scenes early on. When The Doctor meets the Red Kangs, they conduct an elaborate greeting ritual, a sort of secret handshake. He watches everything they do, and then plays it back precisely. This brief scene says a lot about the character of this incarnation of The Doctor. Not so much that he *can* do this, but that he is interested enough to pay such close attention to these little rituals. But it isn't long before we're back in familiar *Doctor Who* territory, padding the episode with long scenes of running through corridors, and people screaming as they are menaced by off-screen monsters.

Oh, and the music is *painfully* dated. I love a nice Yamaha DX-7 sound — after all, I own one of these vintage synthesizers and love playing it — but the music in these shows is often just uninspired noodling on drum machine and DX-7. It sounds vaguely like Jan Hammer's music for *Miami Vice*, only not nearly as enjoyable.

I don't think the failings in these episodes come down to Sylvester McCoy. Richard Briers is quite funny, in an over-the-top way, as the Chief Caretaker. Elizabeth Spriggs and Brenda Bruce are creepy as Tabby and Tilda. I think that Neil Gaiman, writing *Coraline*, might have found Tabby and Tilda to be his inspiration for Miss Spink and Miss Forcible (played in the movie by Jennifer Saunders and Dawn French). It's not really the performances that make this serial painful to watch. It really comes down to the fact that they tried to take *maybe* an hour's worth of script, and stretch it out to four 25-minute shows. And so we are constantly cutting away to see what other characters are doing, which is usually "not much." In the first couple of minutes, we establish the idea that The Doctor and Mel are going to meet up on the roof where the swimming pool is. But it takes almost two hours to get there, and by the time they meet up, we've pretty much lost interest in why they are there.

The serial also has some story elements which, if you take a moment to think

about them, are pretty disturbing. Pex, the young man who follows Mel around bragging what a tough fighter he is, has a pretty problematic ending. It turns out he's supposedly a coward; he stayed behind when the other young men went off to fight some nonsensical off-screen war, and never came back. To me, that makes him rational, a sensible conscientious objector. But the Kangs bully him every time they see him for being a coward. They literally bully him into suicide. He "redeems" himself by throwing himself at the villain and falling through a doorway with him, to his death. Sure, he helps to defeat the villain with this act. But was this really his only option in life? Talk about your toxic masculinity...

Battlefield (1989 Doctor Who Serial)

Grace made a tasty dinner out of leftovers. Leftover steamed broccoli, that would not have been great to eat by itself, was terrific in a cream of broccoli soup, served with the last of the Thanksgiving ham from the freezer. Then I worked on cleaning up the kitchen some more, and getting ready for this morning's bulletproof coffee, and we turned our attention to another Sylvester McCoy serial, *Battlefield*.

This is apparently one of the better serials. I will say this: there is a lot going on here. We have outdoor scenes, and battle scenes, so it moves along pretty quickly. The Doctor gets his old car back, the yellow roadster used mainly by the Third Doctor, called "Bessie." There are plenty of explosions, and sword-fights.

It has some genuinely weird and intriguing moments, such as the moment in which Ace and Shou Yuing protect themselves with a chalk circle. As they complete the circle, it is lit with a single spotlight. It's a simple lighting effect but it works because of its simplicity, while some of the special effects, early video effects like the glowing dragon-like entity in the chamber under the lake, and the magical portal through which Morgaine escapes, haven't held up as well. Jean Marsh is pretty great as Morgaine, and there are some real worthwhile moments in the script, such as the moment when Morgaine restores Elizabeth's sight. But "The Destroyer" is almost as unconvincing as the worst of the old rubber-mask monsters.

Overall I'd say this is one of the better old serials, and it could even be the best of Sylvester McCoy's shows. The script is clever. The dialogue is snappy. McCoy has a lot of hilarious lines, some very funny silent slapstick moments, and even some genuinely touching moments with Morgaine and with his old friend Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart. It's still full of cheese and silliness, but we had a good time with this one. By comparison, most of the old *Doctor Who* serials just don't hold up nearly this well.

Tuesday

Mood: a bit down today. I keep trying to get my schedule working for earlier arrival at work. This morning I got out of bed immediately when my alarm went off at 7. It seemed like I was racing against time even to poop. I got a bath

in, did not even try to do any reading, got dressed, did not even make coffee. Everything felt like it was taking forever. I got out of my driveway at 8:10 p.m. I thought maybe I'd just pick up a coffee Biggby Coffee near my office. But traffic was backed up down Carpenter, and even onto Textile. It took me ten minutes to drive the mile or so to US-12. It's nominally a 4-minute drive. So instead of getting in line to get on 23 to 94, I went to Harvest Moon Café to get breakfast on my side of town. I got in and sat down at 8:20. They were quick, and my waitress offered me my regular order right as I sat down. I was out the door in 25 minutes. Traffic was still backed up, and several times on I-94 I found myself sitting in completely stopped traffic.

Grace is unhappy because she's been wanting time to talk about things. Not even major things, just things. But I am struggling to get enough sleep. I'm trying to recuperate from my injured knee, and my endless cough. (Still coughing up green goo every morning, but less, and still having mild coughing fits during the day, but it still seems to be improving — *very, very* slowly). Bedtime is still awful. Trying to get the kids to brush their teeth is awful. Joshua and Benjamin still have swollen gums and low-grade fevers.

About the time we get the kids into bed and I desperately want to go to sleep, she wants to get on the computer and check her e-mail and check in with everyone she follows on Facebook. So I'm literally lying there trying to start falling asleep, with my arm over my eyes, trying to make it so the brightness of the overhead light does not "reset" my tired feeling. (This happens if I get on the iPad or phone before bedtime; the blue light will drive away my sense that it is bedtime and then I'll be unable to get to sleep quickly.)

Grace is feeling neglected and I'm feeling... well, I don't really know what I'm feeling. Weary. A sense that I'm literally wearing myself out over the long-term and I'm on a treadmill. A sense that trying to get eight hours of sleep, so that I'll get healthier and I won't feel so exhausted, and can reduce my caffeine intake a bit, means that I have to choose to neglect my wife and children.

Dinner last night was the ready-to-bake salmon from Costco. That was a fight with Veronica. Apparently she had wanted to put it on to bake at 6 p.m. I was getting ready to leave my office at 6:00 but my boss wanted to chat. I was feeling reasonably good about my progress on a thing that we agreed last Monday that I would work on, in lieu of some other projects that are still waiting for hardware. Last night he was saying he doesn't think it is necessarily worthwhile for me to work on this. So, I sent Grace a text message at 6:30 telling her I was on my way home, then got in my car feeling useless and defeated. When I got home about 6:55, Grace asked Veronica if she would put the salmon in the oven. Veronica had some kind of meltdown and started ranting about how she had felt like putting it in the oven at 6:00, but she didn't feel like doing it now.

We managed to get the kids to set the table, managed to get the salmon baked, managed to reheat some of the rice dish and steam some broccoli, and sat down to dinner by 7:30. By 8:00 I was almost done loading the dishwasher. It was trash

and recycling night. Somehow waiting for the stragglers to finish eating, washing the last few things, and waiting for the kids to get the trash and recycling out ate up another hour. Feeling low-energy, I had proposed that we watch another old *Doctor Who* serial.

The Happiness Patrol (1988 Doctor Who Serial)

The serial we started to watch was *The Happiness Patrol*, with Sylvester McCoy. I was especially curious about Kandy Man. The “Best of the Seventh Doctor” collection available on iTunes includes *Time and the Rani*, *The Happiness Patrol*, *Silver Nemesis*, and *Remembrance of the Daleks*. So... it’s one of the best, right?

Some of the online reviews were positive. *SciFiNow* says:

...it’s worth revisiting these gems from one of the most underrate periods in the show’s long history.

And their review of “The Happiness Patrol” describes it like this:

Often dismissed as one of the sillier episodes, a relic of the previous incarnation of the show thanks to its surface whimsy and obvious studio-bound limitations — a city in a studio will only ever look like a city in a studio. An incredible, Thatcher-inspired performance from Sheila Hancock as Helen A, the ruler of the cheerily sinister colony of Terra Alpha where everyone is happy and sadness is a crime, sets the tone perfectly though — it’s darkly absurd and joyously unpleasant, with a Bertie Basset-like Kandy Man (who wasn’t the subject of a lawsuit, despite legends to the contrary) who serves as the regime’s hangman and Python-like stab at the banality of evil that recalls Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* and, of course, George Orwell’s *1984*.

Well, that summary is more-or-less true, except that *Brazil* and *1984* are actually *good* and this... well, let’s just say that I’m coming to the conclusion that being “one of the best of the Sylvester McCoy *Doctor Who* serials” is like having a slightly milder case of the flu. I’m told that *Remembrance of the Daleks* is the best serial from this era, and I have watched that one one, and found it kind of slow and dull. Maybe we should give it another chance, but really, if *Remembrance* is the best one... well, you get the idea.

Honestly, most of these serials can only claim to be important because they have some significance in the history of the show. For example, according to this *Nerdist* article, *Battlefield* is important because:

It’s the very last UNIT story in the classic series as well as the last appearance by Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart played as always by Nicholas Courtney.

And also:

Battlefield is the first story of season 26, making it the very last

season premiere for sixteen years. Episode one of this story bears the dubious honor of having the lowest viewing figures ever for an episode of *Doctor Who*, coming in at an anemic 3.1 million viewers.

So, it's important to watch... because... it was the start of the season that *almost permanently killed the franchise* and the first episode *had the worst ratings ever recorded*. Ummm.

I figured *The Happiness Patrol* must move along reasonably well, since it is only a 3-parter, instead of a 4-parter. I was wrong. But there are a few good scenes. There's a moment where the Doctor is speaking to a guard and convinces him to lower his gun, emphasizing how easy it would be to take a life. That scene is very watchable. But there are lots of other things going on that feel unfinished. There's something strange going on with the execution of what seems to be a gay man, and the seemingly random use of black harmonica-playing medical student Earl Sigma, who keeps wandering around, and Ace's conversation with what seems to be a lesbian member of the Happiness Patrol, and the way the "secret agent" hangs out on park benches luring young people into incriminating conversation — several subtexts that would probably be worth unpacking, if more thought had been packed into them to start with. Oh, and the way they paint the TARDIS pink — huh? But as it stands, they just seem like half-baked ideas implemented in shorthand, where the writers couldn't be bothered to make them convincing.

I will say this about it: Kandy Man is really fun, although they don't give him enough to say and do. He rants and raves a bit. The Doctor makes him stick to the floor, then un-sticks him, then sticks him to the floor again, in a way that makes no damned sense. Kandy Man is creepier than I expected. Apparently he's supposed to be a robot made entirely out of sweets. He's kind of mesmerizing to watch. I found myself starting at his giant blue licorice allsorts head with spatulas for cheeks and disturbing little spinning spiral eyes, and wishing I could eat him. Because, licorice! Kandy Man is reviled as one of the worst "monsters" in the old *Doctor Who* franchise, but I found him to be one of the most enjoyable, *because* he is total nonsense.

The Kandy Man Can't

But the show doesn't even follow through with its own setups. That's a big reason it is so disappointing. Kandy Man threatens to feed The Doctor and Earl Sigma candy that is so delicious, it will kill them. The two of them are strapped into chairs and supplied with bibs. We have a funny setup for potentially dark and hilarious gags (perhaps literal gags). But it goes nowhere, probably because the writers realized that the actor playing Kandy Man couldn't actually *do* anything in that costume.

I have to admit that I kind of like the Stigorax puppet (an evil-looking lapdog-like creature). But these pleasures are pretty few and far between. I'm really reaching for things to appreciate. An villain who is made of candy, a nice setup

for political satire, and a few good lines of dialogue can't sustain this 3-parter. In fact I was so bored with it that I stopped it after the second episode, because it wasn't doing enough to keep me awake and I figured we'd be better off getting an extra 25 minutes of sleep than we would finishing the show. Maybe we'll finish it tonight. Maybe not.

It looks like the original Kandy Man costume recently sold at auction. The description reads:

...of multi-material composition, with circuit board to chest, with internal circuits and wiring, height approximately 70 inches (178cm). FOOTNOTES: This particular costume has several condition issues relating to the deterioration of the foam latex (see illustration). Although originally a pristine costume from the Episode, its appearance now more closely resembles the destroyed version which appears in the show.

I'm not sure the auction page will be up there for long, but the suit does look a little worse for wear. Despite this, it sold for almost \$3,000.00.

On my lunch break today I'm going to run out and get some licorice allsorts.

This experience makes me wonder if it might be worthwhile for a hard-core fan to make "fan edits" of some of these long, sluggishly-paced serials, and make them worth watching. Well, *more* worth watching. I'm probably not the guy to do it, but I'd be happy to beta-test the results.

Hmmm... it looks like there are fan edits. But I'll have to delve into those another time. They look like a step in the right direction The edit of *The Happiness Patrol* clocks in at 53 minutes — cut by a third! Might the fan edit be — dare I get my hopes up — watchable? Or at least less unwatchable than the originals? Because, really, trying to watch these Seventh Doctor episodes is mostly just making me depressed, that so many people worked hard on them, and yet, the results were *just... so... very... bad*.

Update: I went to three different stores over lunch and couldn't find any licorice allsorts. Hobnobs, Jaffa Cakes, VeVites chocolate digestives, Cadbury bars, BUT NO LICORICE ALLSORTS! Damn you, Kandy Man, for givine me a craving for licorice allsorts! Stupid, sexy Kandy Man!

Wednesday

Last night after work I tried to find licorice allsorts at Plum Market, the Kroger on Washtenaw that used to be Hiller's, the Kroger on Carpenter, and Target. Shaka, when the walls fell! Zinda, his face black, his eyes red! There are a few more places I might try. Busch's, and maybe Arbor Farms. Maybe the Fresh Thyme market in downtown Ypsilanti. I asked Grace if she would call around and see if she can find any, before I waste any more gas.

Lots of places had soft Australian licorice. But is it just me, or didn't it used to be pretty common to find licorice allsorts on the shelf, too? Even generic versions in bulk food sections, or even in gas station convenience store candy sections? I used to eat these pretty often and I don't think I ever had to hunt down one particular store with a special imported candy section to find them.

When I got home, Grace was out picking up a couple of young house-guests. The table was set for dinner, and I was ready to sit down to eat with the kids, but they were bickering and fighting, and would not obey any orders, so I decided to boycott dinner and got ready for bed. So the kids ate dinner by themselves, continuing to fight and bicker.

When Grace got back home, we all had words. I got some food. We did kitchen cleanup, and I also gave haircuts to Pippin and Joshua. Joshua is always the drama king — he goes directly from “no, I don't want a haircut!” to “shave it all off!” I used the clippers with the half-inch guard, which took off roughly half his hair, but left him enough to provide a little insulation (it is still winter, after all). It looks much better.

The idea is that the kids with the curliest hair — Joshua and Veronica especially — are heavily encouraged to *either* comb it out daily with various sprays or conditioners for super-curly hair, *or* keep it quite short so combing it out is a thirty-second affair that requires little or no painful yanking and tugging. Veronica has reached the age where she wants it long and mostly is taking care of it so that it is not a giant knot. Pippin and Joshua have decided that they want it short to avoid the pain and work. We just don't have a miraculous solution for very curly hair. It's sure super-cute when it is clean and picked out and not full of lint. Merry and Pippin have a little less curl and it's a bit easier to comb out. Sam's is more on the wavy side. The range of colors and textures is always kind of astounding to see.

I downloaded a couple of the *Doctor Who* fan edits to preview and wow, the video quality is impressive. And it looks like they have shortened a number of episodes by at least a third, sometimes even while adding back in some material from deleted scenes. The fan edit for *The Happiness Patrol* is actually rendered in black and white. The creator of the fan edit writes:

The Happiness Patrol is, in many ways, yer [sic] typical flawed production where the ambition of the writer outstripped the budget and various people made the wrong call. But I discovered that you can hide a lot of the story's design flaws, like the flat, theatrical sets, by doing the whole bloody thing in Black & White. It's amazing the difference going from colour to monochrome makes to this story, as the whole thing suddenly becomes more watchable, flat sets don't look so flat, Fifi looks less like a puppet and the whole thing has a lot more atmosphere, like the Film Noir that's struggling to surface from underneath the weight of dodgy design choices piled on top of it.

It does seem to improve the show, but rendering the whole serial in black and white makes it so Kandy Man and all his lethal candy syrups are also shades of gray. That seems wrong. It would be cool if Kandy Man could be rendered in color. Back when the show was made, they didn't have the budget or technology to mix things up like that, but if they were making it in 2018, I think it would be quite possible to make Kandy Man and his various syrups colorful. So you could have the execution scenes rendered in black and white with the actual strawberry fondant spraying on the victims in bright colors. That would be visually shocking and suggest that the residents live colorless lives right up to the point where they are killed. The patrol costumes could be in color too, and the painted TARDIS. That could be amazing — literally the only colorful things in that world would be the machinery of the Happiness Patrol and their mechanisms of coercion. Then perhaps at the end there could be a Wizard-of-Oz transition into color.

Anyway, for the fan edit, see: <https://whoflix.wordpress.com/2015/05/16/the-happiness-patrol/>

Mirab, his sails unfurled!

Friday

Whoops, missed a day completely.

***The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Chapter 9: “Barrels Out of Bond”**

Thursday night's story was the ninth chapter of *The Hobbit*, “Barrels Out of Bond.” This is not a bad chapter, but it is not very exciting for the younger kids, because there is a lot of description and not much action or dialogue. There are several notable differences between book and movie here: in the book, Thorin is imprisoned deep in a dungeon far from the other dwarves. And of course in the book there is no female elf who falls in love with Kili. Not all the changes are for the worse; for example, after seeing the movie and then going back and re-reading the book, it seems disappointing that Thrainduil, chief of the wood-elves in Mirkwood, is barely described and does not even have any lines.

I also forgot to report on another night's story. I forget just which night it was, but we read a couple more stories from *D'Aulaires' Book of Norse Myths*. We are getting close to finishing up that collection of stories.

We've been a little busy and distracted because we have a couple of adorable house guests. One of Grace's friends is in the hospital for a birth, and we're keeping her 1-year-old and 3-year-old girls. They seem to be having a good time for the most part, but the noise level is ramped up just a little bit higher than usual.

Snow Day

Last night I went to Costco a day early because there was a heavy snowstorm predicted. I got some extra food, paper towels, fizzy water, etc.

Early this morning the storm arrived. Here's what I just posted on Facebook:

Well, that was an exciting and pointless drive to work. I was on the ramp from 23N to 94W. It was unplowed and very slippery. I wound up stopped completely in a line of trucks trying to get on 94W. Fire trucks and ambulances were getting on because and there was an accident ahead. I heard on the radio that all lanes of 94W were closed at Ann Arbor-Saline Rd. From the ramp we could see that traffic was not moving on 94W. So I gave up and got back on 23N. 23N was a little more passable but not really good. So I got off 23N at Washtenaw to text my boss and consider my options. It is possible I could have gotten to work by taking surface streets but we still have 6 more inches of snow falling today, and I was very concerned that when it came time to leave, I'd wind up stranded. I decided to take surface streets back home and then heard on the radio that 23N is now closed as well, at Washtenaw. Traffic on surface streets was not good, with lots of emergency vehicles around. It was taking me forever to get a few miles. I picked up some fire logs, and we're having a snow day for everyone! But my Protestant Work Ethic™ is now telling me I should have been up and out at 6 a.m. because work is more important than everything else, while my Socialist Work Ethic™ is telling me I should be pissed that I have to surrender one of my very limited vacation days that I was hoping to use for, you know, an actual vacation.

I am unfortunately not set up to work from home at our new home, or I would have done that. I was thinking maybe I would go pick up my work laptop and debugger and bring it home so I would be able to work from home and would be less likely to get stranded on the far side of town but that didn't really work out. I probably should have planned that out last night.

Anyway, it's a snow day. I'm home. Right now some of the kids are outside. More snow is coming down. A lot more. We just had some chicken hot dogs for lunch and we've got fake logs in the fireplace, and I'm getting ready to have a little Doctor Who marathon.

Merry just came to us crying because he had stuck a Lego up his nose. It was wedged in there and bleeding and painful. We had to hold him down, Grace held his hands and I managed to work it out with the tine of a fork, along with some blood and snot.

After that, Grace said "Don't put Legos up your nose!"

Merry asked “Why?”

Saturday

It’s about 3:00 in the afternoon. It’s snowing more. Grace has taken our two little girl guests out to reunite them with their mom. I’m sure the driving conditions still aren’t very good. Here’s hoping she doesn’t get stuck or slide off the road.

It’s been a bit difficult. The incremental increase in the general level of noise and chaos is hard for me. I was up making breakfast this morning, bacon and blueberry pancakes, and did a whole round of kitchen cleanup again.

The Power of the Daleks (1966 Doctor Who Fan Edit)

We tried to have a *Doctor Who* marathon last night, watching some more of the fan edits. We watched *The Power of the Daleks*, a Second Doctor serial (in fact, the first one). This serial does not survive at all in video form, so it’s been reconstructed using animation. The original had six twenty-five minute episodes (two and a half hours total). The fan edit condenses it to just over an hour and a half, and reworks some of the music. I’m pleased and surprised to report that *it’s really good*. In fact, this might be the best old-school *Doctor Who* serial I’ve ever seen, at least when viewed in fan edit form.

You can find the fan edit we viewed here: <https://whoflix.wordpress.com/2017/02/18/the-power-of-the-daleks-2/>

The actual animation is pretty crude, but the artwork itself is very nice, if that makes sense. When characters have to walk or interact it looks clumsy and strange. Even the animation of their mouths is not great. But the backdrops and the characters, especially the Daleks, look great. In fact, the interiors that tend to look cheesy in the original look much more convincing in animated form, because a lot of the extraneous detail has been abstracted away. It’s the extraneous detail (flimsy textures, etc.) that keep giving you the visual hints that you’re looking at a low-budget show. That’s gone in the animated version.

It’s tragic that no original video or film exists, but somehow I think out of this weird “lost” state we now have a version of the original story which is, to put it quite bluntly, probably quite a bit more enjoyable to watch than the original. A lot of credit is due to the folks making the fan edits who have figured out how to make the sluggish and padded original episodes snappy and dramatic.

It’s still snowing.

The Happiness Patrol Fan Edit

We watched the second half of *The Happiness Patrol* fan edit. In fan edit form this serial is a lot more bearable. I’m not gonna say it’s actually good, but it has its points. Kandy Man is still fun and weird. We finally had some licorice allsorts

to eat while watching him, but unfortunately they were somewhat strange, from Walgreens. They didn't have the blue round ones covered with nonpareils, or the yellow round ones with the licorice center. So we couldn't really eat Kandy Man's head. And while I think the serial overall looks better in black and white, a monochromatic Kandy Man just doesn't make me ravenous for licorice candies the way the polychrome version does.

It's still snowing.

***Scream of the Shalka* (2003 Doctor Who Fan Edit)**

We also watched *Scream of the Shalka*, also in fan edit form. This is a bit of an oddball serial, in more ways than one. It's animated, with a flat and angular style. It was originally presented in 6 parts online, in Flash format. The Doctor was is voiced by Richard E. Grant. He plays this incarnation of The Doctor as kind of fey and aloof — not very compassionate, or someone you'd like to befriend. In fact, when I first saw him I thought the story was setting up a revelation that he was actually a vampire. There's a fair amount of innuendo in his dialogue. There are more gross-out moments in the visuals, and it feels a bit darker. Overall, it seems like this incarnation of the show was targeted at a somewhat older audience. It's not bad, but after watching this, I'm not surprised he wasn't featured in any more shows. People don't really like the unfriendly Doctors. Over the years the various Doctors have varied in personality, but it's not an accident that the Sixth Doctor (played by Colin Baker), who is the most prickly and seems the most psychopathic, is not remembered very fondly.

Numbering the Doctors, and Doctoring the Numbers

Richard E. Grant was designated the Ninth Doctor back in the day, but when the series was revived, Christopher Eccleston was also called the Ninth Doctor. So make of that what you will. There are other glitches in the official numbering; when the War Doctor was introduced, we now had a Doctor in between eight and nine. There are also other confusing continuity disputes. Does The Valeyard count for anything? How about Peter Cushing? How about the pre-First Doctor faces we see in *The Brain of Morbius*? A straightforward numbering doesn't really seem to cover all this complex retroactive continuity changes. So this is one reason I tend to prefer to call the incarnations of The Doctor by the last names of the actors: Eccleston, Tenant, Smith, etc.

***The Caves of Androzani* (1984 Doctor Who Fan Edit)**

We tried to watch the Fifth Doctor's serial, *The Caves of Androzani*, also in fan edit form, but had to give up because the kids were getting too bored and noisy. This serial is widely considered one of the best, but I wasn't feeling it. We'll have to give it another chance.

***The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Chapter 10: “A Warm Welcome”**

Last night’s story was the tenth chapter of *The Hobbit*, “A Warm Welcome.” This chapter is a good example of the ways in which the movie diverged *hugely* from the book. I’m not going to go into too much detail here, but in the book this chapter is short and involves more telling than showing. The party is given, as the chapter name suggests, quite a warm welcome in Laketown. Bard is not mentioned; there is no secrecy and not much drama; they are not smuggled in. As far as I’m concerned, most of that drama from the movie doesn’t really add anything good to the story.

Books, Music, Movies, and TV Shows 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* (Peter Jackson film trilogy)
- *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Chapter 9: “Barrels Out of Bond” and Chapter 10: “A Warm Welcome”
- *Paradise Towers* (1987 *Doctor Who* Serial)
- *Battlefield* (1989 *Doctor Who* Serial)
- *The Happiness Patrol* (1988 *Doctor Who* Serial)
- *The Happiness Patrol* (1988 *Doctor Who* Fan Edit)
- *The Power of the Daleks* (1966 *Doctor Who* Fan Edit)
- *Scream of the Shalka* (2003 *Doctor Who* Fan Edit)
- *The Caves of Androzani* (1984 *Doctor Who* Fan Edit)
- *d’Aulaires’ Book of Norse Myths* by Ingri and Edgar d’Aulaire
- *Existence* by David Brin

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, February 10th, 2018

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