

2018 Week 16: The Week Ending Saturday, April 21st

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

State of Decay (1980 *Doctor Who* Fan Edit)

I had some down time on Saturday afternoon, and watched part of *State of Decay* (the 1980 *Doctor Who* serial). This is a vampires-in-space story. It seems that perhaps the rationale for the “E-Space” (“Exo-Space-time continuum”) trilogy is to go into a pocket universe (not a full parallel universe, but a *smaller* universe) in order to free up the writers; nothing they do there has to fit well into the established continuity. They can introduce big threats, and if they don’t escape into the regular old universe, we can just breathe a sigh of relief and forget about them after the story ends.

E-Space

E-Space is apparently a little green. It looks a little green on the viewscreen, but I thought maybe this was just because some of the film elements had aged badly before they were digitized. Nope — the producers wanted it to look that way. The TARDIS made its way to E-Space via a CVE, a “charged vacuum emboitment.” “Emboitment” (French: “emboîtement”) apparently refers to “The outdated hypothesis that all living things proceed from pre-existing germs, and that these encase the germs of all future living things, enclosed one within another,” and literally means “interlocking” or “stacking.” See also Preformationism.

I guess the idea here is that E-Space is a world that grew out of, and is somehow embedded within, N-Space, the universe we live in. But this conception of E-Space is not well-developed in the show; in *Logopolis* we learn how the CVE was created using “block transfer computations” (blockchain?) by the Logopolitans (were they mining bitcoin?) It’s complicated. (And a little silly.)

And personally, I live in the universe of Eä, Tolkien’s universe. Or is it Briah, the universe of Gene Wolfe’s Solar Cycle?

The Great Vampire

In this serial, the big threat is the “Great Vampire,” who drinks blood by the bucket-full and lives (if you can call it living) under a crashed spaceship that has been there for a long time, occupied by the original crew who have become the aristocratic rulers of a feudal society. They don’t age, you see, because they’ve become vampires.

The horror is pretty dumb. The dialogue is pretty dumb. Honestly it seems like the most interesting things in this serial are the sets and the guest stars. The sets are surprisingly well-done. The vampire guest stars (Rachel Davies, William Lindsay, and Emrys James) are pervy/creepy and their makeup, so completely over the top that it can’t even see the top any more, is great. Their scenery-chewing is entertaining. There is some nice banter between The Doctor and Romana, too. But these entertaining scenes and bits of dialogue can’t really elevate the sluggish show (sluggish even in fan edit form). Adric (Matthew Waterhouse) is in this one, but he doesn’t have a lot of lines. We learn that he has stowed away on the TARDIS, and he’s been captured by the vampire aristocrats.

I will note in passing that Baker was dating Lalla Ward (Romana) and married her. Unfortunately their marriage lasted only eighteen months. But this might explain why their banter was more convincing than usual.

Here’s a review that is more positive than this one.

This Week’s Pottscast

We had a great podcast recording session with our friend Joy Pryor. You can find the show blog post [here](#).

Grace spoke with Joy about her First Stop Shop, a thrift store concept that reminds me a bit of the “free store” as described in Abbie Hoffman’s *Steal This Book*. There is more about free stores or “give-away shops” on Wikipedia [here](#) — the concept was implemented by the (contemporary) Diggers.

The Ice Storm

The weekend was quite strange. On Sunday morning, we woke to the aftermath of an ice storm. We must have lost power briefly during the night, since the boiler control had reset, but during the day on Sunday I only noticed a few little flickers. Still, I really need to get a second UPS for the basement, and a third for the networking equipment and computer in our bedroom.

The Kano

The kids have been using their Kano. Mostly, they’ve just been playing Minecraft. They’ve also been on YouTube, because they found a way to work around the proxy server. I need to fix that.

I'm hoping they will discover the included Adventure game, which is some kind of a descendant of *the* grandfather of all text adventure games, the *ur*-text if you will, Colossal Cave Adventure. I'm not sure exactly which of many twisty little versions of Adventure this one is, but it doesn't matter that much. I grew up with text adventure games: Radio Shack's Haunted House, Scott Adams' text adventures for the TRS-80, including his "Adventure Zero" (the introductory adventure), and then later Pyramid 2000, a cut-down version of Colossal Cave, and then still later, most of the Infocom games. My favorites were the Zork games, but I also really enjoyed Planetfall, Enchanter, Starcross, Suspended, and a few others; I completed a number of them. The details are getting a little hazy in my memory, though. I think in my old notebooks, I may still have at least one or two of the maps I drew.

I'm not sure if I can get the kids interested in text adventures. They are used to visual storytelling on computers. But I can try. I think enjoying a game like Zork requires a certain skill that I acquired young, and which has proven invaluable to me: building a world out of words, and then "debugging" that world (that is, solving the problems it throws at me). And text adventures have the highest-resolution graphics of all: the ones in my mind.

I wonder if they'd make a fun bedtime story?

I wonder if I could get them interested in *writing* them?

***A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle**

The kids have been asking me to read them *A Wrinkle in Time*. I did not want to derail our progress in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, but I did take their request into consideration and read them the first chapter.

I've done more than enough ranting about *A Wrinkle in Time*, the 2018 movie, for one lifetime, but reading this chapter reminded me all over again of things I didn't like about the movie.

In the book, Meg has actually gotten into a fist-fight at school; she isn't in trouble just for tossing a basketball at another student. That's far more realistic to me; back in my day in high school, fights involved black eyes and split lips. In 2018 apparently high school fights are soft and, to me, unrealistically liberal. I don't think kids have actually changed; they are violent. I guess in 2018 the black girl in high school knows that if she throws a punch, she will likely be taken down, and maybe injured or even killed, by the school resource officer. So they lower the stakes and make Meg's crime a violation of sportsmanship, rather than a more realistic, and easy to relate to, act of violence by a tormented adolescent.

I also found myself steaming about the book's description of Mrs. Whatsit. In the book, she was not frightening to the kids because she was elderly, and seemed like a harmless eccentric, maybe even a "bag lady" or homeless person. There's a slapstick sequence in which her boots are full of water, and the kids struggle

to help her pull off her boots and pour them out, then put them back on over her wet socks.

This portrayal is so much more silly and humane than the scene in the movie, and importantly, it sets up an impression of Mrs. Whatsit that gives her room to genuinely surprise them later, as she reveals herself to be a being of great power and beauty. In the movie, she's already beautiful (even wrapped in a dress made from a bedsheet), elaborately coiffed and made up, and leaps right up over a garden wall.

One of the deep messages of the book is "don't judge people (or creatures) by their superficial appearances." This plays out in the scene with Aunt Beast, a terrifying-looking alien being who is gentle and compassionate to Meg. A good portion of the *point* of the witches, or "Misses," is lost when they start out bristling with alien power and beauty. And one of the major lessons of the book is lost. L'Engle would have despised this change.

Monday

Working with Team One

I've had some trouble getting feedback from Team One. I've asked them to verify that they will loan me \$25,000, \$5,000 more than I asked for previously. I got a note back saying "that should be fine," but I've asked for something in writing. Their responses have been brief and a bit unclear.

We've gotten more addenda for the sales agreement and are trying to hash out, with the help of our realtor, which items should actually be written up and put in the signed agreement.

Grace has been struggling to get information back from various people about the house and our insurance claims. As her patience reached its low point for the day, she sent me a text message that simply read "pray for me." And so I briefly thought she might be having a medical crisis. But no — she was just fed up.

After she told me all the different ways in which the insurance adjuster, inspector, and various contractors were making her life miserable, by refusing to get back to her, or refusing to do work already paid for, or refusing to even answer phone calls, or even having their phones shut off or e-mail addresses start bouncing messages back — I really can't blame her. It's been *crazy* stupid.

The Rust Belt in Free Fall

I have to remind myself that rust-belt cities that are in economic free-fall are like this: the people who are really good at their jobs, who are qualified, and could compete and get paid better elsewhere, have in many cases left to do just that. What's mostly left are the people stuck there: maybe they have family in the area, maybe they are attached to it because they've lived there all their lives, maybe they have a home they can't sell. And they are barely scraping by,

and so gradually their work turns into a sort of low-grade con, as they have to not just work but hustle at multiple gigs to scrape by.

I know when we lived there and I was unemployed and broke, I couldn't put money into the house, and it was a struggle not to feel like that represented personal failure. It's the failure of a whole community.

Even friends aren't immune to this. We paid a friend of a friend, not a professional contractor but allegedly a reasonably good handyman, a couple of hundred dollars to do a repair, including money for raw materials. He cashed the check immediately, but never did the job. It's been a couple of months. Grace has been leaning on him, but we don't really have much leverage; he's not a professional, so he has no professional reputation to protect. It's not much money, but the repair was important to us. So we're still scratching our heads.

In fact, the professionals also don't seem to have much interest in their reputation, either. I guess when things are bad, you can't afford pride. And so maybe you start to take advantage of the desperation around you, because it helps you feel less desperate. Maybe you even feel a little successful, when you've been able to successfully cheat people.

You can probably tell that I'm floundering a bit here, trying to figure out how to stay in solidarity with people who don't show much interest in maintaining solidarity with me and my family. I'm probably over-thinking it.

Maybe the low-level dishonesty and lack of diligence starts to feel justifiable, when you're in unending financial desperation yourself. I know that I tried to maintain the house, and would like to not feel as irresponsible as I do feel, when I lost consecutive jobs and spent several of our years up there in low-level financial desperation myself.

And we're still trying to get out of that situation.

Tuesday

Last night Grace took our three older boys (Sam, Joshua, and Pippin) to stay with our friends the Martin family.

Configuring the Kano

After work I put the Kano on our private network (strangely, the Kano listed it as available, even though it is supposedly configured to have its SSID hidden — I will have to look into that). I tried to get the Kano working with my proxy server, but didn't have any success. I thought I could configure Chromium to use my proxy server, but it won't show the proxy server setting and gives me a confusing message about using the system proxy server setting. So I tried configuring the proxy server using the Kano control panel. It didn't work; it gives me a permission error.

I'm not sure what it's actually doing, to verify the server. I mean, it's the whole point of a proxy server to block some URLs, right? So maybe it really is working just fine. But it won't apply the setting.

So I need to verify that the proxy server is working from another client. And maybe I need to whitelist whatever URL the Kano is trying to access to verify the proxy server (if, in fact, that is the source of the error).

It is quite hard for me to use the Kano; the screen is very high-resolution but it is just so small. The tiny keyboard is very difficult for me to use and I keep mis-typing passwords. The Kano Linux distribution hides a lot of the usual Debian configuration options that I'm used to, and wraps up the standard apps with various scripts. So it wasn't so easy to figure out how, for example, I might pass a proxy server option to the desktop icon for Chromium.

I was not able to find a whole lot of good examples online, perhaps because the Kano Linux distribution is relatively new.

***The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 1, Chapter 3: "Three Is Company"**

Last night I finished reading Chapter 3 of *Fellowship* to the kids. In chapter 3, we first meet the black riders. When they first show up in the book, they aren't all that menacing. In *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Tom Shippey writes about how Tolkien gradually "wrote his way into the story" — he didn't know, yet, the full significance of the black riders, and how dangerous they were. And so at first they are creepy curiosities.

The movie makes them much more menacing from the get-go, while still maintaining some of the odd and creepy details from the book, such as the "sniffing:"

When it reached the tree and was level with Frodo the horse stopped. The riding figure sat quite still with its head bowed, as if listening. From inside the hood came a noise as of someone sniffing to catch an elusive scent; the head turned from side to side of the road.

And, later, a black rider even *crawls* towards them. (In my mind's eye, I imagine possessed Regan as she crawls backwards down the stairs in the famous deleted scene from *The Exorcist*.)

The Elves Passing Through

These changes in the film are, I think, changes for the better; they establish a sense of danger, and it grows quickly and consistently. There's another change that is fairly large: in the movie, Frodo and Sam watch a band of elves passing through the woods to the Grey Havens; they don't speak to them. In the book, a black rider is apparently frightened away by a traveling band of elves that

Frodo, Sam, and Pippin (Merry is not yet with them) meet on the road. Frodo speaks to their leader:

‘Who are you, and who is your lord?’ asked Frodo.

‘I am Gildor,’ answered their leader, the Elf who had first hailed him. ‘Gildor Inglorion of the House of Finrod. We are Exiles, and most of our kindred have long ago departed and we too are now only tarrying here a while, ere we return over the Great Sea. But some of our kinsfolk dwell still in peace in Rivendell. Come now, Frodo, tell us what you are doing? For we see that there is some shadow of fear upon you.’

In the book, the hobbits walk for a time with this band of elves, and dine with them, and even sleep in their encampment. It’s a beautiful scene, and they are the first elves that Sam has ever seen:

Sam could never describe in words, nor picture clearly to himself, what he felt or thought that night, though it remained in his memory as one of the chief events of his life. The nearest he ever got was to say: ‘Well, sir, if I could grow apples like that, I would call myself a gardener. But it was the singing that went to my heart, if you know what I mean.’

This seems at first like it might a bit of a cop-out on Tolkien’s part, but I think it is actually designed to suggest Sam’s tendency to be a bit inarticulate about what he is experiencing; he’s not “learned,” although Bilbo “learnt him his letters.” Later, in Lothlorien, he will surprise us when he composes words in memory of Gandalf; and, of course, at the very end, Frodo left the last pages of the Red Book for Sam.

Gildor: a Loose Thread

We don’t learn exactly where the elves are from, or where they are going, or even who Gildor is. Wikipedia tells us that “Gildor’s ancestry appears to be a loose thread that Tolkien never properly tied up.”

Gildor speaks to Frodo about the black riders, and gives him some advice, but the advice is not surprising, or specific. This helps establish the way in which the elves tend to remain aloof from human affairs. And Gildor has no role in the unfolding story whatsoever, save one: as Frodo leaves Middle-Earth, with Bilbo, Gandalf, and Galadriel, Gildor and his band leaves with them.

And so this small plot digression doesn’t really advance the story much, except to add a little sense of depth to Tolkien’s created world. It also sets things up for parallel events hundreds of pages in the future: Gildor and his band, making their farewell tour of Middle Earth, accompany Frodo for a time as he leaves *his* home, the Shire — twice.

In the movie, the producers decided to use the brief appearance of the elves as a

way to explain that the elves are leaving Middle-Earth. The band of elves in the movie fit in nicely with Tolkien's description; they seem to glow:

They passed slowly, and the hobbits could see the starlight glimmering on their hair and in their eyes. They bore no lights, yet as they walked a shimmer, like the light of the moon above the rim of the hills before it rises, seemed to fall about their feet.

This sets up events in the movie that play out later, in Arwen's story. And so, in the movie, that brief sighting of anonymous elves actually does more to establish the *story* than Gildor and his band do, in the text.

Pippin's Song

In chapter 3, there's also a song. You might recognize it, if you have watched the movie trilogy, because the producers adapted a walking song into the beautiful dirge that Pippin sings in Denethor's halls:

*Home is behind, the world ahead,
And there are many paths to tread
Through shadows to the edge of night,
Until the stars are all alight.*

In the original, the song continues in an upbeat mode:

*Then world behind and home ahead,
We'll wander back to home and bed.
Mist and twilight, cloud and shade,
Away shall fade! Away shall fade!
Fire and lamp, and meat and bread,
And then to bed! And then to bed!*

But in the movie, the producers cherry-picked some of Tolkien's words to yield a much more melancholy song, deeply relevant to the oncoming war:

*Mist and shadow
Cloud and shade
All shall fade
All shall fade*

It's one of the most beautiful moments in the movies, and shows off one of the more brilliant bits of adaptation, in which the producers used Tolkien's words, but in a different context.

Speaking of words and contexts, Tolkien uses the word "fade" many times in *The Lord of the Rings*, and with many slightly different meanings. One could write a whole essay just on his use of that single word! But I will leave that to someone else.

Wednesday

I had to set my phone's alarm for 6:00 a.m., jump up and wake up Grace, and make a batch of bulletproof coffee. Grace had to shower, then get Veronica up. She took Veronica, Elanor, Benjamin, and our three guest children up to Saginaw so she could coordinate various plumbers, inspectors, and other repair folks who are working on the house and our insurance claims. I heard from her that she made it OK, and I heard that the plumber has gotten the main leak upstairs fixed, so that's a minor victory — we can have the water on, so the potential buyer can complete her inspection.

After work I will drive to Grass Lake to pick up the boys.

Elysium Fire

I've finished nine chapters of this novel and it's moving along nicely. It's been a useful stress relief and distraction to spend a couple of hours in the Glitter Band.

Thursday

Last night after I left work, I drove to the home of our friends, who live in Grass Lake, to pick up three of our boys, who had stayed overnight. It's a long, long drive. On the plus side, the section of I-94 from the West side of Ann Arbor to exit 150 is in a lot better shape than the part I use to commute every day. But on the minus side, the side roads are in terrible shape, riddled with potholes, and covered with patches that also have potholes.

One kid, who shall remain nameless, didn't want to leave, and I'm sorry to report that I had to drag him out from under a bed by his shirt and carry him to the car. Then he screamed for much of the hour-long drive home. Then he refused to get out of the car once we were home.

So. Stressful night.

Fixing Up the Old House

Grace came back late with Veronica and five babies. She had a long day. The plumber showed up as planned at the old house in Saginaw, and fixed a broken copper water supply pipe leading into the pink bathroom upstairs. This looks like a classic ruptured pipe due to freezing. We had the pipes drained when we turned off the water in the fall, but apparently the handyman we had on hand to do it didn't really succeed.

So the water is on, which means the buyer should be able to complete more of the plumbing inspection.

He also found a number of small leaks, and we have to decide if we want to try to have those repaired, even if insurance won't cover them. That's about \$1,000

more.

We also had an environmental inspector from Stanley Steemer out, and a furnace guy out, to get more reports for the insurance claim. We had to pay about \$750 out of pocket yesterday, and it's not clear if we'll be able to get any of that back from our insurer.

It's becoming difficult to manage with our house-guest's schedule. We're no longer eating dinners together, which puts us back where we started trying to manage two completely separate sets of meals. This is not workable in the long term and I'm struggling a bit to try to figure out how we can make our home work more like a coöperative under these scheduling constraints.

Friday

It's been a difficult week. It always takes it out of us, when Grace has to travel with the kids up to Saginaw and back. We've been a bit sleep-deprived. Despite this, I managed to get some important code improvements done yesterday, all centered around rationalizing memory usage.

Last night we had a dinner of assorted leftovers, and so managed to eat most of them, although we did have to throw away a few things that were going off. This is another unfortunate side effect of a chaotic week when we have missed some of our usual sit-down meals together.

The Struggle for Time

I've been frustrated this week. I haven't been able to free up the time that I want to spend, the way I want to spend it, for various things: to spend with the kids; to practice guitar; to work on the podcast. Instead I've felt a lot of stress over various things: the money situation; the home sale; our current living situation; the kids' computer situation.

Each evening seems, when I get home, to be already blown, as most of it will be taken up by dishes. Then I hope for a reasonable sequence of events at bedtime, with everyone pitching in to help do the final cleanup and getting ready, and a story, and instead it devolves into screaming babies, kids wandering away from every task, and a situation where I'm stuck herding cats until we don't have enough time for a story. Then we try to have one anyway, and wind up getting to sleep well past midnight — and so I've been overly tired all week, and getting in to work later than I should.

I'm hoping for a better weekend, and a better week.

Finding a Happy Medium: *A Wrinkle in Time*, Chapter 2

At bedtime, I read the kids the second chapter of *A Wrinkle in Time*. In this chapter Meg has her encounter with principal Jenkins and hears again that she should find a “happy medium” in her approach to life. At this stage of the story,

the meaning of this phrase is not entirely clear. She's being asked to compromise — but between what two extremes? It seems to mean that she is being asked to spend more time doing what other people ask, even when she can't see the point of things like studying the exports of Nicaragua, and also to demand less from others, and perhaps to demand less from life itself. One extreme might be the “going along to get along” extreme — don't make waves, just keep your head down and do what everyone asks of you. And the other might be a sort of aggrieved entitlement, always saying “it's not fair.”

Of course one must, especially in childhood and adolescence, accept the guidance and teaching of others. And to have the skills needed to navigate life yourself later, you need to sit through skills-building work which might seem pointless at the time. Learning to pass the “marshmallow tests” in life really is important. I found high school almost unbearably tedious, and even parts of my college education were a real slog. But much of what I was learning was, in retrospect, really just the endurance and patience to chip away at a long-term goal, even when the individual steps towards it were not always gratifying.

In later chapters she will actually find the “Happy Medium” in person. I am looking forward to re-reading that part and trying to understand what L'Engle is getting at with this literal manifestation of a cliché.

Meg's Journey: Manifesting Her Inner Story?

This raises in my mind the odd possibility that we are meant to *doubt* some of what Meg experiences. Are some of her later experiences *created*, or at least shaped, as manifestations of her real home life and school experiences? Are we to see some of the events of the story as either existing inside her head, or emerging from it? As we continue I will be looking for more examples of this. I don't think L'Engle meant for us to believe that Meg's experience took place in her own mind — after all, there are other people with her, and she rescues her father. But aspects of it seem to emerge from her life experience, either as manifestations of her inner world or as events somehow stage-managed for her edification.

This idea is present, in a way, in the movie: inside “The It,” Meg is forced to confront another version of herself — a version with straightened hair and tighter clothes, who lacks glasses, and has a blatantly insouciant sexuality about her. This version seems made up from her dark thoughts about what it would take to conform, and be popular. Meg banishes this vision because she has started to believe that she is not broken, and not a thing that needs to be re-shaped to fit anyone else's expectations. But yet she does find her “happy medium” and does start to live up to the expectations and demands of others.

We also learn that Mrs. Who is using the stolen bedsheets to create “ghosts” for Mrs. Which (witch), props to scare anyone who might visit the “haunted house,” inhabited by the “witches.” There's even a bubbling cauldron in the house, filled with something that smells like a chemistry experiment rather than food. I'm

not sure we ever learn what the “witches” are cooking up. I do think it’s a bit of a loss that the producers of the film didn’t do anything to explore the crone stereotype, and subvert it, as L’Engle did. Instead, as I’ve pointed out in my review, we are shown a world in which women aren’t allowed to be old, as if this was somehow more empowering for them.

The Hobbit Revisited: the Videos of Lindsay Ellis

I’ve been watching YouTube videos by Lindsay Ellis, particularly her three-part series on the recent trilogy of films based on *The Hobbit*. The three parts are:

- The Hobbit: A Long-Expected Autopsy (Part 1/2)
- The Hobbit: Battle of Five Studios (Part 2/2)
- The Hobbit: The Desolation of Warners (Part 3/2)

Ellis says in the first segment “*The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* is so good it makes me angry,” and I’m pretty much with her — I had quibbles here and there, but that film, and the whole trilogy, still holds up very well. My family watches the extended edition trilogy every year, around New Year’s Day.

The Hobbit trilogy — well, not so much. It’s very frustrating to watch. There are fantastic scenes. The films are also overstuffed with a lot of garbage, rushed, last-minute additions given a bit of CGI and color-correction gloss as the films were rushed out the door. Watch these videos to find out what went wrong, and more importantly, how and why. They’re a real education in the craft and business of filmmaking.

The Last Jedi Revisited

I liked *The Last Jedi* a lot, but I understand why a lot of *Star Wars* fans didn’t. So it was interesting to read this essay from Cinemablend, “I Was Wrong About *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*” by Sean O’Connell. He writes about seeing Rian Johnson’s vision more clearly on a second viewing.

It’s not a long essay, but I found it gratifying to read, because some of the *Star Wars* fans I know didn’t like *The Last Jedi*. They *really* didn’t like it.

I have not yet written a full review, but I did write a few notes, in previous blog posts. After watching it again on Blu-Ray, I don’t really feel the need to add anything.

Saturday

I’m not in a great mood.

Last night after work I made a Costco run and got food for the week, and we had a version of our usual Friday night dinner, salmon, salad, and some adorable little lemon meringue mini-pies. They were adorable, but the flavor was nothing

to write home about. I love lemon meringue, but just about everyone makes it too sweet for my taste.

Things have become difficult with the number of kids running around and with Grace and I struggling to give some attention to other projects, including the house sale, dealing with insurance, etc. Fortunately our buyer seems to be pretty dedicated to actually closing the sale.

***Star Trek: The Next Generation* Season 5, Episodes 18 and 19, “Cause and Effect” and “The First Duty”**

We managed to watch a couple of episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* after dinner, with the subtitles on so we could follow the story even when the kids got noisy. We watched “Cause and Effect” and “The First Duty.”

“Cause and Effect”

This is a really fun episode. Before the opening credits, the Enterprise blows up. So then we’ve got to find out what happened and how they get out of it. It’s a time-loop story. Grace is convinced that the recent *Doctor Who* episode called “Heaven Sent” must have been inspired by this story. We see the same actions occur over and over again, but watching closely, the viewer realizes the footage is *not* identical each time. The scenes were shot multiple times, with different readings and camera cuts. Even the explosion effects vary as the events repeat themselves. And there are a number of little jokes: for example, Beverly Crusher keeps knocking over and breaking her wineglass. In the last repeat we think “Hey! She didn’t break the glass!” because she’s not even in the scene; she’s on the intercom to Engineering. But then we hear the sound of breaking glass through the communication link.

This would go in my list of the top ten episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. We even get a very quick cameo by Kelsey Grammer at the end.

“The First Duty”

I’m not sure I’ve ever seen “The First Duty” before. In this episode, Wesley Crusher is a cadet in Star Fleet and his squad of trainee pilots has a fatal accident. It’s one of the better episodes. Grace and I were debating what we think of Wil Wheaton’s acting in this episode: I said that I appreciated him under-playing the emotions, as it seemed to fit well with a character who was struggling to juggle conflicting loyalties. But on the down side, he doesn’t give much impression of being tormented by the situation; I think the viewer mostly has to imagine that he is. Ray Walston as Boothby is great. Robert Duncan MacNeill as Cadet Nicholas Locarno is good. I was a bit startled to realize that I was familiar with MacNeill as Tom Paris in *Star Trek: Voyager*.

The weaknesses of this episode stem mostly from the fact that we don’t really get to know any of the younger characters. Locarno is not portrayed sympathetically

and we don't really get to see his character change; we only hear about, but don't see, the consequences of his action. There is an interesting screenwriting choice: we are told that Locano defends his teammates and tells the investigators that the fatal accident was his fault, and that he bullied them into the fatal stunt. But we don't get to *see* this happen. It would have been a great moment to show on screen, and some of the earlier conspiratorial scenes could have been trimmed to make room for such a scene. It would have shown the moment in which Locarno grew up and took responsibility for his action.

Recording *Moby-Dick* Chapters 28-31

I saw a post on Facebook by our friend Artur; he was talking about this edition of *Moby-Dick*, the Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, the one with deckle-edged paper and a cool illustration on the wraps. It reminded me that I had been meaning to fix up a little recording I made a couple of years back. I had been reading *Moby-Dick* to the kids at bedtime, and trying to make it entertaining for them by voicing the characters. They were having a great time, so I made a recording of chapters 28-31, which are some of the strangest and funniest. There was a place where I missed an edit, and a line was repeated.

I fixed that, but then got bogged down in the details of trying to get a good-sounding audio clip: replacing the instance of Izotope Alloy I used in the original project with an instance of Renaissance Vox, getting the pre-gain right, getting an instance of Izotope Ozone to give me the compression I wanted, etc. I couldn't figure out why the file was compressed but not full-volume. I finally realized the master volume slider was down, something I never usually touch.

Discovering a Bug

Then I couldn't figure out why Logic would not bounce a mono file. And then I converted it to a mono MP3 file, but Safari would not play the MP3! And neither would QuickTime player! I'd get nothing but silence.

So that led me on a quest to try different MP3 encoder settings. Nothing seemed to work. I tried playing it with VLC media player. That program crashed, so I thought something must really be wrong with that MP3. Finally I realized that iTunes would play the file. I downloaded Chrome, and Chrome would play the file. I downloaded Firefox, and Firefox would play the file. There was nothing wrong with the file. The Safari web browser has bugs. QuickTime player has bugs. Apparently a mono MP3 file confuses both of them. At least this one does.

I don't think anyone at Apple has any interest in fixing these bugs.

The MP3 file in question is [here](#).

Using the Kano with a Proxy Server

I'm trying to figure out how to get the Kano to use the proxy server like our other computers. I just sent Kano a request for support:

Hello,

I am trying to configure Kano system to work with a home proxy server. I use this for whitelist-based web filtering.

Initially I could not get the WiFi configuration to use the proxy server, because enabling it apparently makes a request to www.google.com for verification. One of the whole points of using the whitelist is to keep my kids away from Google tracking them, but I enabled www.google.com temporarily and was able to turn on the proxy server.

However, it doesn't seem to work. The Chromium browser does not honor the system proxy settings (and it won't let me specify a proxy server independent of the system settings). There's an error message that suggests I provide a proxy server on the command line. I would attempt to edit the launcher for Chromium, but it uses a command wrapper of some kind and I'm not sure how to change it to specify a proxy server.

I'm looking for a way to prevent my kids from unfiltered internet access on their Kano the same way it works on our other computers in the house.

Thanks!

We'll see if they come back with any sort of useful reply. I don't like the simplified GUI for the proxy server. It has some bad user interface design. For one thing, when you try to turn it on, it tries to hit several web sites. The whole point of a proxy server is potentially to block web sites. So the way it generates errors when my proxy server is working the way I want is obnoxious and confusing.

I am also concerned, although I did not mention this my message, because I also saw the Kano making web requests to Facebook URLs (which the proxy server refused). I was not attempting to load Facebook. We have never signed in to Facebook from the Kano. The security and privacy implications are honestly more than I feel like I can cope with at the moment. I'm not sure whether this is just something that happens normally where certain Kano pages run scripts that access Facebook URLs, or what. I know that Facebook likes to track you from site to site, but I guess I had higher hopes for the Kano ecosystem. I'll have to look into it as I have time.

We're going to be hard-pressed to record and produce a podcast this weekend.

I'm going to see if I can get one of the Chromebooks up and running with Linux. Maybe if there was another machine they could use, they would stop fighting

over the Kano.

I'm pleased to see they haven't broken it yet. It's honestly better than the worst-case scenario I was planning for.

I haven't timed it, but it seems like the Kano's battery life is terrible. To be honest I mostly just expect to use the battery as a UPS and leave it plugged in most of the time. It's supposed to last four hours, but I don't think we're getting that.

I did get a little reading time this morning and I'm almost done with *Elysium Fire*.

I'm feeling kind of demoralized because I totaled up the first quarter "what I've been reading" lists and it seems like I completed only four books in the first quarter of 2018. That's terrible compared to 2016 and 2017. But on the other hand, I've been completing a weekly podcast and a daily journal for the whole year to date. I don't manage to write every single day, but on the days I don't manage, I try to go back and fill in what happened, a day or two later. I've been pretty successful. The number of words I've written so far this year is... large. I don't even want to check, honestly. Maybe I'll try writing a shell script to count the words.

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.

- *State of Decay* (1980 *Doctor Who* serial)
- *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle
- *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 1, Chapter 3: "Three Is Company"
- Lindsay Ellis's trilogy of videos about *The Hobbit* movie trilogy
- *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Season 5, Episode 18, "Cause and Effect"
- *Star Trek: The Next Generations* Season 5, Episode 19, "The First Duty"
- Star Wars: *The Last Jedi* (2017 Film)

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, April 21st, 2018

This work by Paul R. Potts is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.