

# 2018 Week 20: The Week Ending Saturday, May 19th

Paul R. Potts

## Sunday

We had a busy Mother's Day, but managed to record a podcast. We didn't have a guest, but wound up talking mostly about some books, movies, and TV shows that we've been watching. We are still actively working on scheduling guests for future shows.

We had a chicken pot pie for dinner and then I finished editing the podcast.

We had a long story last night: first Joshua and I read the first five chapters of a new book I bought him on Saturday, *The Wild Robot Escapes* by Peter Brown. We enjoyed the first one, *The Wild Robot*, so we've been waiting for the sequel to arrive.

### ***The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 1, Chapter 10: "Strider"**

Next, I read chapter 10 of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, called "Strider." This one of course features Aragorn, also known as Strider. I was struck by his mild and conciliatory manner in print, compared to the way he's made a little more menacing in the film.

There are a few odd details in the text. Aragorn is apparently the person that climbed over the gate into Bree when the watchman's back was turned; as the text describes it, we think that it might be a Black Rider. This doesn't seem quite like Aragorn's style — too much risk of being seen, or shot at with a bow! In this chapter, Aragorn does not yet describe the Black Riders very convincingly. There's an odd detail that is never mentioned in the movie: Merry is apparently rendered unconscious by the "black breath." This is probably not present in the movie because it just would have been too easy to ridicule (the halitosis of Sauron! Aiiiiiiiiiii!!!)

We still haven't seen the Black Riders do much that is truly menacing. Gandalf's letter is revealed, and it concludes with a silly number of postscripts — this reveals just how concerned he is, as well as how distracted. And there is the head-scratching detail about Aragorn's sword: apparently the sword he actually

carries around, in his scabbard, is Narsil, a sword that dates back to the First Age. This seems slightly ridiculous — it’s a broken stump. Is this really the weapon that Aragorn uses to defend himself and defend the borders of the Shire? It makes a bit more sense when we learn that the sword, in Tolkien’s original back-story, is in two pieces, not a number of pieces. In the movie, it was shattered, and the shards are on display in Rivendell. But still, it seems like Narsil, thousands of years old and broken in two pieces, would not be part of Aragorn’s “everday carry” in fighting orcs, Black Riders, etc.

### ***We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson — Conclusion**

After finishing “Strider” and sending the kids to bed, I read Grace the final chapter of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. The ending of the story is quite satisfying. As I mentioned in this week’s podcast, if you read a description of the end of the novel after reading only the first chapter, it would seem unbelievable and unconvincing. But Jackson does such a beautiful job of setting everything up that when we get to the end, it seems like the only possible conclusion. I highly recommend this novel and I’ve really got to read more Shirley Jackson!

## **Monday**

Back at work. It rained until early afternoon. Tonight I’ll go to Costco for groceries. I also need gas. And I’ve got a variety of small errands and phone calls to make. Last night’s sleep was bad: Elanor was restive. So I’m tired today.

## **Evening**

What I bought at Costco:

- a berry pie
- a chicken pot pie
- sliced turkey
- sliced ham
- a box of sliced Italian meats (capocollo, prosciutto, and salame)
- ground turkey
- sliced provolone
- lamb chops
- three dozen eggs
- sliced cheddar
- two boxes of Costco granola
- a jar of Michigan honey
- two bags of kale salad
- two boxes of blackberries
- a bag of rice ramen noodles
- a bag of torta sandwich rolls
- a bag of Costco whole grain bread
- a bag of Dave’s Killer bread

- a 3-pack of Flonase
- a green t-shirt
- a pair of shorts.

The Flonase is pricey: \$49.99 for that 3-pack. But it's been helping me out a lot, and I'm starting Sam on it, too. The t-shirt is a G. H. Bass t-shirt and I have a couple of these; they are suitable for wearing to work, and cost only \$9.99. I have a couple more that I bought a year ago, and they hold up reasonably well to washing. The shorts are also G. H. Bass, cargo shorts, pretty nicely-made for \$16.99.

The cart-load cost \$282.37. Without the clothes and Flonase it would have been more like \$200.00. It's a measure of how stressed our finances are, in general, that this seems like too much to be spending to help feed 12 people for a week (although most of them are children and don't eat all that much). Grace and I are really starting to get worn down by stress. We are hoping, hoping, hoping that the house sale will close soon and we can start — even just start — to feel a little less grinding stress about our money each month.

## Dinner

Dinner was sandwiches, made with the torta rolls, toasted and buttered, and some of our homemade garlic mayo, and the ham and Italian meats. Grace made a smoothie out of some expiring strawberries and bananas. We had salad with it, and then had the pie for dessert.

After dinner Grace took the cheddar and turkey to our friend. I was going to try reading the kids a story, but Veronica went with Grace and baby Elanor was noisy. So the story didn't happen. Grace got back close to midnight.

Grace is firming up her plans for the weekend. She will drive to Connecticut to attend a family member's funeral. On Wednesday she will drive to Saginaw to pick up a rental minivan. So she will be gone Thursday through Monday. I have a tentative plan to work from home Thursday, Friday, and Monday. I'm hoping for good weather so that the kids will play outside.

## Tuesday

Elanor slept better last night. We got the windows open and the fan on and it wasn't too uncomfortable. Today will be cooler.

The kids stole my hairbrush again.

The bathtub drain is almost completely clogged. I've been putting an enzyme cleaner down the drain for a couple of days, but I don't think it is really helping, since this is pretty clearly a hair clog. I used the plunger on it this morning. The plunger is not very effective, because there's an overflow drain, and I'm this means I'm pushing or pulling air through the overflow drain. But the plunging will move things a little. I managed to get a few handfuls of hair out.

I would be able to snake it, but this drain has a permanently attached stopper. I can't even fit one of those thin, flat plastic snakes around the stopper. It works if I use the extreme clog remover (basically, straight sodium hydroxide, *aka* lye). I'm not really happy having to use these things a lot, because of our pipes, and because we have a septic tank.

We had a screen to catch hair and keep it from going down the drain, but the kids tore it up. I guess I need to get yet another one.

Breakfast was Costco granola and coconut milk (at home), and cold brew and yogurt (at work).

Webmail is down again. For the fourth time in two weeks.

On the plus side, it does seem that with regular intake of sauerkraut, yogurt, and antacids, and some occasional peace and quiet, my reflux is improving a bit. I don't think it will really go away completely until we get the money situation moving in the right direction again.

## Wednesday

Lasts night Grace roasted the lamb chops and wilted a bag of spinach and we had a delicious dinner.

Because she is about to leave town, we needed to record this coming Sunday's podcast episode last night. We recorded a "hot take" episode about the events in Gaza. Gaza has been on our minds a lot, and weighing heavily on our feelings, so I'm very glad we got something out, even something rough. We are committed to doing our best to get *a* show out once a week, not necessarily only a *good* show. We are putting our faith in the idea that even if some individual shows are rough, going through the process of recording and producing them every week, and listening to ourselves, means they will improve.

I was not initially planning to produce and upload the episode last night, but because it was short, it didn't take that long to process, and I realized that it might be very difficult to get quiet time to work on the episode with Grace away. So I went ahead and published it.

### ***The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R Tolkien, Chapter 11: "A Knife in the Dark"**

After finishing the podcast, I went upstairs and read half of chapter 11 of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. This is the chapter called "A Knife in the Dark." In this re-read, I noticed some of Tolkien's interesting systems of imagery. We return briefly to check in on Fatty Bolger, who is living in Frodo's house at Crickhollow and trying to maintain the illusion that Frodo is still there:

Fatty Bolger opened the door cautiously and peered out. A feeling of fear had been growing on him all day, and he was unable to rest or go to bed: there was a brooding threat in the breathless night-air.

And then:

There came the soft sound of horses led with stealth along the lane. Outside the gate they stopped, and three black figures entered, like shades of night creeping across the ground. One went to the door, one to the corner of the house on either side; and there they stood, as still as the shadows of stones, while night went slowly on. The house and the quiet trees seemed to be waiting breathlessly.

The word “breathless” is significant here and fits in with the riders, with their “black breath,” Merry’s going out for a “sniff” or “breath” of air, and particularly in Merry’s dreams. First, in Bombadil’s house:

It was the sound of water that Merry heard falling into his quiet sleep: water streaming down gently, and then spreading, spreading irresistibly all round the house into a dark shoreless pool. It gurgled under the walls, and was rising slowly but surely. ‘I shall be drowned!’ he thought.

Then, when Merry was rendered unconscious by the “black breath,” Nob reported that

He seemed to be asleep. “I thought I had fallen into deep water,” he says to me, when I shook him.

Merry seems to be particularly susceptible to dreams, or visions, or possessions; recall that he “channeled” a long-dead warrior on the Barrow-downs, and “sniffed” or “breathed” the “black breath.” And when he returns to the Prancing Pony,

He shut the door hastily, and leaned against it. He was out of breath. They stared at him in alarm for a moment before he gasped: ‘I have seen them, Frodo! I have seen them! Black Riders!’

When the village raises the alarm, the held “breath” is let out to blow the horns, and Tolkien starts to refer to gales and winds:

All about Crickhollow there was the sound of horns blowing, and voices crying and feet running. But the Black Riders rode like a gale to the North-gate. Let the little people blow! Sauron would deal with them later.

Back in Bree,

Frodo soon went to sleep again; but his dreams were again troubled with the noise of wind and of galloping hoofs. The wind seemed to be curling round the house and shaking it; and far off he heard a horn blowing wildly.

There are more references to open windows, flapping curtains, and cold air.

Tolkien’s dated, racist language in referring to Bill Ferny’s companion from the South is unfortunate: he has “a sallow [that is, yellow] face with sly, slanting

eyes” and in three places Tolkien calls him “squint-eyed.”

On their journey, as they approach Weathertop, the hobbits and Aragorn see flashes of light in the night. We will later learn, of course, that these flashes were caused by Gandalf’s engagement in a battle. Gandalf will later tell his story, in the chapter “The Council of Elrond.”

I galloped to Weathertop like a gale, and I reached it before sundown on my second day from Bree — and they were there before me. They drew away from me, for they felt the coming of my anger and they dared not face it while the Sun was in the sky. But they closed round at night, and I was besieged on the hill-top, in the old ring of Amon Sûl. I was hard put to it indeed: such light and flame cannot have been seen on Weathertop since the war-beacons of old.

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves! If you are following along in the text, keep an eye out for more “breath” imagery, and more ways in which the seemingly minor characters, Merry and Pippin, are connected to events by their dreams and visions.

## LabVIEW

At work I’m slowly but surely getting my head back into LabVIEW. One of the things I like about LabVIEW is the explicit typing; it is a more strongly-typed language than C. But... one of the things I *don’t* like about LabVIEW is the lack of explicit typing; it is a more weakly-typed language than C.

How can both those things be true? Well, “clusters” (the rough equivalent of “structures” in other languages) exist, and typing is enforced, but yet types can be hard to work with. I’m not an expert at it yet, so I’m sure that I’m still missing some tricks, but it is unfortunate that trying to enforce precise types seems to be considered “advanced.” It doesn’t seem to be very easy to apply a specific type to a cluster, and the programming environment will often let you get away with using types that are *compatible* — that is, clusters that have the same types of elements in the same order. In fact, it seems to be a little unclear how specific types are actually managed. You can’t, as far as I can tell, just pop open a property dialog and tell LabVIEW that a cluster should have an explicit, named type; and I don’t think there is a way to see some kind of list or registry of the type definitions used in a given VI, or across VIs.

In many cases types are just hooked up automatically when you wire things together, and that’s helpful. I like the way you can hook a cluster to an output of a “for” loop, and LabVIEW will automatically build an array of clusters. Arrays are safer than they are in a language like C; the “language” seems to be memory-managed, and tagged, and array objects contain within them their length, and so they can be iterated with complete safety. But it’s confusing when I try to reuse exact types from one VI in another.

Some things that ought to be easy remain pretty hard. For example, there are

enumeration types, and they have an underlying representation (a numeric type). Let's say you want to read an enumeration from a text file. There ought to be a reliable and rigorously error-checked way to turn a string into an enumeration. Enumeration types are precisely specified, so it ought to be easily possible to make the LabVIEW runtime look for exact matches between the string and the enumerations, and generate errors in an ambiguous situation. In the forums, I saw a suggestion to use the "Scan from String" function.

This works, if the strings you are parsing *precisely* match your enumerations. But they also pass "false positives." For example, I have an enumeration type that is configured with the enumerations "RX," "RX-1," and "RXM." If I feed the "Scan from String" function the string "RXZ" it goes not generate an error, but instead recognizes the enumeration "RX."

Using the generic "Scan from String" function this way is confusing; it has many input terminals. We hook an "Enum Constant" object to the "default 1" input terminal, and when we do this, the "output 1" terminal changes its type from the default "double" to the type of the enumeration. The built-in documentation reads:

If you wire an enumerated type to default 1, the function finds substrings matching the string values in the enumerated type and returns the corresponding numeric value of the enumerated type.

This description is not very precise; if the function just attempted to match the first available substring, the string "RX-1" would always match the "RX" enumeration, which doesn't happen. It seems like perhaps the implementation looks for matches, starting with the longest enumeration of the type.

In general, this function makes the same design mistake as *scanf* — it tries to be all things to all people.

If I wanted to write my own VI to convert a string precisely to an enumerations and throw out errors when a precise match is not found, I could do so; I'm sure I could search an array of strings for an exact match. If a match was found, I could coerce the index of the match into the enumerated type. But I was not, at least quickly, able to figure out how to turn my "Enum Constant" object into an array of strings to search. And if I created my own array to search, I'd be violating the DRY ("don't repeat yourself") principle; my array would have to be manually updated if some future maintenance programmer ever changed the enumeration. That future maintenance programmer might be me.

So, for now, I'm sticking with the imprecise "Scan from String," but I'm not happy about it; this should be easier, and the built-in functions ought to, by default, help me do precise error-checking, rather than doing what amounts to a "grep," when parsing my input files. And I hate that whenever I actually try to *test* my program's error-handling, I find that it is, by default, much too forgiving precisely where I want it to be demanding. And I hate the way that LabVIEW tends to suck away my limited time when what I am trying to do seems like it

should be a straightforward and common task.

Like all proprietary languages I've worked with, the ecosystem tends to be *designed* to feed an army of certified consultants and architects, which means that the incentives to simple, "candy-machine" interfaces are missing, and in fact the reverse is true; National Instruments, its training arms, and its armies of consultants all have a vested interest in complexity and hidden features.

### **DreamHost**

DreamHost apologized, but webmail is not accessible today... *again*. This is the fifth day I've been unable to access my e-mail for at least part of the day in the last two weeks. We are trying to close on a home sale and manage some critical repairs. Grace and I are getting important updates from our seller's agent and insurance company almost daily.

I'm scratching my head wondering if we have to figure out how to abandon DreamHost. I've been using their service for our (modest) web hosting and e-mail needs since Grace bought our domain, "thepottshouse.org," sixteen years ago. As if I didn't have enough infrastructure things to worry about.

### **Thursday**

#### ***City of Glass* by Paul Auster**

I'm working from home today. This morning Grace left for Connecticut with Elanor, to return probably on Monday. We didn't have a story for the kids last night but I did start reading Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, the first novel of his New York Trilogy, out loud to Grace.

I have a feeling Grace isn't really going to click with this one. I'm wondering if I will. Years ago I used to read a lot of so-called postmodern novels. That's a contested category, but contains some amazing books like *Crash* by J. G. Ballard, *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs, and *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon. Some folks apparently include even novels like Nabokov's *Lolita* in this category.

*City of Glass* does not seem as extreme or scattershot as something like *Naked Lunch*, but it is quite strange. I haven't gotten very far yet — just two chapters in. But man, this is a weird book. I did some laughing out loud at the self-referentiality of it all. There's the author, Paul Auster. There's the narrative character, Daniel Quinn. The narrative character is a writer. He writes detective novels. Under a pseudonym. His novels' narrative character is called Max Work. Then a man starts calling Quinn and demanding to speak to Paul Auster... and then things start to get strange.

Webmail is not accessible again. This is the sixth day in two weeks...

## Friday

We heard that the house appraised out high enough for the sale to go forward. That's great news! Something in me unclenched, just a little. It looks like the sale will now very likely go forward. It can't come soon enough.

After work yesterday I packed the kids into the car and we ran some errands. We have a check from Liberty Mutual to reimburse us for money spent on repairs, as part of the damage claims. I can't really understand the statement and estimate they sent; it's very complicated. But I'm glad to get some money back. So we ran out to deposit that, and to get some drain cleaner, and then to get dinner out at Culver's. I also made a stop at Nicola's Books, because the copy of *Mistaken Identity* had come in. I also picked up a copy of *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson, and a copy of *The Martian* (the novel), because that was the movie I was planning to show the kids when we got home. I couldn't remember if we had a copy or not.

It turns out we now have three copies. (Oops.) Does anyone want a spare copy of *The Martian*?

### ***The Martian* (2015 Film, Extended Edition Blu-ray)**

We watched the extended edition of *The Martian*. The older kids really enjoyed it, although I think it was too slow to keep Benjamin all that interested. The extended edition and theatrical edition are on the same disc; you select your choice. There was an edition of the Lord of the Rings movies on DVD that allowed you to select which movie to watch, and if you chose the extended edition, it inserted the additional scenes as it played. This is called "seamless branching." I think this Blu-ray probably works the same way, but I'm not sure about that.

The extended edition is only about ten minutes longer than the theatrical release. Some of the scenes are only slightly extended. We see a little more footage showing just how hard a time Watney has, dragging himself into the hab and performing surgery on himself to remove the broken antenna that has impaled him through his suit. There's also a nice scene that shows Watney completing his co-workers' science experiments, since their mission together was cut short. That's a nice scene, but most of the additional minutes aren't all that important or noticeable.

*The Martian* is a good movie, and I like it quite a bit, but it's not *quite* a great movie. I think it could have reached "great" with a slightly grittier, dirtier, smaller approach to the spacecraft interiors (that is, more realistic all around), and slightly *more* of a focus on the beautiful and austere Martian scenery. Watney *talks* about going out daily just to look at Mars; why not structure the passage of time in the film around this idea?

In a couple of places the drama is "punched up" to the point of silliness, such as the crazy final "catch" scene, which piles skin-of-his-teeth rescue on top of more skin-of-his-teeth rescue. It wouldn't have killed the drama, at this stage

in the movie, to have the carefully plotted trajectories of Watney's final rescue actually *work* without the need for crazy heroics, because we've already seen crazy heroics by the *engineers*, and that, it seems to me, is really what the movie is about.

The movie lacks a strong character arc. Watney's tenacity and sense of humor is apparent in the opening scenes, and it is unchanged in the last scene. The mission commander Melissa Lewis is a strong and compassionate leader and willing to risk her life for her crew in the opening scene, and also in the climax of the film. None of the crew really seem to have an arc in this regard. It *is* interesting how the whole crew agrees to make the same kind of personal sacrifice and take on the additional risk of the rescue mission, just as Lewis was in the opening scenes, but it didn't seem like this was ever truly in doubt.

Some of the best scenes in the whole movie are the moments in which the script uses humor to, paradoxically, make emotionally fraught scenes more convincing. When Watney first communicates with the crew on the *Ares IV*, Martinez types

Dear Mark, apparently NASA's letting us talk to you now, and I drew the short straw. Sorry we left you behind on Mars. But we just don't like you. Also, it's a lot roomier on the Hermes without you. We have to take turns doing your tasks. But, I mean, it's only botany. It's not real science. How's Mars?

This "ball busting" dialogue seems to me both great and very convincing. In fact I'd like to have had more of this sort of thing: of Watney talking to the crew of the *Ares IV*, of Watney talking to himself. As far as I'm concerned the humor could have been even darker and that would have been just fine.

There was a real opportunity to show Watney's convincing mental and emotional slide and whatever extreme measures he had to go to in order to remain sane. We see his *physical* decline, but the most extreme things we see him do, emotionally, is to throw a bit of a tantrum, or admit he is self-medicating with Vicodin. I'm thinking of one of my favorite films, *The Quiet Earth*, here. But Watney just seems a little too well-adjusted for his portrayal to achieve true greatness.

This was an adaptation, of course, and the book was good but somewhat tame, so maybe the screenwriters didn't feel that they could punch up the story, *emotionally*, and instead punched up the high-risk action instead. Having seen the movie three times now, it feels like they stuck to the safer, less rewarding path.

I had a quick call with Grace before I went to sleep. She was still driving. She was going to push on through to make it to Hartford without stopping overnight. I heard this morning that she made it in about 1:30 a.m. and everyone is there safe.

***Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* by Asad Haider**

I read just a bit of *Mistaken Identity* before bed, and a bit more of *City of Glass*. *Mistaken Identity* is dense but seems good. It probably wasn't the best thing to try to read while sleepy, and I'm not sure I like the writing style yet; initially at least, it seems a bit disorganized. But this may be, or at least I hope it is, because the first chapter introduces the critical ideas in a rush, and then the next chapters unpack them. At least, I hope that's how it is structured.

Haider touches on many topics, including the Combahee River Collective and the Clinton campaign, and at least initially his assessment of how the Clinton campaign made *cynical* use of identity politics is something I strongly agree with. But even in the opening chapter he goes beyond this critique, touching on the more radical civil rights figures such as Malcolm X, and brings up the liberal whitewashing of King's actual agenda. I want to see where he goes with this, but Haider is also making important points about how all the identity-based agendas are not created equal; not every struggle is the moral equivalent of the struggle against racism.

*City of Glass* continues to be entertainingly weird!

Have I mentioned recently that I really like these editions?

Note to self: I want to get a copy of this edition of *The Bloody Chamber*.

I've also been continuing to read *The Reactionary Mind* by Corey Robin. This is dry by comparison to *Mistaken Identity*, and I'm not sure it is actually all that good, but I want to give it a fair chance.

I took a mid-day break and went to Costco to get groceries for the next few days, to try to avoid rush-hour traffic. Traffic wasn't too bad. I got a big cheese pizza for dinner, and tortilla strips and a layered dip to have as a snack with tonight's movie. I got some pre-made tortas and breakfast burritos, bacon, and pancake mix, and a coffee cake for breakfast tomorrow. We've got lots of food. Which is great, because I really don't feel like cooking all that much when Grace isn't around to cook with me.

The constant arguing and noise from the kids is kind of beating me up, as is the struggle to get the kids to do some chores, to help keep our house from descending into complete chaos.

There's been another school shooting.

## **Saturday**

Dinner last night was pizza, chips, dip, and root beer... and leftover salad for those few of us that would eat it.

### ***Thor* (2011 Film)**

Last night we watched *Thor*, the Marvel movie from 2011. There are three Thor movies; the only one I've seen before was *Thor: Ragnarok*, which was mostly a fun, colorful party that didn't take itself very seriously.

This first film has a few things going for it, and a few things that fall flat. The portrayal of Asgard is quite gorgeous. I thought that the rainbow Bifröst bridge in particular was wonderful. There are some terrific battle sequences. The giant, fire-breathing robot is a marvel to behold. Chris Hemsworth is certainly not *bad* as Thor in this film; he's just a little bland. His self-deprecating Thor in *Ragnarok* is a lot more fun and convincing.

The bad news is that the story really isn't all that strong. Odin goes into some kind of coma, but it's not clear why. Of course, he wakes up at the maximally critical moment. Loki's motivations and character aren't really well-unpacked. We meet Hemindall, the gatekeeper, played by Idris Elba. He seems like a character we'd like to get to know better, but he spends much of the movie frozen in a giant block of ice.

There's a love interest, Jane Foster, played by Natalie Portman, but while Portman does a reasonably good job, it just isn't all that convincing a romance. And more importantly, it seems to qualify as an example of a *L. I. N. E. T. S.*, or "Love Interest Non-Essential to Story." I got this term from Lindsay Ellis in her review of *Dragonheart*; I'm not sure if it is really a pre-existing term of art in the screenwriting field, or if Ellis just made it up. But either way, go watch her videos; I was especially impressed by her long video essay about *Rent*, both the stage musical and the movie; as a fan of the soundtrack album who saw the touring company version of *Rent* back in the nineties, she really made me reconsider what I like and don't like about *Rent*.

But anyway. I'm digressing; back to *Thor*. Some of the minor characters are more fun to watch: Stellan Skarsgård as Erik Selvig is fun to watch, as is Colm Feore as Laufey (the king of the frost giants). Overall, I think the critical consensus is correct, and this movie has some fun battles and nice details, but it just doesn't rise to greatness.

I'll keep an eye out for a discounted copy of *Thor: The Dark World*. We'll probably watch it, even though the reviews are even poorer than those for *Thor*. I hear Natalie Portman gets to go to Asgard, which sounds fun, but it sounds like it wasn't enough to save the movie, and I'm doubting that her relationship to Thor will wind up being important to the story.

Breakfast this morning was a coffee cake, coffee, chicken sausage with apple and gouda cheese, and fried eggs. I fried up a dozen sausages but they were not popular, although I thought they were quite good. So we have six in the refrigerator. Pippin was horrified by the cheese oozing out of his sausage, calling it "animal blood," and then he wouldn't eat anything at all. So this is unfortunately typical for Pippin; eventually he'll eat something.

### ***City of Glass* by Paul Auster (Concluded)**

Last night and early this morning, I finished reading *City of Glass* by Paul Auster. This is a satisfying short novel, but it definitely is a piece of “metafiction,” about itself and the process of writing and the relationship of writers to their works. The story gets progressively stranger as nothing that has been set up takes the obvious and expected path. In the end we actually get an authorial intrusion; the author, writing in the first person, tells us about how he heard this strange story and was given Quinn’s notebook by his friend, the character in the book named Paul Auster. But then... who is the author?

Overall it’s an intriguingly weird book, but it’s definitely not for everyone. If you’re expecting a straightforward detective novel, rather than a sort of existential detective novel about the relationship between author, characters, and readers, you will likely be disappointed.

I probably won’t read the rest of this one to Grace, because I’m not confident she would really enjoy the self-referentiality; it seems like a story written for writers, or at least English majors. I’m guessing she would probably describe the story as “crawling up its own butt.” We had a good time with *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, though, so I’m thinking maybe I’ll read her *The Haunting of Hill House* next. And I will almost certainly read the next two books in Auster’s New York Trilogy; they are also quite short.

It’s rainy and overcast today so the kids are having a Harry Potter movie marathon.

I have one more movie of the four I bought a couple of weeks ago; the kids haven’t seen it yet, and don’t know about it. It’s Denis Villeneuve’s *Arrival*. We’ll see how they do with the Harry Potter marathon, how the weather goes, how our errands go, etc. Maybe we’ll watch *Arrival* tonight, or maybe not. It’s one of my favorite movies, and I’m sure at least a couple of the older kids will like it, although the younger ones may very well be bored.

### **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.*

- *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson
- *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 1, Chapter 10: “Strider” and Chapter 11: “A Knife in the Dark”
- *City of Glass* by Paul Auster (in the trade paperback *New York Trilogy* Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, with an introduction by Luc Sante and illustrations by Art Spiegelman)
- *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, with an introduction by Laura Miller and cover art by Aron Weisenfeld)
- *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* by Asad Haider

- *The Martian* (2015 film) (Extended Edition on Blu-ray)
- *Thor* (2011 film)

*Pittsfield Township, Michigan*

*The Week Ending Saturday, May 19th, 2018*

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