

2018 Week 21: The Week Ending Saturday, May 26th

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

Yesterday afternoon I ran a few more errands. I got some of our laundry detergent, some dishwasher soap packets, etc. I also took the truck to the Chevrolet dealership on Jackson Road to see if they had time to change out some headlights. They did not. So I have an appointment for tomorrow morning.

We have a confusing situation with our insurance. Apparently they are paying us rather than paying the contractors. This is not how they did it last time. I have to try to figure this out with Grace. I'm not sure they have taken into account the money we already spent on the recent damages and put those expenditures towards our deductibles for the two claims. So we might wind up having to pay more than expected, if we can't get this straightened out quickly, and it looks like we might have to do more by way of managing contractors than we were expecting. Which might mean a lot of trips to Saginaw... and the truck really is not in great shape. More to put on the credit cards. I keep telling myself that we just have to get through this bottleneck, and then our monthly expenses will be dramatically lower, and we'll be able to dig ourselves out of the hole.

Last night was frustrating — we were going to watch *Arrival*, but after dinner the kids blew off all their chores, and went outside and played for an hour instead of clearing the table and cleaning up. So I cancelled the movie.

Then we were going to have a story, but Veronica threw a screaming tantrum over a torn-out page in our copy of *D'Aulaires' Book of Norse Myths*. The page was torn into pieces and crumpled up. I think Elanor probably got hold of the book. It's pretty low-quality paper; newsprint-like. But Veronica insisted that I try to repair it with tape. The only tapes we have on hand are clear packing tape and blue gaffer tape. We don't buy the kids scotch tape because they inevitably just unspool the whole roll. It's one of our kids' books; they get damaged. I don't get as unhappy about it as I might get about, say, the destruction of a rare first edition. If it gets too bad we can get another copy.

But the meltdown was the last straw, so I just couldn't continue. I sent them to bed, drank a glass of scotch, and went to sleep myself.

This morning: coffee, blueberry pancakes with a homemade black raspberry syrup, and a Costco quiche.

I spent a little time this afternoon trying to sort out some books and make sure my catalog is up-to-date. In particular I was trying to make sense of our recent Library of America books. I think a few of them might be lost somewhere in the basement. I am still really looking forward to some day soon when I can have all these books up on shelves and accessible.

Dinner will be pasta and meat sauce, some Costco taquitos, and salad.

Grace didn't leave Connecticut until early this afternoon, so she will be staying overnight somewhere in Pennsylvania, then hopefully getting back to Saginaw in time to return the car as planned, then coming back down here, maybe early tomorrow evening.

Monday

It's a lot of work to cook and clean up 3 meals a day for nine people!

Last night we did in fact manage to watch *Arrival*. I'm not sure the kids got all that much out of it, other than the cool aliens. Benjamin was bored and liked to disrupt things.

After the movie Veronica went off to bed early, but I read the kids *A Wrinkle in Time* chapter 3, which leads up to the moment that the children meet Mrs. Which. I was reminded all over again how clever and humane L'Engle's portrayal of the "witches" is, and how badly DuVernay and company tortured L'Engle's ideas. It's maddening all over again.

I was up early this morning so I could get on the road before 8:00, to try to make sure I got the truck to the dealership in time for my 9:00 appointment. Fortunately traffic was not that bad on I-94, so I managed to get there by 9:15 or so. But of course that meant an extra hour of waiting. It still took almost two hours to get the oil changed, tires rotated, and two headlight bulbs replaced. To try to make things easier for Grace when she gets back tonight, I picked up a few more food items at Costco that are either ready-to-eat meals or nearly so: a chicken pot pie, a container of cooked ribs, a container of macaroni and cheese, some more sausages, etc. The kids are having macaroni and cheese for lunch and continuing their Harry Potter movie marathon; they've now reached the two-part *Deathly Hallows* movies.

Evening

The kids continued their Harry Potter marathon but got stalled out before finishing *Deathly Hallows* part 1 because the younger kids were demanding *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2*. I struggled to stay focused and get the rest of my day's work hours in. I'm working in LabVIEW. For some reason my work laptop stalls when starting up, sitting at a plain blue screen for perhaps

ten minutes before finishing the boot-up process. This seems to be because LabVIEW code, starting up, waits a long time to try to contact services on the network, before giving up.

Google tells me that this is a thing. I have not tested this fix yet.

I'm not the only one to have a critique of LabVIEW.

Grace made it back to Ypsilanti! She still needs to get the rental car up to Saginaw and get back here, so I will drive her, leaving here at 8:30, and getting back... well, probably about midnight.

Tuesday

It was almost 1:00 when we got home. We left Ypsilanti a bit before 8:00. We had to drive to Saginaw, drop off Uncle Jim, then put some gas in the rental car, then drive to the old house on Adams, pick up my car, then drive to the rental place, drop off the rental car, then put gas in my car, then drive home. Nothing terribly interesting, just time consuming when you add in the stops for gas and bathroom breaks and time spent getting bags in and out of cars and searching the rental car to make sure nothing was left in it. The rental car was, I think, a 2017 Honda Odyssey. It was so very strange, compared to the Odysseys of years past. The key is a strange, large chunk of plastic that you insert and twist in a keyhole on the dashboard, not the steering column. There were so many gratuitous changes to little things, like heater controls. It seems like these things follow fashions, rather than functionality changes. Everything was motorized, including the rear door latch. I'm really not a fan of all these extraneous motors. There's just so much to break, and no doubt the repairs are very expensive, and require expensive parts, and possibly taking the car to a dealership rather than some other repair shop.

On the drive, our housemate called to report that the kids were trying to murder each other. And when we got home, we found that they had done none of the little cleanup tasks. Food was sitting out, they had opened up multiple containers of coconut milk (there were four containers open). The TV and Blu-ray player were on, with a DVD menu playing over and over, and Daniel was asleep on the floor of the family room. One child has bruises on his face. We are not sure how that happened, or what kind of consequences the kids should face. There was an adult at home, but she was upstairs and did not see the fight, just heard it. They were watching movies and it seemed reasonably safe to leave them semi-supervised for about 4 hours. I guess it was "reasonably safe" in that no one was killed or needed to go to a hospital emergency room. But Grace and I are appalled at our own children. Do they really need an adult in the room with them at all times?

I got up and out a bit late, but it wasn't that bad. It's cool and overcast again. I took a couple of leftover hard-boiled eggs and some buttered bread for breakfast, and drank a small coffee in the car, and brought a breakfast burrito for lunch.

So — lots of eggs. Which means lots of gas. Sorry, co-workers.

I don't have any particular reading or viewing to report, from the last couple of days.

Wednesday

In the LabVIEW Weeds

Yesterday afternoon I spent working mostly with LabVIEW code again. It's coming back to me and I'm remembering more from my training. I still find the visual presentation frustrating. As I'm looking at a screen full of LabVIEW "code," I find myself mentally translating it into a language that, in my head, looks something like Haskell; it has something resembling the Maybe monad, for error-handling, and something resembling **case** statements. I'm still frustrated with the way that it does not really seem to raise the level of abstraction, and in several ways it makes the logic opaque. For example, the options of a **case** structure are hidden until you click through them. You can't see the options at a glance, the way you can see them in a text-based programming language.

There are some things I appreciate: for example, I appreciate the way that a **case** structure has input and output "tunnels" and if you leave an output tunnel unconnected, in one of the "branches," LabVIEW won't let you get away with that. (But this also means, I think, that if you want to modify a variable (feed something into a "wire"), in one of the "branches" of the **case**, the variable has to "tunnel" out of all the "branches." In a text-based language, it seems to me, the logic of which code modifies which variables is at least as apparent, if not more so.

Refactoring code is tedious; it's like having to modify an embroidery project. You have to unpick a lot of threads. Some refactorings are easy, such as creating a function out of some existing code. In LabVIEW the equivalent is to create a "sub-VI." But this winds up burying functionality in a different source file; in a very "factored" case, you can wind up with one file per "function." Following the logic between nested VIs requires having two windows open for each one. If you are single-stepping through this, it gets pretty crazy. All the GUI for all this is hugely resource-intensive, and gets slow.

Traditional code in a text file is essentially one-dimensional, but one can apply a sort of partial second dimension using indentation to illustrate control flow. Inserting functions in a module or rearranging the code within a function involves text-editing operations. When function calls are "nested," they don't have to be further indented, and don't have to involve code in a different source file, although they can. The one-dimensional nature of the source text means that inserting or removing code just pulls up or pushes down the rest of the code at the insertion point; aside from adjusting indentation, that "partial" second dimension, there's no other "rearranging" one has to do in order to fit code into an existing function. In LabVIEW you have to make room for it.

The development environment will help with this, expanding a case structure or scrolling for you, but once the “code” of a “function” exceeds your screen size, you’re starting to get into trouble. That point — where the code exceeds your screen size — is essentially arbitrary and tied to your specific screen.

Wiring can get crazy. LabVIEW style guides always warn against routing wires behind things. But it keeps happening; when I draw wires, LabVIEW *often* seems to route them behind my cases and comments. And apparently if you are studying to get LabVIEW certifications, your code can also get dinged for “excessive bends” in your wires — that is, routing around things.

And speaking of comments, in a one-dimensional code “world,” with indentation, it ought to be relatively easy to figure out what code a comment applies to. In the two-dimensional LabVIEW world? Not so much. What’s the convention? And if you do heavily comment your code — well, the comments get in the way of the wires, and since the wires aren’t supposed to route behind things — bam, you’ve got wires looping all over the screen in their effort to route around the comments. Ugh.

One thing that might be interesting: an option to *hide* all the wires. But this unfortunately would also hide any information about *sequencing*.

Did I mention that outside of the requirements of the wiring, the sequencing often feels arbitrary? When single-stepping the code, the actual order of operation can hop around the screen, as long as it follows the relative ordering imposed by the wiring — kind of like in functional programming languages such as Haskell, which uses lazy evaluation.

Really, the more I get into it, the more I can see how it has advantages for simple programs and for programmers who are not highly experienced, but as I’m not that, I keep feeling the urge to write in something more functional and even more strongly- and explicitly-typed. A lot of my LabVIEW coding time *feels* productive because I’m dragging things around on the screen; “look, I’m busy!” But it’s hard to imagine that in terms of actually completing functionality, I wouldn’t be faster in just about anything, even a language I don’t particularly love, like Python.

I keep wanting to just paste in some “code” in my LabVIEW VIs. Honestly I don’t think it would be that hard to add a textual representation that still obeyed all of LabVIEW’s typing and constraints.

In fact, since at the low level computers essentially execute a *tape* — a one-dimensional “text” — there *is* such a representation; whether an annotated graph, or a text, there is a representation of your LabVIEW code that, because it is a proprietary program, you aren’t allowed to see; this representation becomes the executable.

And something deep within me finds that, idea, that I’m not *allowed* to see under the hood, to tinker, or work on a program in *that* representation, fundamentally and deeply offensive.

Wednesday Evening

Dinner was ribs, brown rice, and cooked cabbage. I was tired and wanted to get to bed early, but when two of the kids came in to say goodnight and blithely wanted a hug and a kiss, Grace and I had to have some words with them about their behavior over the last five days and how angry and frustrated we were with them. It seemed absolutely demented that they would walk in as if nothing had happened, and we didn't have any issues to work out, when the previous night these two siblings had been in a screaming fistfight with each other while I was driving the round trip to Saginaw.

We didn't really *finish* that conversation because Grace and I are honestly kind of out of ideas with these two. One thing we have tried to convey is how much their younger siblings follow their example. And so they are, in a way, undoing, or working against, the habits of diligence and discipline we are trying to inculcate in their siblings. And, that makes us even more angry.

We didn't sleep all that well; Grace has my heartburn. We had a phone call with our realtor. Things are still more or less on track to sell the house, closing in perhaps two or three weeks. We just have to hold out.

Breakfast was an almond milk latte and vegan muffin.

I ordered a couple of copies of *The Benedict Option* so Grace and I can read it and discuss it on the podcast.

At lunchtime I ran out to Meijer to buy some lunch food and to deposit a check from Liberty Mutual. Grace called me with some confusing and startling news: apparently the reason the bat damage claim has been held up in processing is that the estimate for repair work came in at over forty thousand dollars.

Our understanding is that the remediation proposed involves repair to an attic ventilation panel, replacing insulation, and cleaning the ducts which might be contaminated with bat guano. But it's hard to believe that his work could sensibly cost as much as, say, a completely new roof.

So, we're working through our options here. The process of trying to get these repairs done has been endless and extremely confusing.

Thursday

Last night's dinner was a pasta salad made with Costco rotisserie chicken pieces, olives, carrots, and homemade mayo. Pretty good!

We are getting a second estimate on the bat damage repairs.

I'm Not Your "Honey," Sweetie

This morning at Harvest Moon Café I told the manager, on the way out the door: "I'm a 50 year old man with seven children. Please tell my waitress that I

really don't like being called 'honey,' 'sweetie,' or other terms like that, and find it very disrespectful."

This is the first time I've ever spoken to anyone about restaurant servers speaking to me like this. I've often seen people do it to Grace, but I have tended to assume it was part of the infantilization of black women that white people do. But I'm pretty clearly a white male. I'm not sure what exactly offended me this morning, except that it was so constant and so over-the-top silly. Maybe it had something to do with a woman half my age speaking to me as I might speak to an eight-year-old. But now that I think about it, I don't even speak to children like that. I guess maybe I've just reached the "get off my lawn!" stage of my life.

We didn't have a story last night, but Grace and I actually managed to get to bed a little early and so didn't sleep too badly, although Elanor was wakeful (she had gotten a nap before dinner).

At work this morning I found that my computer had blue-screened and rebooted yet again overnight, just sitting there. I made another image backup.

Friday

***The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 1, Chapter 11: "A Knife in the Dark"**

We finally managed to have a decent story last night. I read the kids the second half of chapter 11 from *Fellowship*, called "A Knife in the Dark." This is the penultimate chapter in "Book One," the first half of *Fellowship*. I've had to explain to the kids several times: *The Lord of the Rings* is one big novel, broken into six "books" or sections, and these were originally published in three physical volumes. This leads people to believe that it is a "trilogy," and it really isn't; it isn't three novels. Between "books," the story doesn't conclude; in fact, Book One ends in a cliffhanger situation, and the first *volume*, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, certainly does not *conclude* the story in its final chapter, "The Breaking of the Fellowship."

"A Knife in the Dark" is a good example of how Tolkien achieves drama in these chapters, really in spite of, and not because of, his main storytelling impulses, which seem to be digression and world-building. In the book, Aragorn doesn't seem to be all that good at his job; he confesses to several mistakes. If he had been really good at it, maybe the hobbits would have avoided the Black Riders altogether! Although that would not allow for the dramatic confrontation. Maybe instead we'd be reading about another hobbit meal at the "Forsaken Inn" that Aragorn briefly mentions; we don't know a lot about that Inn, except that in some drafts of *The Hobbit* Tolkien described a "Last Inn," a deserted building east of Bree, which might be the same place.

In the movie, the hobbits Merry and Pippin foolishly light a fire on the peak of Weathertop, a hill holding the ruins of a watch-tower, which attracts the attention of the Black Riders, and Frodo yells at them to put it out. The peak

is visible for miles around. The Black Riders converge on Weathertop and there is a dramatic fight; Frodo feels overwhelming pressure to put on the ring, and does so. That all follows the book fairly closely, but there are some differences.

In the book, the traveling party explores Weathertop and finds evidence that Gandalf may have been there three days earlier, but they don't *camp* there; they camp in a "dell," a more secluded spot. They see the Black Riders converging on their position, and so they have plenty of warning that they will be arriving soon. They build a fire, and then Aragorn prepares them for the fight by building up the fire into a huge bonfire, sharpening everyone's swords, giving the hobbits a brief tutorial on which end of a sword to hold, and establishing a perimeter of barriers to snare and trip the riders.

I'm kidding, of course. Aragorn actually does none of those things, deciding that it is better to prepare for the inevitable attack by... reciting several pages of verse, specifically, verses that tell part of the story Beren and Lúthien.

There's no sugar-coating this: these particular verses in the text have some beautiful language in them here and there, but they are dull as dishwater, and they don't really scan or sing all that well. There are so many verbs, describing so little action: music wells and quavers, hemlock-sheaves lie, beech leaves fall, the woodland wavers, the heavens shiver, her mantle glints, a mist quivers, a lark rises, rain falls, water bubbles, starlight trembles and shimmers, hair and arms glimmer. The rhymes are unexceptional: green/seen, fair/there/hair, shimmering/glimmering, glistening/listening, quavering/wavering, shivering/quivering. Here's a taste:

*As Beren looked into her eyes
Within the shadows of her hair,
The trembling starlight of the skies
He saw there mirrored shimmering.
Tinúviel the elven-fair,
Immortal maiden elven-wise
About him cast her shadowy hair
And arms like silver glimmering.*

Tolkien's inclusion of this particular bit of back-story is suggestive of his amazing world-building, but these verses themselves as poetry? Meh. I struggled to sing them in a way that would make it lively, but Merry and Pippin (my children Merry and Pippin, not the hobbits in the story) actually fell asleep. (Merry and Pippin in the story might have fallen asleep too.) There's actually a reason for this: just as Tolkien recycled some of his old coming songs about Tom Bombadil, here he actually inserted a revised version of a much older poem he published in a Leeds University literary magazine, *The Gryphon*, in 1925, called *Light as Leaf on Lindentree*. This was written in a light, rhymed verse which may have fit in a collegiate magazine at the time but doesn't, it seems to me, fit well in this chapter.

Tolkien wrote at much more length about Beren and Lúthien in his unfinished

(but still very long) epic poem *The Lay of Leithian*. Here's an excerpt from Canto III, that seems to describe a similar moment in the story:

*He gazed, and as he gazed her hair
within its cloudy web did snare
the silver moonbeams sifting white
between the leaves, and glinting bright
the tremulous starlight of the skies
was caught and mirrored in her eyes.
Then all his journey's lonely fare,
the hunger and the haggard care,
the awful mountains' stones he stained
with blood of weary feet, and gained
only a land of ghosts, and fear
in dark ravines imprisoned sheer —
their mighty spiders wove their webs,
old creatures foul with birdlight nebs
that span their traps in dizzy air,
and filled it with clinging black despair,
and there they lived, and the sucked bones
lay white beneath on the dank stones —
now all these horrors like a cloud
faded from his mind. The waters loud
falling from pineclad heights no more
he heard, those waters grey and frore
that bittersweet he drank and filled
his mind with madness — all was stilled.*

(*Neb*s is an archaic word that means “nose” or “beak.” *Frore* is an archaic word that means “frozen or frosty.” Did I mention that Tolkien worked on the Oxford English Dictionary? He also uses *span* as the past tense of the verb *to spin*. This is another archaic usage which seems to have lingered on in the work of quite a few British authors, including, oddly enough, Douglas Adams, who used it frequently in his *Hitchhiker's* books.)

You might have guessed that I enjoy reading *The Lay of Leithian* more than I enjoy reading the later verse Tolkien included in this chapter. I imagine that he might have liked to include a bit of *The Lay of Leithian* in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, but found it difficult to choose an excerpt that would be short enough, and also convey the desired tone (presumably Aragorn wouldn't want to distract the hobbits from their fear of the Black Riders by invoking horrifying giant spiders — we're not in Shelob's Lair yet!)

Anyway, having sedated the hobbits with poetry, Aragorn doesn't stop there; he continues to tell the hobbits about how this story ties into other ancient tales (some of which were later published in *The Silmarillion*):

Tinuviel rescued Beren from the dungeons of Sauron, and together

they passed through great dangers, and cast down even the Great Enemy from his throne, and took from his iron crown one of the three Silmarils, brightest of all jewels, to be the bride-price of Luthien to Thingol her father. Yet at the last Beren was slain by the Wolf that came from the gates of Angband, and he died in the arms of Tinuviel. But she chose mortality, and to die from the world, so that she might follow him; and it is sung that they met again beyond the Sundering Seas, and after a brief time walking alive once more in the green woods, together they passed, long ago, beyond the confines of this world.

A Matter of Breeding

Aragorn is fascinated with this story, of course, because it is echoed, in that very Tolkienesque way that stories are reiterated across the ages, going from history to legend to myth, in his own relationship with Arwen. Aragorn is descended from Beren and Lúthien, through Dior, Elwing, and Elros (Elrond's brother), and then through several generations of the Kings of Númenor. Arwen is *also* descended from Elwing, her grandmother, through Elrond. She is much closer to Beren and Lúthien in terms of generations, because Elves have much longer generations.

My kids asked “wait — doesn't that make Aragorn related to Arwen?” And my answer was “yes, yes it does.” They are first cousins “62 or 67 times removed”, which probably makes them not much more closely related, if more closely related at all, than pretty much any two random people on earth currently living. Certainly they are not closely related enough, genetically, to worry about inbreeding, especially since Aragorn's descendants have spent tens of generations “outbreeding.”

***Beren and Lúthien* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Edited by Christopher Tolkien**

The story of Beren and Lúthien has been published in the recent standalone volume *Beren and Lúthien*. To create the text for that that volume Christopher Tolkien sorted through various drafts and versions, some previously published in *The Book of Lost Tales*, *The Lays of Beleriand* and *The Silmarillion*, to make a longer-form, continuous, standalone story. Wikipedia says:

Published in 2017, it is painstakingly restored from Tolkien's manuscripts and presented for the first time as a continuous and standalone story. The intent of the book is to extract a single narrative out of the ever-evolving materials that make up “The Tale of Beren and Lúthien”. It does not contain every version or edit to the story, but those Christopher Tolkien believed would offer the most clarity and minimal explanation.

The story as told in that book lacks internal consistency; for example, Beren is sometimes a Gnome (an early version of Tolkien's elves), and sometimes a

human. Christopher Tolkien believed, it seems, that trying to combine all the interesting story elements in one story and make them consistent would have required too much revision to Tolkien's actual texts. I think he was probably correct about that; it is a good thing that he "showed his work" and one can actually go and read the draft materials he worked from in the published *History of Middle Earth*. It is a shame that Tolkien did not get a chance, or have the inclination, to write a fully polished and coherent version of the story himself.

Riders Attack!

Anyway, all this storytelling takes place in the lead-up to the actual attack of the Black Riders. When it arrives, the party can barely see them, as they are wearing black robes against a black background:

Over the lip of the little dell, on the side away from the hill, they felt, rather than saw, a shadow rise, one shadow or more than one. They strained their eyes, and the shadows seemed to grow. Soon there could be no doubt: three or four tall black figures were standing there on the slope, looking down on them. So black were they that they seemed like black holes in the deep shade behind them.

The hobbits are too filled with terror to do much of anything. Frodo can see them, though, after he puts on the ring:

He was able to see beneath their black wrappings. There were five tall figures: two standing on the lip of the dell, three advancing. In their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helms of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel.

Not much of an actual fight is described at all. Frodo "struck at the feet of his enemy," but apparently to no effect worth mentioning. Strider brandishes flaming pieces of wood, but Frodo apparently blacks out before he sees anything resembling the fight scene in the movie:

At that moment Frodo threw himself forward on the ground, and he heard himself crying aloud: O Elbereth! Gilthoniel! At the same time he struck at the feet of his enemy. A shrill cry rang out in the night; and he felt a pain like a dart of poisoned ice pierce his left shoulder. Even as he swooned he caught, as through a swirling mist, a glimpse of Strider leaping out of the darkness with a flaming brand of wood in either hand.

This scene is very exciting in the movie, but it's been rearranged considerably. I don't really mind. I recall that in Ralph Bakshi's animated film, this scene is much closer to the book — but, mind you, I'm not going to actually *recommend* that you watch Bakshi's *Lord of the Rings*. Although it might be time to watch it again, and show it to the kids.

My work computer rebooted again overnight, logging a blue-screen error. Tonight after work I'll hit up Costco, and we'll have a long weekend!

Saturday

Fellowship of the Ring by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 1, Chapter 12: "Flight to the Ford"

Last night I read the first half of chapter 12 of *Fellowship*, called "Flight to the Ford." Stuff is happening! Frodo's been stabbed by a Morgul blade! The party is rushing towards Rivendell!

We find out that Frodo did manage to cut the Witch King's cloak:

'Look!' he cried; and stooping he lifted from the ground a black cloak that had lain there hidden by the darkness. A foot above the lower hem there was a slash. 'This was the stroke of Frodo's sword,' he said. 'The only hurt that it did to his enemy, I fear; for it is unharmed, but all blades perish that pierce that dreadful King.'

Since the party found Frodo with his sword intact, his stroke must not have landed. It's not all that clear exactly what happened after Frodo passed out. We think the party succeeded in driving away the Black Riders; they left without a fight because they believed that Frodo would soon be under their command. But how was this robe left behind? Did the Witch-king of Angmar really leave the scene without his cloak? Does he wear a cloak over his robe. Do... do the undead ringwraiths get *cold* when they're out hunting hobbits? I have so many questions.

We also get an important detail about the blade that wounded Frodo:

There was a cold gleam in it. As Strider raised it they saw that near the end its edge was notched and the point was broken off.

The blade was designed to break off in the wound. We don't learn for sure yet that there is a piece of the knife embedded in Frodo's shoulder, but later Aragorn suggests it:

'What is the matter with my master?' asked Sam in a low voice, looking appealingly at Strider. 'His wound was small, and it is already closed. There's nothing to be seen but a cold white mark on his shoulder.'

'Frodo has been touched by the weapons of the Enemy,' said Strider, 'and there is some poison or evil at work that is beyond my skill to drive out. But do not give up hope, Sam!'

There's an interesting little bit I had forgotten about. When scouting the Last Bridge, Aragorn finds a token:

‘I can see no sign of the enemy,’ he said, ‘and I wonder very much what that means. But I have found something very strange.’

He held out his hand, and showed a single pale-green jewel. ‘I found it in the mud in the middle of the Bridge,’ he said. ‘It is a beryl, an elf-stone. Whether it was set there, or let fall by chance, I cannot say; but it brings hope to me. I will take it as a sign that we may pass the Bridge; but beyond that I dare not keep to the Road, without some clearer token.’

We will find that the beryl was dropped by Glorfindel; we’re going to meet him soon. He’s not even in the film; in the film, Arwen was given Glorfindel’s role in this part of the story. I will write a bit more about that subject when we get there.

Frodo’s illness is a bit confusing, both to his companions and to the reader.

Frodo dozed, though the pain of his wound was slowly growing, and a deadly chill was spreading from his shoulder to his arm and side. His friends watched over him, warming him, and bathing his wound.

It seems that he is not able to walk, and so they put him on the pony, which slows everyone down because they have to carry all the provisions and luggage that the pony was carrying. And he gets gradually worse; later,

The cold and wet had made his wound more painful than ever, and the ache and sense of deadly chill took away all sleep.

But in the book, he doesn’t seem nearly as close to death as he appears in the movie; he doesn’t seem like he’s dying of tuberculosis. When it is necessary he actually *can* go on foot, at least for a while:

They decided to attempt the climb, but it proved very difficult. Before long Frodo was obliged to dismount and struggle along on foot.

In some ways, Frodo’s sickness seems to be almost more a *spiritual* malaise than a physical illness, although he has trouble with his vision:

...every now and again a mist seemed to obscure his sight, and he passed his hands over his eyes

This reminds me of some of Tolkien’s wording back when Gandalf displayed a bit of his power, to remind Bilbo of his promise to give up the ring:

Bilbo drew his hand over his eyes. ‘I am sorry,’ he said. ‘But I felt so queer. And yet it would be a relief in a way not to be bothered with it any more. It has been so growing on my mind lately. Sometimes I have felt it was like an eye looking at me. And I am always wanting to put it on and disappear, don’t you know; or wondering if it is safe, and pulling it out to make sure. I tried locking it up, but I found

I couldn't rest without it in my pocket. I don't know why. And I don't seem able to make up my mind.'

As Frodo starts to "fade," he is less able to perceive the everyday world around him — hence the "mist" that obscures his vision, like a cataract — and more able to perceive the shadowy realm where the Black Riders live. Both the ring and the wound from the Morgul blade are contributing to this process:

Ever since the sun began to sink the mist before his eyes had darkened, and he felt that a shadow was coming between him and the faces of his friends.

He is becoming a "creature of the night," to use the phrase from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*:

...during the day things about him faded to shadows of ghostly grey. He almost welcomed the coming of night, for then the world seemed less pale and empty.

Again Tolkien mentions Frodo's dreams, or near-dreams, foreshadowing later events when the Black Riders will be mounted on flying beasts:

Frodo lay half in a dream, imagining that endless dark wings were sweeping by above him, and that on the wings rode pursuers that sought him in all the hollows of the hills.

But the process doesn't completely weaken Frodo, or quench his spirits; in this chapter, he can even laugh and banter with his companions at times. When the party discovers the stone trolls, and Aragorn breaks a stick one one of them, we find that Frodo is still in the game:

There was a gasp of astonishment from the hobbits, and then even Frodo laughed. 'Well!' he said. 'We are forgetting our family history! These must be the very three that were caught by Gandalf, quarrelling over the right way to cook thirteen dwarves and one hobbit.'

Sam then lightens the mood considerably by singing a song of his own invention. This one was *far* more fun to sing out loud to the kids, and it's one of my favorite pieces of verse from *The Lord of the Rings*, almost as good as Frodo's song about the Man in the Moon.

We will soon finish chapter 12, which means we will be done with Book One; maybe not in terms of pages, but in terms of storytelling landmarks, we will be halfway through *Fellowship* and one-sixth of the way through the whole novel.

Dinner last night was salmon from Costco, leftover pasta salad, and a big berry pie from Costco. We drank a bottle of wine: 2017 Daisy brand Pinot Grigio blend from the Bieler Family winery in Washington State. This was a ten dollar bottle, and I was pleasantly surprised how good it was; it's a very light, very balanced blend, just the thing for the weekend when we pretty much kick off summer, although technically it does not start for a few more weeks.

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 Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 1, Chapter 10: “A Knife in the Dark” and Chapter 11: “Flight to the Ford”
- *Beren and Lúthien* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Edited by Christopher Tolkien

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, May 26th, 2018

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