

# 2018 Week 31: The Week Ending Saturday, August 4th

Paul R. Potts

## Sunday

### Vacation Report Part One

*(Text based on my hand-written notes)*

We are at our friend's home in Mid Forest Lodge. There is no Internet access, or cell phone service, but I am committed to my weekly posts, writing notes for each day, so I will write notes by hand and transcribe them. I could have brought my laptop, but we were packing in a rapid and distracted way. I left my laptop and Grace's laptop in the basement after charging them from the generator Friday night.

It's terrible how bad my handwriting (or, rather, hand-printing) has gotten. It is some combination of aging and lack of regular practice. Sometimes I feel like I can't hand-write at all anymore.

Saturday was a long and frustrating day. My notes for Saturday were cursory because I was typing on my laptop at Harvest Moon Café, rushing to finish the week's blog post and post it so I could eat my breakfast. Saturday went something like this:

- *Pre-dawn*: the generator was out of gas, so Grace and I got up to refill it and start it up. I think that was about 4:00 a.m. When the power went out, with no artificial light in the evenings Grace and I both fell immediately into a "biphasic" sleep pattern, or "interrupted sleep," waking up for an hour or so about an hour into our night's sleep, then falling asleep again for another three or four hours.
- *Morning*: immediately begin arguing with Grace about the particulars of our long to-do list. She had planned to get out and run errands first. I was so disgusted with our kitchen and family room that I heated water to fill a dish tub and scraped and partially washed all the dirty dishes that would fit in the dishwasher, and then all the rest, which we stacked in the dish tub on the counter, so that nothing was left sitting in water or covered with much food. We could not actually run the dishwasher or disposal and we did not have a second wash tub to give things a scrub

and rinse before hand-drying them, so that's a note for next time: buy a couple more sturdy wash tubs and keep them on hand in the basement with dish soap and bleach so I am prepared to do a three-stage hand wash the next time this happens. (The three-stage wash involves a tub of hot soapy water, a tub of plain rinse water, and a final rinse in water with a little bleach added, before hand-drying the dishes). With the leftover soapy water I was able to flush the first floor toilet, although the tank would not actually fill. This helped our morale and got rid of some of the stink in the house. So having done at least a bit of cleanup, Grace and I headed out for breakfast at Harvest Moon.

- *Late breakfast:* Grace and I both got steak and eggs. We took our laptops and got online using Harvest Moon's WiFi. I posted my weekly blog post, and notes on Twitter, Facebook, and the podcast blog to let people we still had no power and would not be able to get a podcast out this weekend. (The secondary reason, which I did not want to announce publicly, was that even if the power came back on, we intended to be out of town on Sunday). When we were done eating we ordered another order of steak and eggs to go, to feed to Veronica, Merry, and Elanor. On the way home we filled up my car, and the gas can for the generator. We brought home the food, refilled the generator and got it going again, cleaned out two coolers, argued with Veronica about chores, and left again to run more errands.
- *Errands:* our first errand was to Target, where we stocked up on a number of basic toiletry items including the travel-sized tubes of toothpaste we still are forced to keep in the bathroom, because a certain Potts child who shall not be named still can't restrain himself from squeezing out entire tubes of toothpaste. This limits the amount of toothpaste he can waste, and the size of the mess he can make. We also got a few more small containers of things like shampoo and conditioner, some spare band-aids, q-tips, and the all-important Tums, a requirement for old parents traveling with young children.
- *More errands:* next, we went to Meijer to get ice and dry ice for the coolers. Our plan was to take as much food from our refrigerator with us in coolers as possible. This was our attempt to make the best of a confusing situation. We thought the most likely scenario was that the power would not be on when it was time to leave. In that case, we'd have to throw everything else in the refrigerator and freezer away. If the power was back on, we'd be able to leave some things safely. In either case, we'd take a bunch of our food to our friend's cabin to eat. We had asked her what food she needed, and she had told us they could use fruits and vegetables. So we loaded up a cart with bananas, a watermelon, asparagus, cherries, blueberries, apples, tomatoes, and zucchini — basically, things that looked good at Meijer, and were perishable but not *that* perishable (no lettuce), and so would survive the car ride just fine. We got six more large jugs of bottled

water, so that we could use a couple of them to flush the toilets, and leave a few so that our housemate could flush the upstairs toilet at least once a day while we were gone. That seems like a very wasteful use of bottled water, but we couldn't think of any other simple options.

- *Housemate*: the situation with our housemate and her children was a bit difficult, and weighing on my mind. With no air conditioning, no lights, and no running water, we did not think it was a good idea for her to stay at the house. We thought she had a place to stay for at least an evening or two until the power came back on, but there was some difficulty with that, so she needed to stay at our house. There is more to tell about all this, but it isn't really my story to tell; the upshot is that it was another stressor and made me hesitate to leave them, out of concerns about their sanitation and safety and also the safety of our home (for example, if she needed to use candles around her small children). Which reminds me — I need a better solution for next time. We had some nice oil lamps in the Saginaw house, but the kids destroyed them. I guess we need to keep three or four battery-powered camping lanterns on hand, if we aren't going to have a solution involving wiring a generator in to the main electrical panel to power lights. That's a to-do, as soon as funds allow it; I want to get the panel re-organized and correctly labeled by an electrician, as it is a mess now, and get the proper equipment installed so that we can run a generator's 220V output into the panel, and turn on only the things that are urgently necessary; we can use this for the present with this portable generator, with a plan to replace it in the long term with a larger fixed-installation generator, or a whole-house battery, or *something* that solves the same problem.
- *Dry ice*: there was none; Meijer was out. So we had to buy plain old ice, which won't really keep frozen things frozen. We got back home and tried to power through the packing and the rest of the cleanup. We were tired and distracted — that's how I wound up leaving without any underwear except the pair I was wearing. But I did get our phones charged and a new lithium battery pack charged, and made sure we had all the various car chargers and wall chargers we could possibly need, so that Grace and I could keep in touch in case we got separated while driving separately. This was mostly for the drive, since we didn't think our phones would actually work in Mid Forest Lodge (it turned out that we actually had enough signal to send and receive a few text messages, but probably not enough for clear voice calls).
- *Stress ratchet*: another factor that was ratcheting up our stress level was the ongoing, escalating problem of the Saginaw house. In particular, the recent break-ins. We were not sure it was a good time to me ourselves inaccessible to the police, or our neighbors, in Saginaw. We had a tentative plan to meet our realtor there to change our lock-box code at 3:00. That wasn't going to happen, so it was a relief to hear that he went up himself

earlier in the day and changed it. Our realtor has been suggesting that, especially given the intruder situation, it would be a good idea to work with a local realtor who could keep a closer eye on the property. We had not been able to find a good one about eighteen months ago, but he suggested we work with the agent he had been working with on the recent sale that fell through. We considered trying to meet this new realtor on our way, but it was getting to be clear that we weren't going to be passing through the Saginaw area until late in the evening, so we will try instead to meet her on our return trip.

- *Packing*: I removed the seats completely from the Honda Element rather than just folding them up, which obstructs the view out the side windows a bit. This was surprisingly tricky to do. They unlatch and snap out, but the way the mechanism works is not all that obvious, even trying to follow the diagram. But I got them out eventually, and unbroken, except for a small plastic cover. After packing the rest of the things, it was time to grit our teeth and empty the fridge, because we had no confidence that the power would be restored in time to save any of the food. So I shut down the generator and put it away, and we started the unpleasant process of throwing away most of our food, emptying a lot of storage containers right into the trash and cleaning them as best we could without running water. And so, of course, about halfway through that process, the power came back on. It was about 5:30. There was no retrieving the edible food we had already dumped into the trash. But we were able to flush the taps, and the toilets, and the disposal, and we didn't have to throw out everything. This was fortunate. I don't have an exact figure, but a refrigerator and freezer fully stuffed with healthy food including a lot of bottled condiments and all that holds something like six hundred dollars worth of food. Ours did not have quite that much, because we had packed some of it, and because it was at the end of the week when I normally buy groceries for the week, and because we had thrown some of it out, but the fact that the power came back on probably saved us a couple of hundred dollars of food, some of which was not really replaceable, like the lard we had rendered down from pork fat raised by our friends in Grass Lake. I'm really glad we didn't have to throw that out. And so, with a fair amount of trepidation about leaving a lot of rinsed and scraped but dirty dishes, with a dishwasher load running, we left.
- *The boys*: we first had to stop in Brighton to pick up the four older boys, who had mercifully missed the whole power outage drama. I had to follow Grace with the Element, because I don't know the route very well. Fortunately, I did not lose her. Then we pressed on towards Saginaw. We stopped at the Culver's in Birch Run for dinner and made it to Mid Forest Lodge about 11:30 p.m. And I had the experience I always have, driving to our friend's cabin in the woods — it was hard getting here, but I'm so glad we did.

We've got a full house here: the eight members of the Potts family, our friend's family of five, and one dog. I finally got to bathe this morning. It was a bit hard to sleep in the bed last night with Grace and Elanor, as Elanor is a cranky and demanding bed-mate, and we were in a full-sized bed, not the queen-sized bed plus crib she is used to. We got up and I made coffee and washed dishes as we brought in the coolers and bags of groceries from the Element, leaving it almost empty. We had some lamb's quarter, courtesy of our friend Joy, which is delicious but requires some labor for preparation, so we had not gotten around to eating it yet. Grace cooked the rest of last Friday's rotisserie chicken into a broth, and made lamb's quarter soup. Our friend ran out for almond milk and more eggs.

After a beautiful day — the kids spent most of the day on the lake — it's raining beautifully too, and gently. We'll do some rearranging of the refrigerator and freezer. It looks like we actually have enough food on hand for tonight, Monday, and Tuesday, and we plan to leave Wednesday morning. We will try to meet up with the new realtor in Saginaw, and get home, hopefully, before it gets too late, then I'll go back to work on Thursday morning. So, three vacation days. This plan would have come together in a much less stressful and expensive way without the 52-hour power outage and the trespassers in Saginaw, and a few other things I'm unable to go into here. Grace is resting for a bit while I finish this. We've all been a bit short on sleep.

### ***Jhereg* by Steven Brust, Continued**

I got a little down time and finished *Jhereg*, the first novel in *The Book of Jhereg*, the omnibus by Steven Brust. The novel ended quite well, with a very clever plan that played out in an engaging way. The various plot elements all came together and the story concluded nicely, while still setting up the later novels. So I have no complaints. It's quite a good novel. I think my gripes about it were largely because recently I haven't been up to reading novels (or non-fiction) that requires sustained mental effort. In this case the effort is the effort required to fully track the complex set of characters and the complex plot — literally *a* plot, as the characters plot to complete a tricky assassination and prevent a war.

There is inter-generational, internecine political scheming and maneuvering going on too — in fact, it is just a touch *Dune*-like in that regard, while at the same time avoiding any of the ponderousness and portents and prophecies that turn some readers off of *Dune*. (I kind of love *Dune*, but it doesn't work for people who don't love writing that echoes ancient myths and legends.) But *Jhereg* is not a sprawling book like *Dune* — at about 170 pages or so, it moves along at a decent clip. It's not Brust's fault I was trying to parse out his world-building while anxiously worried about various Difficult Problems or while I was half-asleep.

So, I'm continuing the omnibus, reading the second novel, *Yendi*, and this probably means, God help me, that I will eventually read all of them, although it will take me some time. May I live long enough to finish them.

The kids are getting restive so I should wind this up. I will try to write updates on Monday and Tuesday. Wednesday may well be too busy. The updates on Monday and Tuesday may be short. The whole idea with this sort of vacation is that I shouldn't have all that much to talk about. I'm trying to relax. Now, granted, I don't relax quite the same way that some people do, and I'm not very good at it, but I'm grateful for even a chance to try. I might read part of *Elric: Stormbringer!* That's the other book I brought. And I brought the August 16th issue of the *New York Review of Books*. The editorial, "Hail to the Chief," by Michael Tomasky, echoes a whole lot of my thoughts on recent politics and I think we'll probably talk about it on the podcast.

We do have a regret about this weekend. Two politicians are speaking in Ypsilanti this weekend: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Abdul El-Sayed are speaking at a Huron Valley DSA event. We are excited about both candidates. Maybe we will at least be able to see video, or a transcript. It seems like a shame to miss them when they are actually going to be speaking very close to our home. But we can still follow and promote their candidacies and platforms in other ways.

## Monday

### Vacation Report Part Two

*(Text based on my hand-written notes)*

We had a difficult night. Merry came to us in the middle of the night feeling homesick, and Elanor was very disturbed. At bedtime she just shrieked and screamed. She held onto a little children's book and screamed, turned it over, opened and closed it, screaming each time. We thought maybe she wanted us to read it to her, but that just made her scream. She's often had a hard time at bedtime, getting very agitated and climbing all over us protesting, but this was more extreme. We couldn't find anything wrong with her, physically. Our best bet is that she was, like Merry, also feeling very unsettled, trying to sleep another night in a strange place. She seems to be feeling fine today, like she was yesterday, but now she and Grace are down for an extended nap. I just hope this won't happen again tonight. Her screaming was keeping everyone awake and I had to take antacids because it was making my stomach acid go crazy. If she is the same way, tonight, I think we need to consider leaving early.

Our friend was up very early to take one of her sons to a canoeing camp. So she was probably the most affected by our scream-y daughter. There was also a small crisis because the kids had been given very strict instructions about the tent. They were not, under any circumstances, to take food into the tent. (It is not unheard of for bears to appear in these woods.) Someone ignored that edict and so this morning our hostess found food (and ants) in the tent and was righteously angry. So we've been trying to get the kids to stop bickering and arguing about who did what, and do a good job cleaning it out.

For breakfast I made a few pans of scrambled eggs and some coffee. It's hard

to judge how much food to make in these circumstances. People, especially the younger people, wander in and out and stragglers show up and demand more food while I'm cleaning up. I did a round of dishes, but there are more. People are already asking for lunch. Grace is down and our hostess is still away and so I guess I'm on the hook to take the kids down to the beach.

Time passed.

We have a brief but fun time at the beach. The kids were playing on a floating foam mat. Grace brought Elanor. I had to end it for Merry when he started tearing holes in the mat.

If you stand in the sunny, shallow water, the tiny little fish will strike at your legs.

There were a few blackflies around, and so I have one or two of the strange, bloody bites they inflict.

Late lunch, about 4:00 — lunch meats, bread, sautéed zucchini with onions. Dinner will be a taco bar and I am frying up our shishito peppers. Our hostess is taking part of the group to go out on a “deer ride” — driving the trails at dusk looking for deer and other wildlife. We will eat about 9:00 when everyone gets back. Grace and I have struggled to get a couple of naps today to help recover from last night's badly broken sleep.

## Tuesday

### Vacation Report Part Three

*(Text based on my hand-written notes)*

We got quite a good night's sleep — we tried stuffing the baby with food and drink before bed, and that seemed to help. She was screamy right at bedtime, but settled down before long. Our friend didn't have to be up before dawn, so it was a much quieter morning. I think Elanor is getting used to being away from home, at least a little bit, and acclimatizing to the routine, at least a little bit. Unfortunately we won't be here long enough to really get used to it — getting used to it is pretty much what would comprise being fully “on vacation,” but we will only be getting a total of three days and four nights in the woods. I am resentful of the power outage situation — if all that hadn't happened, I think we would have packed on Thursday night, and not had to do emergency shopping for water and food we could prepare and eat by candlelight, and left Friday after work. I'm also a little terrified of the situation we will find when we get home. Worst case scenario (well, maybe not the *worst*, but a bad one): what if the power went out again? (I'd imagine that could happen if the repair crews have to do a lot of work on the lines.) We'll return to a fridge and freezer full of spoiled food.

I've done some more washing-up, and made some scrambled eggs with leftover shishito peppers, chopped roughly; that's become one of our favorite breakfasts.

Then I did more washing-up, and assisted in getting lunch together. Grace took a shower and worked on her hair. There has been a lot of drama with Merry over who gets to go fishing. The older boys were going fishing this morning, and Merry, not knowing where they were going, ran off to the beach before they even left. We went to get him, but they had left by the time we brought him back, so he couldn't go with them, and no one wanted to take him to meet them. Then when Joshua walked back from fishing, I sent him back with Merry, to see if Merry could get a little fishing in. But they were just winding up when they got there. It got so complicated with Merry. I guess one of our reels is hopelessly tangled. Then Joshua and our friend's son left to ride bikes to a sand pit, and tried to ditch Merry, which is not OK. So now our friend's son, Joshua, Pippin, and Merry are all at a sand pit and the older two are under strict instructions: if they return without the younger two, they will be in deep shit.

This is mostly a very benign-seeming place, and we love letting our kids be free-range here, as much as possible, but Merry isn't ready; he's not much of a swimmer yet. I'm not sure about Pippin, but I think he needs close supervision in the water. These younger kids are not allowed to be at the lake without adult supervision, not just sibling supervision. With the sand pit, our big concern is a younger kid getting ditched by an older kid who should know better, and then getting lost. Kids have their dramas and sometimes resist taking any responsibility for each other.

Overall it's such a great environment here. I think it's a temperate rainforest, although I'm not 100% sure about that. It gets quite a bit of rain, but during the day the humidity is, at least this week, actually quite low. So it's not clammy like Saginaw. Hand-washed dishes dry quickly and clothes hung up on a line dry quickly, at least if it doesn't surprise us and rain on them.

We're going to try to fit in a lot more stuff on our last full day here. We'll have a little bonfire. Grace is planning to cook chicken paprikash with the sweet peppers we brought, and a few of the tomatoes. We'll pack up as much as we can tonight. It always takes forever to track down all the kids' clothes. Fortunately, the drive back is not all that long, so even if our schedule slips, it likely won't mean getting home at midnight. At least, I hope it won't. Then I go back to work Thursday morning and that's it for my summer vacation. I am not very confident that I'll have any time free tomorrow to write. If not, I'll try to summarize Wednesday's events on Thursday night.

## **Wednesday**

### **Vacation Report Part Four**

I'm writing this on Thursday because, as I predicted, I didn't get any time at all on Wednesday to write notes.

We got up at a reasonable hour and I did not shower and did not eat breakfast, having just a few gulps of coffee; I was quite wired because I knew it was going

to be a very busy day and I had to immediately get on to our tasks; I had hopes of getting to bed before midnight, since I had to be back at work Thursday. The kids did eat breakfast, though.

Grace and I then started trying to pack, organize our laundry, and herd things and kids out the door in some kind of organized way. This took quite some time. Packing our own stuff took very little time; I didn't bring that much. I put my camera and chargers and loose stuff back in the bag it came in and put my few remaining clean clothes back in our shared suitcase. The toileteries could all go back into one shared bag as well. The harder part was dealing with dirty clothes, damp laundry we had left over the backs of chairs to finish drying (and which the kids scattered and dropped as soon as they were up), and making sure the kids got everything out of the house.

The kids kept trying to go off to ride their bikes around the lake, or head to the beach. It was a real challenge to try to keep their heads in the game and get them to pack their backpacks. And in fact we failed to double-check Pippin's work, so we learned when we were unpacking that he apparently left his whole backpack at the cabin. It was hard enough just making sure everyone had their own shoes on.

Surprisingly, there was still a little ice in the big cooler, so we put our cold packs back in and brought a few uneaten food items home along with Grace's iron formula, Floradix, which requires refrigeration. Since we ate most of the food we took with us, there was a lot less of it to bring home in the Element, which was nice. The kids did bring back a few extra toys that they won at a fishing event, and our hostess gave us a stack of children's books. We drove out of the driveway a bit past noon, which was later than I wanted to get out but not that bad considering the difficulty setting on this video game.

We got into Prudenville at about 12:30 and gassed up both cars and I had a bottled coffee drink, and we fed the kids a round of RXBAR protein bars to try to hold them over until we could have lunch. Grace arranged to meet our new realtor at the house in Saginaw, so we drove straight there. We got into Saginaw at about 2:00. I had hopes of stopping very briefly at the Barnes and Noble but we gave that up. I also had hopes of getting my oil changed at the place I go in Saginaw, since Grace was not able to do it last week. But that wasn't going to happen, either.

### **Old House Update**

We met up with our new realtor as planned and tried to get the kids to play quietly while we went through the house. The new plaster and paint work looks pretty good, and the refinished floor in the front room is a big improvement. The house is very dusty, though, and there is a fair amount of stuff left by various parties: our contractors, our former house-sitter, Grace's brother, and Grace herself. There is a layer of sawdust everywhere. So it needs a thorough vacuuming; we took our vacuum cleaner when we found evidence that people

had been breaking in, as we didn't want it stolen. All the light bulbs in the basement were burned out. I'm not sure how that happened, especially since a number of them were pretty new. A storm and lightning strike, maybe? We tried turning on the air conditioning units and found that the second one wouldn't start. Maybe a blown capacitor? We turned on the water supply in the house and verified that the taps and toilets work. However, the kitchen tap has been sitting dry for a long time, and it looks like the gaskets were all dried out, so it leaks a lot of water when you run it. A couple of other taps had the same problem to a lesser extent.

So, we have to consider what more we can do. The air conditioning repair might be relatively cheap if it is just a blown capacitor (that's the problem we had at our new house). We can certainly replace all the light bulbs. I'm not sure if we want to pay a plumber to replace taps. We still owe money for the paint and plaster work and the duct cleaning. And then there's the matter of the furnaces. Can we, or should we, put a new furnace on a credit card? Even if we can, I'm not sure we should — our balances are creeping up close to critical. So the house should show a little better with the water damage repaired and the floor refinished, but it's not entirely clear what our next priorities should be, to get it sold.

Our meeting and paperwork with the realtor took longer than we expected — I think it was three hours or more. So then we had a carload of hungry kids. We were torn between wanting to feed everyone and wanting to get back home. We settled on driving down to Birch Run and eating at a deli there. We got the kids pizzas and Grace and I split a pastrami sandwich and each drank a green smoothie, which was a reasonable late lunch/early dinner.

I had wanted to go to the Hanes store for some more pairs of underwear, which would really help out when we're in a bad laundry week and running now on clean clothes, but decided we just couldn't take the time, and I really should make do with the underwear I have. So how's that for full disclosure, *aka* "opening the kimono?"

## **Back Home**

We drove the rest of the way home. Grace and I swapped cars so she could drive in the air-conditioned vehicle, so I had most of the kids in the Tahoe. It was uncomfortably hot but we made it home with no real issues. I got in about 7:45, just a couple of minutes behind Grace. Our housemate had done some cleaning so the place was actually in pretty good shape. That was a big relief; we really didn't want to walk in the door and have to spend a couple of hours cleaning. We did some unpacking, which included emptying the cooler. I didn't put everything away. The wool blankets are still in the back of my car.

Grace left again to take some groceries to her friend and I washed up Merry and Pippin, and gave myself a quick wash, too, then lay under the fan in the bedroom to cool down, and by the time she got home I was feeling pretty civilized again.

We knew the kids were going to be hungry again, so while she was out, Grace picked up another pizza and some plain breadsticks and wings for those who didn't want dairy, and we had another small dinner. The kids were not really on their game, getting ready for bed and a story, so I read Merry a story. For some reason he had chosen a Curious George book about Christmas. I could not restrain myself, and had to embellish the book with some jokes about the monkey crapping on the floor of the children's hospital and flinging feces at the nurses, because I am a very mature responsible adult parent and stuff, but other than that, it went down pretty uneventfully. The kids were bundled off to bed about midnight. Grace needed a little time to look at some urgent e-mail. We got to sleep about 1:00, which was not all that much worse than I predicted. It was a very long and busy day, but I felt pretty good about everything we accomplished.

## Thursday

It was a bit rough getting up and out this morning. We didn't have any more regular ground coffee, but there was some Turkish grind, so Grace made me a Turkish coffee to go. I took some canned baked beans and instant grits to work and ate those for breakfast and lunch, which was a bit strange but, it's been a strange few days.

### ***Yendi* by Steven Brust, in *The Book of Jheræg* by Steven Brust (Omnibus Edition Containing the Vlad Taltos Novels *Jheræg*, *Yendi*, and *Teckla*)**

I am most of the way through the second Vlad Taltos novel, *Yendi*. It was easier to read the somewhat plot-heavy storytelling while on vacation, and I'm getting used to Brust's style. He's quite a clever writer and sets up nice recurring motifs. The moral ambiguity of the protagonist is serving its intended purpose, forcing me as the reader to suspend judgment while I consider the choices I might make in the same circumstances. I know they wouldn't be his choices. But I also would not have ever pursued his career as a crime boss, and almost certainly would not thrive, and maybe wouldn't even survive, in the world of these novels.

### **“Dead God's Homecoming” by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: Stormbringer!* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)**

At some point I finished the first novella of the four that comprise *Stormbringer*. It's called “Dead God's Homecoming.” In the book I've got, *Elric: Stormbringer!*, the novellas are presented as four “books” of the novel *Stormbringer*, so I'll mark the book as finished when I finish the whole book including the essays that are included after the novel. There are differences in the various versions of these stories that have been published in many different editions over the years, but I'm not going to try to dig into the differences at present, and just content

myself with the fact that this book contains the versions Moorcock most recently approved.

“Dead God’s Homecoming” sets up more elements of the cosmology of Moorcock’s world. This includes setting up the present Melnibonéans and humans as “precursor” beings to all of known human history; the characters know their world is going to end, and undergo radical transformations, while they themselves will be completely forgotten. Of course, this is an inherently ironic premise, as I am reading about them now.

All this revealed cosmology, including the transformation of Elric into a *generic* “Eternal Champion” character who will recur across time and space, is *not*, in my opinion, well set-up by the earlier (in publication order) Elric stories. So I’m scratching my head a bit. It seems like perhaps at this point Moorcock really saw no future in Elric and his world, and so felt the need to give himself a number of escape pods and hatches in order to make it easy for him to remove Elric from his world of origin.

All this construction, to me, actually seems at this point a bit like a *failure* of imagination rather than the success of it. Moorcock, it seems, couldn’t see his way to getting excited about more Elric stories that built on the elements he had already put in place.

I’ll have a clearer opinion of the *Stormbringer* arc when I’ve finished it, but so far it does not seem as much fun as the earlier stories which worked better as standalone, or gently-linked, stories, rather than these, which are links in a heavy, elaborate, even baroque, chain.

Maybe tonight I can transcribe my written notes from Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. I’ll do it if I get some down time this evening.

## Friday

### The Local Obstetrics and Gynecology Monopoly

Today is “gripe about health care” day.

Grace has been trying to find a new obstetrician, since the man who safely delivered six of our children is going to be semi-retired and not doing deliveries any longer. She’s been trying to interview doctors. So this morning she had a 7 a.m. appointment with an obstetrician. The appointment was to interview the doctor, to gather information before deciding if she wanted to entrust him with her (and our upcoming family member’s) care. This should not have been all that controversial a thing to do. She set it up with staff and confirmed it with staff, that she wanted to interview the doctor. At 7 a.m. the building was locked up. She had to wait around for some time.

She finally was let in, and the doctor told her that he wouldn’t be interviewed and wouldn’t answer questions unless she had transferred over all her records to his practice.

The whole point of the interview was to see if she and the doctor seemed to be on the same page regarding ethics, emergencies, end of life decisions, etc. Grace is a committed Catholic and has affirmed to me numerous times that she is committed to follow church teachings on matters of life, death, and birth. It's insane that the doctor gave her this brush-off and refused to answer her questions. We're told that our ability to choose freely in a marketplace of health care options, to get our health care *à la carte*, if you will, makes for more choices and better outcomes. But practitioners don't actually want to do anything that might help patients vote with their feet, and the institutions they work for don't either. They want to force us into buying what they are selling, forming *de facto* monopolies.

Speaking of monopolies, apparently IHA has muscled into the region and expanded its territory, and all the OBs who might be taking new patients are part of the IHA monolith.

I'm thoroughly disgusted and angry on her behalf.

We're constantly told that in order to manage our expenses we need to become active participants in the health care system, carefully consider whether care is necessary or can be had cheaper, and also follow the convoluted rules and guidelines of insurers. But I'm sure I'm not the only one who has found that whenever we try to do this, the doctors hate it. They hate that we might ask them hard questions or do anything to slow down the flow of cash rattling down the chute from insurers into their coffers, and no doubt their practice managers hate it as well.

An OB doctor is not simply a service provider. They aren't interchangeable. Such a doctor interacts with mothers on a *very* intimate basis. The stakes are much higher than the stakes are when selecting a plumber or someone to fix your roof. It's an entirely valid and reasonable thing to try to make sure you are on the same page with such a person before turning over records. And she repeatedly told the staff the purpose of the appointment.

They will probably try to bill our insurance for this waste of our time, and I intend to prevent it.

And there's another story. Grace took Elanor to our dentist. Apparently she was not listed for coverage under my employer's dental plan. I had to check with my employer's human resources folks. In my mailboxes, I found a paper trail: when I told HR about the birth, they sent me the form to add them to our general health insurance plan, and I filled that out. So she's had health insurance. But apparently they didn't send me the form to add her to the dental plan, and I neglected to ask. (In my defense, babies don't have teeth, and between Elanor's Down Syndrome and her congenital heart defect, I had other medical issues on my mind.)

HR tells me most of their employees don't sign their children up for dental coverage until they are 2 or 3 years old. Elanor is 18 months old, but she's got a

lot of teeth already, and she's been having a rough time with her teething. It's August and the next open enrollment period isn't until May. So I can't even submit the paperwork and she won't be covered until June of next year.

So I guess we have to decide if we think it is important enough to justify paying the full price for an examination. How do we decide that? And why should we have to make that decision?

This would be less of an issue if we weren't already quite stressed financially, mostly because of expenses around the old house. We *must* get this resolved soon.

I think we might be going to see Bernie Sanders and Abdul El-Sayed this weekend.

## Saturday

I went to Costco after work and got a relatively modest load of groceries including chicken drumsticks, ground turkey, salad, coconut milk, macaroni and cheese, salmon, blueberries, bananas, pancake mix, and a tin of Chinese moon cakes for dessert. We ate quite late.

### *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell, Continued

Our bedtime story was three more chapters from *Down and Out in Paris and London*. In these chapters, our narrator is back in London, and plans to start a job as a caretaker, but when he gets there, he finds that the people in question have left for a month and so he has to figure out how to feed and house himself while he waits to start his job. He gives us a tour of the boarding houses used by the brokest of the broke in London.

There's also a chapter in which he recounts the story of a miser and his scam to traffic cocaine. His portrayal of the Jew behind the plot is blatantly racist and hasn't aged well, but the story itself, about a crazy guy panicking as the police search his hotel, is still hilarious. Orwell's thoughts on British food, culture, and architecture are pretty funny, too. We are getting close to the end of this book and I will be sad to see it go. Fortunately we have several other volumes of Orwell's non-fiction that I've never read before. As I've mentioned before, I'd love to have more of his essays, but I haven't settled on an edition to buy.

It's about 1:30 and I'm going to finish up the blog post and take Sam with me up to Saginaw. The old house needs some more cleaning. We'll stop and pick up light bulbs, spray cleaner, and a few other things. It's very hot today. Our friend Joy is here. We're trying to figure out how to get our various errands done when out of three cars, only one (my Element) has working air conditioning.

## 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.*

- *Jhereg* and *Yendi* by Steven Brust, in *The Book of Jhereg* by Steven Brust (Omnibus Edition Containing the Vlad Taltos Novels *Jhereg*, *Yendi*, and *Teckla*)
- “Dead God’s Homecoming” by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: Stormbringer!* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell

*Pittsfield Township, Michigan*

*The Week Ending Saturday, August 4th, 2018*

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