

2018 Week 32: The Week Ending Saturday, August 11th

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

Yesterday afternoon I took Sam and ran errands. The highest-priority items on our to-do list are at the house in Saginaw. I didn't really want to go, and it was very hot yesterday, but we really need to get some of these things done.

A Near Miss

My driving was bad because I was so exhausted. When I was trying to get on 23, I hit the edge of the road, which was all covered with loose gravel. The Element started to lurch and skid violently back and forth across the pothole-filled ramp, and I barely got it under control before merging. That was one of those sobering moments when it really hits home that any given drive could actually kill me, or at injure me and possibly other drivers, and maybe total my car in the process.

First, I set out to find a replacement cell phone battery for Grace's phone. Traffic was heavy and it is quite a pain to get around town. At my first stop, the T-Mobile store, they told me that they don't even sell any batteries. They referred me to the Batteries Plus Bulbs franchise at Packard and Platt. They had a battery, although I should have been skeptical because it was dead when we put it in (lithium batteries are usually shipped and stored partially charged). It seemed to be charging up fine so I left it plugged in to finish charging and drove up to Saginaw. Grace was out, so I asked Veronica to tell her about it when Grace got home (she forgot, though).

Before getting back on the road I found a liquor store that had bottled cold brew coffee and got that stuff down my gullet. It helped immediately and I didn't have any more trouble driving.

Cleaning Up the Old House

Sam and I proceeded up to Saginaw and went looking for supplies: a dozen LED bulbs, vacuum cleaner bags, etc. I reaffirmed by belief that Bed, Bath, and Beyond is the most useless store in existence. I eventually got everything at Home Depot, although it took a while to find everything; one employee sent me

to the wrong part of the store to find vacuum cleaner bags, and I had to ask someone else. We got dinner at Culver's and then went to the house.

There were a lot of small things to do. The contractors had left messes in various rooms. I replaced all the burned-out and missing bulbs in the basement (there were seven). So now every light down there works. We swept and vacuumed as much as we could given our limited time. I organized a lot of paint and supplies like caulking on the shelf and pitched empty containers, used sandpaper, etc. This took quite some time. It is very far from spotless now but it is a little less awful.

Upstairs, I cleaned out closets and places where the contractors left junk. I'm not sure why contractors think it is OK to leave mountains of trash: empty bottles filled with cigarette butts (it never even occurred to us that people would smoke *in our house* while doing a contracting job, wow), shredded filters (apparently one of them liked to tear a filter off each cigarette and shred it and leave the shredded filters), a lot of clothes, especially socks (were they using old socks as rags? I don't even know), and leftover pieces of sheet metal grating and tile. If you are a contractor in someone's house, why wouldn't you take a few minutes and clean up your trash on the way out?

A Terrible Painting Job

I was able to examine the painting job a little more closely. The library had cabinet doors with cool little movable wooden louvers that could be opened and closed; I'm not really sure what good they were, but they were cool-looking. The painters just slopped paint right over everything, including the little metal latch mechanism. So the louvers are completely frozen in a mass of paint. I did manage to get the doors open, but I couldn't even open the doors without tearing the paint up since everything was basically one big glued-together mass. There was also a spot with built-in shelving, with metal rails with those little shelf clips, so that the shelves could be raised or lowered. They just glopped paint over everything. The shelves themselves they took out and left on the floor. They are covered with blobs of plaster.

I have to take a deep breath and just tell myself that these are the folks we could get. But it sure does not make me happy to pay them thousands of dollars this work. There's no repairing the cabinet doors; they would just have to be replaced. They were custom-made in 1927.

It wasn't too bad in the basement, but in the first floor it was warm, and in the second floor it was unpleasantly hot. I spent a couple of hours on the cleanout and loaded stuff into my car until it was pretty much full. There's not much left. There are some unused packing boxes which we should probably bring here, although they are so large that we didn't find them useful for moving. They were part of our U-Line moving kit. I guess if we had used professional movers and a moving truck it might have been useful to put some of our things in boxes that large, but to make them manageable to pack and carry and store things,

especially books, I used much smaller boxes for just about everything. Stuff too big for the smaller boxes just went loose in the back of my car.

We left about 10:00. I didn't want to stay any later because I was afraid I'd be unable to drive the return trip safely. I stopped and got a couple of bottles of Gatorade and drank mine and half of Sam's and didn't feel too bad, didn't have any trouble driving. Sam was good company and we talked about some of his favorite subjects, quantum mechanics and cosmology. When I got home I drank something like six more glasses of water before I felt hydrated again. All I really wanted to eat for a late dinner was some sliced tomatoes that Grace and Joy had brought home on their errands. I dusted them with salt and they were delicious. We got to bed about 1:00.

***Yendi* by Steven Brust, Concluded**

While waiting for Grace to come to bed, I finished *Yendi*. I feel like I'm starting to get a handle on Brust's fictional world. It's quite complex, but he's revealing only bits and pieces of it, leaving quite a few mysteries. In this book I noticed some typos. There's a spot where the text reads "forth or fifth" instead of "fourth or fifth." There's also a spot where he borrows a Monty Python joke. I'm going to have to tweet to him about that.

"Black Sword's Brothers" by Michael Moorcock

This morning I finished the second part of the fix-up novel *Stormbringer*, the novella called "Black Sword's Brothers." It's growing on me. There are some really magnificent scenes in the second part, scenes that remind me of scenes from classic high fantasy works like *The Worm Ouroboros*, such as Elric and Moonglum's battle with the Lords of Chaos. It's easy to see in these passages some of Moorcock's influences and also easy to call to mind works that *Stormbringer* has influenced. The essays included in these Michael Moorcock Collection volumes, besides being somewhat interesting in their own right, serve a useful function: Moorcock mentions many other books that I'd like to track down and read, such as Poul Anderson's 1954 novel *The Broken Sword*. I've got several of the books Moorcock mentions in my Alibris shopping cart waiting for some money to buy them. Some of them have been out of print for a long time.

The battery for Grace's cell phone was completely dead this morning, so I think we're going to try to return it. I saved the receipt. I'm not sure if I want to try getting another one, if I should just give up on this quest to avoid throwing away an electronic devices needlessly, and buy a new phone. But I definitely want my \$40 back!

I made hash browns and scrambled eggs and ate the last few slices of a loaf of roasted garlic and olive sourdough that Grace brought from The Mother Loaf Breads in Milan. Wow, that was delicious.

Grace and I pulled all the stuff from the Saginaw house out of my car, spread it

out on a tarp in the yard, and sorted through it, to decide what to keep and what to throw away. Almost all of it went into the trash. Unfortunately trash pickup isn't until tomorrow night, so I'm going to be driving around for a day and a half with bags of paint and construction trash in the back of my car. At least nothing stinks too badly.

Hot Again

It was extremely hot in the sun outside. It was over 90, but very humid. The air quality is bad today, too, so I've had to use my inhaler for the first time in months. I never needed an inhaler until we moved back to Washtenaw County. I couldn't stay outside in the sun much longer without feeling like I was going to collapse!

Abdul El-Sayed

Abdul El-Sayed is running for governor of Michigan. He is holding a rally this afternoon nearby, featuring Bernie Sanders, Nina Turner, and other guests. Doors open at 4:00. Grace and I are going to try going. I will take my audio recorder. If we have to stand in a long line outside, we'll have to give up and come home — it's just too hot for that to be safe today.

Monday

Abdul and Nina and Bernie

We made it to the rally. It was actually outdoors, but this was not clear at all from the scant information I had seen, which said “doors open” at 4:00, and the Detroit rally was indoors. We were seated on a hillside behind a hotel building. It's some kind of a hotel/golf course/conference center run by Marriott but owned or attached to Eastern Michigan University. This made the rally an awkward combination of a public and private event. The hotel was selling bottled water and sports drinks on site, but only for cash, and we did not have cash with us. The speakers were about an hour late, which is hardly unusual for this sort of event, but we were getting uncomfortably hot, so Grace went into the hotel and bought us four bottled sports drinks at \$4.95 each. Ugh.

I'm not going to write up a lot of text about the rally. I recorded all the speakers and all the talks are embedded in this week's podcast episode. We didn't mention the sharpshooter that was on the roof during Dr. El-Sayed's talk, but not during Bernie Sanders' talk, or the camera drone hovering over the crowd. There was a little bit of drama about a socialist party, the Socialist Equality party, that was distributing literature. According to Niles Niemuth, their candidate, they were banned for doing this on the sidewalk in front of the hotel building itself and had to hand out their papers in the parking lot. I found myself involved in a discussion about this on Twitter with Niemuth and author Steven Brust, oddly enough, who was retweeting Niemuth. As I've noted before, I'm in the

process of reading Brust's Vlad Taltos novels; I started following Brust recently on Twitter in part because of his politics; he describes himself as a "Trotskyist sympathizer" and often tweets links to the World Socialist Web Site.

I'm glad they were not detained and were allowed to exercise their First Amendment rights, but I can't support the idea that some people are forced into a second class of First Amendment rights. As we discussed in the show, we were also disturbed by the gauntlet of people grilling us as we went in to the allegedly open and public event, pretending that we had to be registered to vote and wearing an Abdul sticker in order to enter. Is this a public event, or isn't it? And if it isn't, why should we, the public, attend and support it?

Producing the Pottscast

The podcast production went without a hitch, but it takes a while to do this sort of thing: uploading audio files from the portable recorder, which is quite slow; recording our commentary; transferring raw audio files across the network; putting together the Logic project; editing a bit; tweaking plug-in settings; bouncing the uncompressed track; generating the MP3 file; generating the movie; uploading both of them; writing the blog post; generating the feed file entries. I was done before 1 a.m., but as a result I didn't get any dinner. So I ate a moon cake for dinner, waited for Grace to finish some e-mail and help me trim my beard and mustache, and got to bed about 2 a.m.

Sam woke me up about 7 a.m. when he was apparently making himself breakfast and starting on his task list. He must have wheeled the recycle bin down to the road. I don't really want him waking up the neighbors at 7 a.m. — or waking up me for that matter, when I've been up until 2 a.m. I was able to get back to sleep and got up again about 9. On the way out I left the bags of trash for Tuesday morning's trash pickup on our road.

We're out of coffee except for a little Turkish coffee, so I had to get a coffee out at Joe and Rosie Creamery on Jackson Road. I didn't even finish a large coffee, pouring out the last third because I was starting to feel like a junkie on the verge of an overdose. Between all the sun and dehydration this weekend, the mild sleep deprivation, and the caffeine, I've felt better... but we got quite a bit done!

My cough has been coming back, in a milder form. We've been having bad air quality here in Washtenaw County and I've had to start using my albuterol inhaler again. Today the high temperature is supposed to be 88, a little bit lower than yesterday's 93, but it is still very humid. Supposedly we might get an inch of rain this afternoon, but I'm not holding my breath; the rain forecasts have been quite far off, predicting much more than we have actually gotten, all summer, because, I believe, the shifting climate behavior no longer matches the historic models used for prediction.

Tuesday

Yesterday on my lunch break, I went to Nicola's Books to see if I could order books that Veronica wanted, a series called *The Secrets of the Pied Piper* by Matthew Cody. She had the first two, but somehow both of them have gone missing, and now there is a third one out, so she wants all three. Their availability is complicated. Copies were in stock at three different distributors. The second and third are only available in hardcover. The first is only available in a paperback reprint. So I'm thinking maybe I will just get used copies or new-old-stock copies via Alibris.

Jackson Road is Burning

On my way back to the office I saw a bizarre sight: part of the median strip of Jackson Road near the Uptown Coney Island restaurant was on fire. A strip of the dry, yellow grass maybe fifty feet long was merrily burning. Some road construction workers were trying to put it out with blankets or something like blankets. It didn't look like they were having much luck. When I got back to my office, the power had just dropped for a minute or two and come back on. A minute or two later I heard fire trucks heading towards the fire.

I won't say that this kind of thing never happens in the Ann Arbor area — it does get dry here in the summer, sometimes, and I occasionally hear about elevated fire risk — but I've never seen anything quite like this, a fire in the middle of a median on a city street. The grass was dry enough that just about anything could have started it, including a stray cigarette. I know from my long commutes that plenty of drivers in Michigan habitually throw their butts out their car windows. I know this was a tiny little nothing fire compared to the record California wildfires, with their stunning “fire tornado,” but I can't help but feel that these are both warnings that the weather patterns I grew up with are rapidly changing, and not for the better. Even mainstream media sources are starting to post articles about “runaway” climate change, feedbacks, and tipping points.

We have finally gotten some rain, although it was not much. We got maybe half an inch in Pittsfield Township; we might get another half-inch tonight and tomorrow. And we managed to avoid the severe thunderstorms they were warning about yesterday. I was getting nervous about another power outage and what that would do to our budget. I have not yet replaced the dehumidifier that blew in the last storm, and I need to get on that soon — I am getting nervous about all the books we have stored in the basement. So we've got to either borrow a dehumidifier or buy one soon. The frustrating thing is that I've thrown out at least three in the last decade or so, as they tend to die after the warranty expires and they are not economically repairable.

Last night Grace took four baskets of clothes to the laundromat. We had gotten way behind on laundry, in part due to the power outage and in part due to our vacation. We didn't want to stress our well too hard by trying to a lot of loads in

one day. I don't really know the amount we can safely pump out of our well over time, and the more I read about this, the more I realize that it's a complicated thing to measure. I don't know if the dry conditions this year will affect our well, or not. Will it affect the available water a year from now? I just don't know. But as we develop our gardens and renovate bathrooms and things like that, we will keep in mind the goal of keeping our water use reasonable. I'm not going to say "sustainable," because I don't know how to even begin to determine that, especially in the face of rapid climate change.

I got home from work fairly late last night. When I got home Grace was still out and the kitchen situation was looking grim, with a sink packed with dirty dishes. Veronica actually volunteered to make dinner, and so she did; we had sausage and rice cooked in the Instant Pot, and kale salad. I had the kids empty the dishwasher and got it reloaded with a very full load of plates and bowls. Then Grace got home, and with some effort we got the kids to unload the car, and with yet more effort we eventually got the kids to get ready for bed and show up to listen to a bedtime story.

***Dragons at Crumbling Castle and Other Tales* by Terry Pratchett**

Last night's story was the first story from a book of children's stories by Terry Pratchett, *Dragons at Crumbling Castle and Other Tales*; in fact, the title story. I came across this book at Nicola's yesterday and could not resist bringing it home; fortunately, it was an inexpensive paperback edition. Apparently Pratchett started publishing these stories in his local paper when he was just a teenager, from 1966 through 1973. Having only read the first one, I can say that it does read like something written by a very energetic and imaginative young writer. There are a lot of puns and general silliness. It reads like it was not really structured in advance, or revised to have a strong structure, but that's hardly surprising. It has a lot of funny *moments* instead of an overall funny plot. Pratchett was very carefully writing at the level of the sentence and the scene, but not building up jokes that take pages to land. That's okay. It's still a fun read.

***Autumn* by Karl Ove Knausgaard**

I also picked up a copy of Karl Ove Knausgaard's book *Autumn*, in translation. For a year or so I've been looking for this book on the shelves any time I'm in a bookstore. I've been looking in the fiction section, next to his massive series of autobiographical novels *My Struggle*. It hasn't been there. Apparently it's been shelved, at least at Nicola's, with biographies. I could quibble with this. Is it really biography? I'd call it writing in the *belle-lettres* tradition of work like Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. And isn't *My Struggle* really autobiography, anyway? But mostly I'm glad to have found it. If I like this one, maybe I'll continue with the rest of Knausgaard's seasons. Meanwhile, the sixth volume of *My Struggle* is coming out soon, and I'll have to consider just how committed I am to making it to the end of Knausgaard's massive project.

***Nixon in China* (Opera) by John Adams with Libretto by Alice Goodman**

And now, for something completely different...

It's been a while since I've written about any of the music that I listen to, in part because I haven't really been listening to anything new recently. For a while I've had a CD of music from John Adams' opera *Nixon in China*; it came in a bundle of used classical CDs I bought a couple of years ago in Saginaw. I've listened to it before, in the sense that it was playing and I was in the room, but over the last few days I've pulled it out again and tried listening more closely.

Superficially, the music is very reminiscent of Philip Glass, some parts more than others. However, I wouldn't call it minimalist at all, except in a few passages. In fact the music is often a riot of melodic shifts and rhythmic patterns playing against each other, often with dissonant or at least startling intervals. There are passages where a group of singers are all singing at once, seemingly in different keys, and seemingly in different meters as well. The effect is not actually chaos, but it *conveys* chaos; we're hearing the music actually demonstrating the clashing messages and agendas of the different characters. Some of it rises to "genuinely difficult to listen to," although not as difficult as something else I've been listening to on YouTube: *Einstein on the Beach*. I might have more to say about *that* work another time, if I can make it through any more of it.

So, I've listened to this CD several times through and I have enjoyed parts of it quite a bit, and other parts less so. I have had a hard time making sense of the libretto in parts. It's not that I can't understand the words, but that the words often don't seem to make literal sense. I also had a hard time piecing together a sense of any story, or what might be going on during the songs.

In this opera, the songs and libretto tend to be on the abstract; they have a complicated relationship with time and space, when characters sing about events and moments from the past in abstracted ways. The libretto often has moments when the characters say incredibly banal things. Nixon sings that his flight was "smooth," stretching the word "smooth" out into at least ten syllables, while he apparently tries to think of something to say, and then he just kind of blathers about the trip; this isn't exactly a "one small step for (a) man" moment:

*Oh yes,
smoother than usual I guess.
Yes, it was very pleasant.
We stopped in Hawaii for a day
and Guam, to catch up on the time.
It's easier that way.*

Nixon keeps wandering away from the present into reverie and even paranoia, even as he invokes the moon landing when astronauts spoke from the Sea of Tranquility:

*We live in an unsettled time.
 Who are our enemies?
 Who are our friends?
 The Eastern Hemisphere beckoned to us,
 and we have flown east of the sun,
 west of the moon across an ocean of distrust
 filled with the bodies of our lost;
 the earth's Sea of Tranquillity.
 It's prime time in the U.S.A.
 yesterday night. They watch us now;
 the three main networks' colors glow
 livid through drapes onto the lawn.
 Dishes are washed and homework done,
 the dog and grandma fall asleep,
 a car roars past playing loud pop,
 is gone. As I look down the road
 I know America is good at heart.
 An old cold warrior piloting towards
 an unknown shore through shoals.
 The rats begin to chew the sheets.
 There's murmuring below.*

With only the audio to go on, I have not sense of what is going on, on the stage. Like Billy Pilgrim, I start feeling “unstuck in time” (and space) while listening. (Rats? Real rats? Where? Metaphorical rats?)

***Music from Nixon in China* (Orchestra of St. Luke's, Edo de Waart, Conductor, Elektra/Nonesuch CD, 1988)**

Today the “other shoe” dropped as I was looking at a CD set of the opera online. I realized that the CD I've got is not a complete, or even mostly-complete, recording of *Nixon in China*, but is an album of excerpts, called *Music from Nixon in China*. It's got a few songs from Act I, Scene 1, a few songs from Act I, Scene 3, a few songs from Act II, Scene 1, and a few songs from Act II, Scene 2.

Operas are often released in the form of albums that contain highlights from, say, *Carmen*. But even before I saw all of *Carmen*, I felt like I could listen to a “highlights” album and make some sense of each song without needing to watch the whole thing from beginning to end; it wasn't really all that disconcerting to skip over parts of the story. Those songs were more conventional, though conveying a moment in the story and a mood. But *Nixon in China* has a less conventional story structure, and on this disc, none of the scenes are complete. There is nothing at all from Act III, and the presentation of Act II, Scene 2 skips right over a number of songs, jumping to the last one. This goes a long way to explain the jarring transitions. I feel a little better about not being able to make sense of the opera. It looks like this CD might have been a promotional item sent to radio stations, although I think playing disjointed parts of the opera on

the radio probably would leave the radio audience as confused as I was.

There's at least one full presentation of the opera on YouTube. The video quality is poor, although the audio sounds pretty good. I'm considering ordering a copy of the full 3-CD soundtrack. I don't feel like I can really judge the whole thing yet; it's been sort of "controversial," which is a way of saying "not unambiguously considered good." I'm leaning towards something like "quite flawed but ambitious and interesting." I'll say one thing — the libretto's take on the notion of history in people's lives, and how they perceive their role and place in history, is much more interesting and complex than *Hamilton's* take on the same subject. Mao Tse-tung sings:

*History is a dirty sow:
if we by chance escape her maw
she overlies us.*

In completely different news, I ordered a second replacement battery for Grace's cell phone. We'll see if this one is any better. If not, I'll have to give up on the idea that we can replace the battery and instead just replace the phone. What was that about escaping maws?

Wednesday

Steaks

I went to Costco after work last night for a modest load of groceries; Grace had been asking specifically for some red meat. This is not all that surprising in this stage of her pregnancy. She's been taking Floradix for extra iron, but in a typical week we eat little to no red meat, tending to prefer chicken or ground turkey. So I picked up a tray of some of Costco's lower-priced steaks.

I think they were "sirloin cap" steaks, also known as the "coulotte." I also got some lamb chops for another day. We cooked these steaks in our giant cast-iron pan by just seasoning them with salt and pepper, searing them briefly on each side, then cooking them on lower heat for just a few more minutes, then letting them rest. We deglazed the pan with red wine from a box and made a quick peppery pan sauce to scoop over them. The resulting steaks were really delicious, rare and quite tender. I keep looking wistfully at the higher-end steaks at Costco, which I don't want to pay for, and so I had the idea that this cheaper cut would not be very good. I was completely wrong! There were a couple of small steaks leftover, which could go into a pasta dish or a rice dish or into sandwiches.

I think for the rest of Grace's pregnancy, and maybe for a while after, I'll be adding red meat to our weekly Costco haul. We have yet to try anything from their meat counter that wasn't excellent, so I that has given me confidence that we can stick to the lower end and still get good stuff. Costco is convenient since

I'm there at least once a week anyway, but I think Grace may also start picking up things from a butcher shop she found in Milan.

Anyway, we ate these steaks with kale salad, roasted red potatoes, four-bean salad from a jar, leftover corn-on-the-cob, and an apple pie. Pippin complained about the apples in the apple pie. I'm still scratching my head at that. Does he want mock apple pie made with crackers instead?

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

Dinner and cleanup went fairly smoothly and I read three more chapters of *Down and Out in Paris and London*. (After reading a young children's book to Merry, I asked everyone else if they wanted more Pratchett stories, or more dee-oh-pay-low. They unanimously yelled for Orwell. I couldn't be more proud.

In these chapters, our narrator has completely run out of money, waiting for his job to start, and has to stay at a series of "spikes." A spike is a workhouse for the poor — yes, as in the time of Dickens, although I think conditions were marginally better in Orwell's day than in Dickens' day. The workhouses originated in the "poor laws." I think we're going to need to read more Dickens, next. (Maybe we should just continue reading *Oliver Twist*, which I set aside unfinished a while back, possibly because the Victorian-era language was putting the kids to sleep. Orwell's language causes the opposite response — the kids want to stay up and talk about the story.)

Grace is on her way up to Saginaw this afternoon to work on the house. She's going to work on cleaning, and try to get an HVAC repair person out to look at the air conditioning unit, and if possible get a plumber out to replace the badly-leaking faucet in the kitchen. We just had it fixed a couple of years ago, but it seems like taking the house through the winter without heat, and having the water shut off, has been really bad for it.

We're down to about \$80 in our checking account because of the extra food and gas expenses over the last few weeks. My stress level is ratcheting up as our bank balance goes down. I really need to get another dehumidifier working in the basement. I am very sick of buying \$200 dehumidifiers that break after a year or two. I've been looking into an Ebac CD35P, a more industrial model. That would run me about \$800. I need something soon. I have a query into a distributor in Warren (about an hour from our home). I really don't have \$800 to spend. I also don't have \$200 to spend, but do I need to just buy a cheap one — again? I really don't want our stored books and papers getting damp, so this seems like an urgent problem. Maybe I need to look for a crappy used one, even if it only lasts a few months.

Grace will probably be home late.

Thursday

I Hate Past Me

There were no big crises yesterday that led the kids to call me at work. I'm proud of Veronica for keeping everyone more-or-less in line. However, when I got home I found that Merry had taken a metal piece from some kind of Ikea item left by our friend Joy, bent it in half, and then used it to carve some deep gouges in our bathroom wall, right through the paint and into the plaster. No one noticed he was doing this. He denied it at first, until I made him stand next to the wall and pointed out that the top of the scratches was right at the top of his reach, and the bottom was right at the bottom of his reach. Then he confessed.

This kid is going to be the death of me. It's not really fair to him, but after so many other incidents like this, I can barely look at him without feeling enraged. I read him a bedtime story.

If we don't fix it soon, he will probably start picking at it every day until he has torn the plaster open, just like he did to several damaged spots in Saginaw. He was so tenacious that it looked like he was trying to tunnel out of our house. I guess I admire his focus; I myself have been diagnosed with Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder, and it must come from somewhere. A quick aside: raising kids who are "mini-me" to varying degrees is a little unnerving and has resulted in me learning more about my past self than I ever really wanted to know. But it's also giving me a chance to understand myself better and, perhaps, learn a little compassion for the parts of myself that are still in me, largely unchanged from my childhood. And, maybe, it will make me better able to help them get through the difficult parts, since I've done it, although I hardly came through unscathed. My "mini-me" kids are probably having the opposite experience.

We can spackle and paint that spot, but I don't think it will look even. We've been talking about repainting the bathroom in something that isn't matte finish, because the matte finish absorbs moisture and stains really easily. It was a pretty choice, but terrible for a room used every day by children with dirty, wet, sticky hands. And it's also simply not good in a humid environment, even with the fan running — it seems to absorb moisture and swell, so parts of the wall are covered with tiny cracks in the paint.

Dinner last night was a chicken pot pie that I bought Tuesday night.

Grace got some work done at the house yesterday, and also got some chores done that we had not been able to do: she got the oil changed in my Element! Finally. And she also stopped at the Birch Run outlet mall and bought me six more pairs of underwear, which is something I've been planning to do for at least six months, but haven't actually done. We could have stopped on the Wednesday we came back from our vacation, but I did not want to drag the kids into stores in the outlet mall. I would have stopped Saturday when I was in Saginaw, but left so late that the store was closed. Since she was up by herself, with no kids

in tow and a whole afternoon to spend there, it was a little easier for her to take the time.

We're starting to have showings of the house, which is promising. It is listed now at \$75,000. If we get an offer at that price, I will still have to borrow a big chunk of money to close on these terms. But this would still lower our fixed expenses and get us off the hook for future unplanned expenses related to the old house, which would go a long way towards stabilizing our finances!

My head is overstuffed with annoying details. They aren't really that interesting, even to me, but I've committed myself to making this a complete journal. So here are some of the details crowding my head. Maybe if I get them out into a file (I was going to write "onto paper," but that is not accurate and may never be accurate), I will be able to evict them from my head and free up some space.

My new underwear is too tight. It's the exact same product, and size, purchased a year later. The overseas manufacturers are doing what they often do, which is to gradually cut down the amount of fabric in a product to save money. I've had to contend with this many times before, and I've taken pictures and documented it. For example, the same Old Navy jeans, purchased a year later, were cut much differently. It just seems to be a fact of life that I can't ever find articles of clothing that I like and buy more of them over time. So they don't fit, but at least they have also been redesigned to be hideous. The waistbands now say "Champion" in a nauseous day-glow green color. The older pairs used red script or white script. The new pairs use this green waistband color along with a variety of different colors for the body of the briefs. This makes for some eye-watering color clashes. They're horrible. Clearly no one who is a designer, and probably no one who is not extremely colorblind, is applying any oversight to this product line.

People are crapping in the toilets at our old house and leaving it. Presumably they are the people at the showings. It would not actually be a problem; we left toilet paper in all the bathrooms. Except the water has been off (via the shutoff in the basement). We have been leaving the water off because we are still concerned about leaks, but we are going to try leaving it on, since we will be back in the house frequently and it looks like the realtor will be in the house, too. Hopefully if there is a leak becoming a problem, we can catch it before it does any real damage. This is a stupid thing, but it's just one more thing I have to worry about.

We paid a plumber today to fix the terribly leaking faucet in the kitchen, so there's that, but after sitting unheated and with the water off for months and months we are concerned that there are more dried-out gaskets and leaks that we have not found yet.

Another Obstetrician

This afternoon Grace is meeting with another obstetrician, to see if this one is suitable. This doctor's office is in Birmingham, Michigan, about an hour from our home, but does deliver babies at St. Joe's. Because of the distance, she's kind of hoping he doesn't wind up being her preferred choice.

I get paid this evening. Our checking account is quite low — under a hundred dollars. All these extra expenses this week — the plumber, the extra tanks of gas, road food — are going on the credit card, which is rapidly creeping up towards its limit. This really can't continue — and so we are hoping as hard as we can that something changes soon. Hey, if you are reading this — would you like to buy a beautiful old house?

Joshua, Pippin, and Merry are apparently sick of home-schooling and are asking if they can go to school. We'll give it some thought.

And here is one final, ultimate bit of over-sharing: I've had painful hemorrhoids. I think it was the disrupted diet, due to the power outage, plus a couple of pizzas, and road food that we don't usually eat, and an excessive amount of driving. And, of course, stress. I've been eating salads and fruit and fiber bars and drinking less coffee and extra tea and water and the situation seems to be improving. But talk about adding injury to insult, or something, not to mention a literal pain in the ass!

Friday

Last night I got home fairly late. Grace ran out on an errand to take a kombucha SCOBY to her friend (I'm trying to imagine explaining that to future generations... I don't really like kombucha all that much, and I don't really want to give myself food poisoning, which is totally a thing, but *you* are welcome to experiment). She was gone for quite some time. I got distracted trying to unclog the bathtub drain. While I was sitting on the edge of the tub applying three rounds of drain cleaner, the timer on the oven went off. I didn't hear it, and no one else noticed and turned off the oven, so dinner (chicken pieces baked with lemon) was a little over-cooked, but still tasty. When Grace got back we had chicken, rice, and leftover salad.

I found that I had accidentally left my copy of *Elric: Stormbringer!* at work, and I really wanted to read myself some Elric, so at bedtime I read a bit of *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*. So now I'm juggling two Elric stories.

***Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)**

In this novel, Elric becomes integrated into Moorcock's "Eternal Champion" concept, as Elric shares the adventure with Hawkmoon and Corum. There's also Erekosë, who seems like he could be Elric himself from later in his timeline.

I'm not entirely clear on that, though. In modern science fiction and fantasy, meeting yourself is a fairly common trope, but it might have been less common back in the day. I'm skeptical of all this multiverse stuff, but I have to say now that I'm somewhat familiar with the character, I'm enjoying the story so far.

According to the Multiverse wiki, *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* is a fix-up of three novellas, "Sailing to the Future," "Sailing to the Present," and "Sailing to the Past." Going by in-universe chronology, I think this story takes place after the events of *The Fortress of the Pearl*. At least that's where it appears in the recent Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection series of books that I've got. So, it's fairly early in Elric's timeline. In publication chronology, it was published much later. By picking it up now, I guess I'm no longer reading the Elric material in chronological order. (Pretend there's a shrug emoji here.) Maybe I'll finish *Sailor*, and maybe I won't. Maybe I'll quit *Sailor* and go back to publication order. Maybe I'll stop completely. I can quit anytime I want, I swear.

If I do continue in publication order, I'll finish *Elric: Stormbringer!* and then, I think, next up is "The Eternal Champion," the original novella version, collected in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*, not to be confused with the novel *The Eternal Champion*, which is apparently quite different and doesn't really feature Elric as himself. Again, if you want to read this stuff in publication order, it probably would make more sense to read the Del Rey collections. Since my budget for books is limited right now, instead I am using the tables of contents of *those* volumes, on the Multiverse wiki, to look up and read the stories in the Gollancz volumes that I've already got. (I'm also learning that, annoyingly, the Del Rey collections have a few stories in them that aren't in the Gollancz volumes.)

This evening I'll go to Costco for groceries, and try to restrain myself as much as possible, because money is tight. I'm experiencing a bit of cognitive dissonance because at the same time I'm debating whether I want to buy a \$700 dehumidifier to protect our things from moisture damage, or another cheap one which probably won't last more than two years.

Saturday

Last night: another Costco run. Fruit: organic grapes (kind of hard to find), bananas, strawberries, and some oranges to try from South Africa (wow). Vegetables: green beans and brussels sprouts. Our housemate made dinner! Pasta and meat sauce, salad, and garlic bread. Nice!

I also brought home something from Costco I wanted to try: "loaded potato salad." It turns out loaded baked potatoes are much better hot.

Anyway, lots of chaos and kitchen cleanup. After I got a dish load on, I gave Veronica the option of doing a round of hand-washing either last night, or this morning. She chose this morning.

***Elric: Stormbringer!* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

No bedtime story for the kids last night. I did get a few minutes to read a little more of *Stormbringer*. It's quite an imaginative old-school fantasy story. (Spoiler) Elric keeps losing love interests, and friends, to his big black phallus. The sexism is very palpable, and the violence is brutal. If you decide you can't tolerate it, I can't really blame you. I'm trying to enjoy what I can from it — in particular the crazy visions of a world being destroyed by the literal manifestation of chaos, and a hero trapped by his fate. It makes more sense if you think of it as a sort of modern retelling of an ancient creation myth. It isn't an adaptation of any existing myth, but it partakes of their freakish raw energy.

I was somewhat startled when several of the kids were up early and actually did the rest of that hand-washing and kitchen cleanup!

I was going to make breakfast, but wasn't feeling too energetic this morning. The kids heated up leftover pasta from last night. I soaked my inflamed rear end in the tub and and I'm trying to decide if it is getting better or worse and whether I need to go to a doctor.

Our water softener is not working right. I changed the battery and I've run it through a couple of extra "regeneration" cycles but the water is yellowish, slightly sticky-feeling, and tastes like iron. We might have to get someone out to look at it. The valve under the well pump seemed like it was leaking a bit, as well, kind of like the valve on the boiler was leaking. So we may need to get a boiler service person *and* a water system service person out here. I'm looking at my bank balances very, very nervously.

I got a second replacement cell phone battery for Grace's phone and it doesn't seem to be working either. So it may very well be the case that neither of these replacement batteries are bad, but the phone itself can no longer charge and manage battery power properly. So we've probably got to go buy Grace another phone. More unwanted expenses occurring at a bad time.

In positive news, we've heard from our realtor in Saginaw that since re-listing the old house, and having several showings, one or more buyers are submitting offers. If we have an offer we can make work at all for us, we will take it. Anything that gets us free of the house without having to go through the short sale, deed-in-lieu, and/or foreclosure process would be welcome.

Our insurance company has raised our monthly payments by almost 25%. They are still supposed to send us about \$1,700 in additional payments.

It sounds like we might be able to borrow a dehumidifier so maybe I can put off buying one. When possible I would like to buy a higher-end unit. I've spoken to a couple of co-workers about them, and they confirm that they have had similar experiences with cheap dehumidifiers: older ones lasted a long time. Current ones die at about the two-year mark, and aren't worth fixing. This higher-end one is designed to be fixed, although I don't know where I would take it; would

we have to ship it back to the factory? And I was looking for a local reseller, but never heard back from the place I tried to contact.

I haven't got any great news or reviews or insights to finish up the week, so I'll just sign off. With any luck we will have good news about the house soon. Closing on a sale would be such a load off my mind that I expect that my chronic heartburn might actually just go away. I have been putting off seeing a doctor about it because I'm pretty sure that I know what is causing it, and therefore, what will fix it. I hope I get the chance to find out soon.

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.

- *Yendi* by Steven Brust in *The Book of Jheræg* by Steven Brust (Omnibus Edition Containing the Vlad Taltos Novels *Jheræg*, *Yendi*, and *Teckla*)
- “Black Sword’s Brothers” by Michael Moorcock, in *Elic: Stormbringer!* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- *Dragons at Crumbling Castle* by Terry Pratchett
- *Autumn* by Karl Ove Knausgaard
- *Nixon in China* (Opera) by John Adams with Libretto by Alice Goodman
- *Music from Nixon in China* (Orchestra of St. Luke’s, Edo de Waart, Conductor, Elektra/Nonesuch CD, 1988)
- *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell (in progress)
- *Elic: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, August 11th, 2018

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