

2018 Week 34: The Week Ending Saturday, August 25th

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

Grace has been asking for red meat, and so last night we seared some of the steaks from Costco and served them with roasted potatoes and steamed asparagus. (One 3-pound bag of the small red and white potatoes from Costco is, basically, the starch for one meal for my family; they completely fill a baking tray, and we finish them off). We had a little bit of red wine from a box and the combination was very satisfying.

We had some plans underway to take the kids to an outdoor movie in Plymouth, at a hockey rink. But it didn't work out; it got to be too late and we didn't go. But shortly after the movie was to start, it started pouring rain, so it wouldn't have worked out anyway. Instead I read the second part of *The Sleeping Sorceress*.

***The Sleeping Sorceress* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

That second novella, in which Elric encounters the king of the beggars, originally called "To Snare the Pale Prince." There is a lot to like about this novella. The description of the beggar king and his city is pretty great — I'm reminded a bit of George R. R. Martin's grittier characters. Elric's battle against Checkalakh the Burning God is fun to read. But while it is a decent standalone story, it really isn't integrated very well with the first part of *The Sleeping Sorceress* in order to create a coherent *novel*. So this "novel" really is a fix-up, and it doesn't seem all that well fixed-up.

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

At bedtime I read Joshua and Sam another chapter from *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Just a single chapter, because I was feeling tired and distracted. It was a little more about the narrator's experience in "spikes" and a Salvation Army-run shelter. This part is dragging a bit for me; I am eager for something else to happen.

***The Sleeping Sorceress* by Michael Moorcock, Concluded**

This morning I read the last part of the Elric novel *The Sleeping Sorceress*, the third novella that makes up the novel, and I'm sorry to say that this one is pretty weak sauce. Elric is feeling melancholy as usual. Life in Tanelorn bores him. He wants to die, while at the same time he suspects that he can't get off this merry-go-round that easily. He sets off into the desert to try to find his motivation. This seems, pretty transparently, like Moorcock staring at a blank sheet of paper trying to find *his* motivation. Some things happen that are so contrived that they evaporate from the mind of the reader pretty much as soon as they appear.

Elric winds up meeting two other incarnations of the Eternal Champion, Erekosë *aka* John Daker, who is, interestingly, revealed to be a black man, and Corum Jhaelen Irsei, "the Prince in the Scarlet Robe." They also meet up with Jharya-a-Conel, that annoying man in fancy clothes with his winged cat. They have a brief potted adventure together and then go their separate ways. The stakes are apparently the survival of the whole multiverse, or something — in other words, infinitely high. This has the effect of making us care very little about their battle, since the reader can't forget that there isn't any chance our heroes will lose. The setting for their battle is "The Vanishing Tower," which is a lot like "The Singing Citadel" in the earlier novella, although the Citadel is a lot more fun.

Armed with magical artifacts discovered in the Vanishing Tower, the day is saved. But Elric remains despondent, in a state of agitated depression. Rackhir the Red Archer assures him that he has a magical potion that will help him forget recent events. Readers might find themselves wishing for something similar that would allow them to forget the especially morose and whiny Elric that stalks this busted fix-up.

In Karin L. Kross's review on Tor she comments:

When Myshella offers both herself and a vision of Elric's desires to him, he screams in terror, and on recovering himself, tells her coldly, "Know this. Elric cannot have what he desires most. What he desires does not exist. What he desires is dead. All Elric has is sorrow, guilt, malice, hatred. This is all he deserves and all he will ever desire."

You might be forgiven, at this point, for rolling your eyes a bit and saying "oh, come *on*."

Yes, Elric does, as she puts it, come "dangerously close to self-parody" in this book. And it was funny to read about Corum, who I've never read about before, shortly after reading the parody "The Stone Thing: a Tale of Strange Parts." Apparently Corum is the particular hero Moorcock is mocking in that story.

Kross does apparently find the later novel *The Revenge of the Rose* more enjoyable, better than *The Fortress of the Pearl*. But before I get there, to

continue reading the Elric stories in publication order, I have to go back and finish *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*. I'm actually looking forward to it, because I was enjoying the moody setting in the first part, although it is a story that partakes heavily of the multiverse concept, and is also a fix-up of three novellas.

Elric Progress Report

Looking at the seven brightly colored Gollancz Elric books on my shelf, I've now completely finished *Elric of Melniboné and Other Stories*, *Elric: The Fortress of the Pearl*, and *Elric: Stormbringer*. That's three of the seven, completed. I've also read most of the material in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*, and read just about everything in *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* except for the titular novel, which I've just started, and the story "A Portrait in Ivory." I've read everything in *Elric: The Revenge of the Rose* except for the titular novel (and maybe one of the introductory essays; I'll have to double-check).

So I think that leaves me with only *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*, *The Revenge of the Rose*, "The Flaneur des Arcades de l'Opera," and "A Portrait in Ivory." At that point I will have finished the bulk of the "classic" older Elric material.

Two books that were published as separate Elric novels, *The Weird of the White Wolf* and *The Bane of the Black Sword* I've read "deconstructed," that is, as their constituent novellas. This is how Moorcock organized them in the Gollancz volumes, and I think I have to agree with him that they probably work better that way, as they make better separated episodes than novels. Reading these Elric stories of varying lengths — novelettes, novelas, and novels — has given me a lot to think about regarding the "best" length and format for this kind of genre fiction. The strongest Elric material is, in my opinion, in short episodic form. At least, this seems to be true for the Elric stories originally published through the mid-1970s.

There are a few stray stories that I could track down, but I'd have to get my hands on a copy of the Del Rey edition of *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*. Then I'll have to decide whether I want to tackle the much fatter omnibus volume *Elric: The Moonbeam Roads*. It's almost a thousand pages long, and contains three novels, *Daughter of Dreams*, *Destiny's Brother*, and *Son of the Wolf*. These novels are much longer than the older Elric novels.

I'm guessing these Moonbeam Roads novels might be where Elric and I part ways; I think that I'll either love them enough to plow on through all three, or they'll leave me indifferent. They seem to be fully drenched in Moorcock's multiverse stuff, which I am having a hard time enjoying. However, even if I decide I've had enough Elric, I don't think I'll be really done with Moorcock. I might try the "end of time" books — in the Gollancz volumes, these are *The Dancers at the End of Time* and *Tales from the End of Time*. I might try the Gollancz edition of *The Eternal Champion*. And there is some earlier Moorcock material that comes highly recommended. The three novels collected in the Gollancz omnibus volume *Traveling to Utopia* get good reviews, and so do the

novels in *Kane of Old Mars*.

As well, I'd like to investigate some of the books that Moorcock cites as important influences, including Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword*, which I don't think I've ever read; Moorcock also cites Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* books. I own a copy of *The Gormenghast Trilogy* which contains the first three, but if I remember correctly, I only ever finished the first one. Moorcock also mentions in his "Aspects of Fantasy" essays a number of other works that I'm curious about; some of them, like Jane Gaskell's *The Serpent* and William S. Burroughs' cutup novels, I read many years ago and don't feel the need to re-read anytime soon. But there are a number of other works he cites, including some classic gothic novels, that I'm curious about. So in addition to a constant trickle of non-fiction, including political books I'm studying for the podcast, I've got plenty lined up to read!

House Offers

Grace and I made bulletproof coffee for breakfast and Veronica made a pot of oatmeal. Then Grace took a call from our realtor in Saginaw. The news is confusing. One person submitted a very low offer — for only \$55,000, which is \$20,000 lower than our asking price, which in turn is well below our mortgage balance. We can't make that work; I'd have to borrow a huge amount of money to close, which would leave us in a risky financial state. I don't think I can even borrow that much. That's even lower than the last lowball offers we were getting — which we got *before* completing a number of expensive repairs. We're scratching our heads, because we thought there was at least one reasonable offer in the works. This is very discouraging. I'm finding that today I really don't want to interact with people much.

Monday

Yesterday was reasonably successful. We were too late getting started on the podcast and so missed out on two possible guests. Everyone was getting cranky and ravenous and finally I made some big omelettes, with roasted broccoli, corned beef, and leftover roasted potatoes. Those were a hit.

Recording the Pottscast

The day felt like it was slipping away; Grace had a lot of calls and text messages and e-mails and Facebook messages into various people, but wasn't getting any replies, and she found herself stalled out while I waited for her downstairs. But it worked out reasonably well. We recorded a show where I read several marked sections from *The Chapo Guide to Revolution* and we talked about Chapo Trap House in general, their new book, and the increasingly significant split between leftists and liberals. We also read a bit more from *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*, and talked about Mark Bray's prescriptions for "everyday

anti-fascism.” No time to edit means no editing, so there are some belches in this one from both of us. Stress is affecting both of our digestive systems.

We have had some positive feedback on the show from a couple of folks who listen regularly, burps and all.

While I was doing the production and uploading, Grace and the kids got a simple meal of pasta together and managed to get the kitchen more-or-less ready for the week. I was done shortly after 11. Even with a shorter show, under two hours, with no edits, just the process of getting everything bounced, converted, and uploaded takes quite some time. I put a lot of effort into the show notes and I inevitably wind up finding typos after the blog post is up and the podcast feed file has been updated. It is time-consuming to fix those, but although I’ll tolerate a show that has burps in it, I draw the line at typos.

The kids were fairly rumbustious at bedtime and I can’t say I could blame them; they hardly got out of the house all weekend. The humidity was oppressive. So it was after 1:00 when Grace and I finally got Elanor to settle down and got on to sleep ourselves.

***The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* by Michael Moorcock**

This morning I finished the first of the three novellas that make up *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*, called “Sailing to the Future.” I wrote before that I liked the moodiness of this setting. But the actual story of this first novella is not great. Elric and three other incarnations of the Eternal Champion destroy two weird and gigantic sorcerous beings in an abstracted ruined city. They believe that they are searching inside a strange building, hunting the two antagonists they are seeking. But they realize that they are actually inside the body of one of their enemies. The four champions unite physically into a being with eight eyes and four faces. The description of this is scant but it seems to horrify each of the four so much that they don’t want to remember anything about it, and apparently some of the cannon-fodder warriors along with them actually go mad, at least temporarily, watching it happen. This stinks of a pretty profound externalized homophobia:

“We are the Four Who Are One,” said Erekosë. His voice shook. Elric was seized by an alien impulse, an impulse which disgusted and terrified him. “No...” He attempted to sheathe Stormbringer, but the sword refused to enter its scabbard.

Yeah, I hate it when I’m out fighting with my buddies and my sword won’t fit back in my scabbard until I’ve used it. But sometimes you’ve gotta do what you’ve gotta do.

“We are the Four Who Are One,” said Erekosë. “Our united strength is greater than the sum. We must come together, brothers.

LOL.

Elric felt his arm begin to rise, drawn upward by his sword, and he saw that each of his three companions were also lifting their swords. The swords reached out across the pool and their tips met above the exact center.

Oh, myyyy.

Elric yelled as something entered his being.

LOL again.

Elric's body began to shake, but his hand kept a firm hold upon the sword. The atoms of his body flew apart and then united again into a single flowing entity which traveled up the blade of the sword toward the apex. And Elric was still Elric, shouting with the terror of it, sighing with the ecstasy of it.

Indeed.

So, this novella gets points for the moody setting and the imaginative use of a womb level. But it loses points because, basically, everything that happens in Womb World *stays* in Womb World. When everything is all multiversed up, Moorcock can bring in characters and kill them off again and there are no real consequences for anything that happens. In this story, Elric has pretty much completely forgotten the events of "The Singing Citadel," and at the end of this story, he is imbibing a drink which will allow him to forget the icky (but ecstatically pleasurable) "bad touches" that he was required to endure (but did not at *all* enjoy) when he and the other Eternal Champions had to join in the inter-dimensional circle-jerk and fuse their oversize swords into one, and plunge it into their enemy.

Elric thought to himself: I must forget all this or sanity will disappear forever.

Indeed, they can't really face each other the morning after:

Brut whispered, "What was it? What happened to us?" Elric increased his grip upon the warrior's shoulder. "Nothing," he said.

I'm really hoping the second novella will be better. On the positive side, the episodic structure of these so-called novels means that if one of them isn't all that good, it doesn't take very long to get to the next one.

On my lunch break today I ran out to Stadium Hardware and picked up a pair of long needle-nosed pliers with a curved tip. The only tool they had like this was made in China. To try to make feel less guilty for buying a tool made in China, I also purchased a much more expensive pair of Channelock pliers made in America. I guess that might sound silly. It's also because I know I used to have a similar, but shorter, pair of Channelock pliers, but I haven't been able to find them. If I find them again I'll have two nice American-made tools to meet needs that will, no doubt, crop up in the future.

I'm hoping these curved-tip pliers might be just the tool I need to help remove a chunk of glass from our sink's garbage disposal. If this doesn't do it, I'm giving up, and tomorrow night I'll buy a new one at Costco, and we'll see if we can get our handyman out to install it this week.

After buying the pliers, I had huevos rancheros at Don Juan Mexican Bar and Grill on Stadium Boulevard. Nothing was terribly spicy but my stomach is touchy and everything is tasting off to me again. There's no news from our realtor.

Today, Grace has gotten some calls and e-mails returned and our realtor has forwarded us one low-ball offer on the old house. This offer is too low for us to accept — we'd have to bring something like \$40,000 to the closing. I don't think I could borrow that much even if I wanted to. So we're hoping there is at least one more offer forthcoming.

Tuesday

Fixing the Garbage Disposal

Something actually went right last night and I want to take a moment to celebrate a small victory. I used the curved-tip needle nosed pliers to pull what I thought was a piece of broken glass out of the garbage disposal. I was hoping that the pliers would either pull it out, or break it into smaller pieces that would come loose and let the disposal turn again. I managed to get a firm grip on the thing and yank. It was *very* tightly stuck. I was pretty sure I had nothing to lose since the alternative was replacing the disposal, so I pulled as hard as I could. What I actually pulled out was a small transparent Lego brick.

Opaque Lego bricks are made of ABS plastic, acrylonitrile butadiene styrene. It is hard to shatter, but it can shatter. The kids have gotten this kind of Lego part in the disposal before and I've been able to break them up to get them out. But the clear Lego pieces are made of polycarbonate, not ABS, are almost impossible to shatter. Polycarbonate plastic, according to Wikipedia, "can undergo large plastic deformations without cracking or breaking." Safety glass lenses are made of polycarbonate, or a similar plastic. So it's not really a surprise that the disposal could not chew through it, and that I couldn't break it.

As for the question of how it got in the sink — well, I can't even begin to answer that, except to point out that there are nine children living under my roof now, six of them my kids, and three guests. The youngest one can't walk yet but that leaves at least three likely candidates between the ages of one and four.

Why Legos? I don't know. If one child leaves a Lego lying on the floor, another child might pick it up later and throw it in the sink. I've also found bits of hair clips in the disposal.

I've had to remove broken things that were jamming the disposal at least five times this year. It's getting old. Glass is the usual culprit. The young kids can't

really reach into the kitchen sink but they sometimes try to do what the rest of us are doing and get their dishes into the sink after a meal. They've been known to throw their glasses into the sink, despite our best efforts to convince them not to. They've broken a couple of our very sturdy Durablex tumblers that way. If the sink is empty they likely won't break. If they land on *another* Durablex tumbler, or a Corelle bowl (most of our plates and bowls are Ikea knock-offs of Corelle), that's when something breaks. The Ikea glasses break like crazy. I don't think we're going to buy any more of them. They cost perhaps a third of what the Durablex tumblers cost, but they break much more frequently, so they're not really a bargain.

Last night I found a broken tumbler in the sink. What worries me is that there was a big piece missing and I never did find the piece. It wasn't in the dishwasher. It wasn't in the disposal. It wasn't in the sink, or on the counter. I had the kids sweep the kitchen floor thoroughly. We break at least one or two glasses or plates or bowls per week. Even given our best efforts at sweeping up every time a piece gets broken, tiny fragments go flying, and may wind up quite far away. I frequently get small fragments of glass stuck in my feet. Generally I can pull them out easily. I'd rather get them stuck in my feet than have the kids get them stuck in their feet. Stepping on a larger piece could easily mean an emergency room visit. Our toddler could put something like that in her mouth and that... would be bad. It's things like this that give parents sleepless nights.

House Sale Closing Scenarios

Our realtor sent us three estimated closing scenarios, for selling the house at three different prices: \$75,000, \$65,000, and \$55,000. They would require us to borrow nearly \$20,000, nearly \$30,000, or nearly \$40,000, respectively. So far the only written offer we've received is for \$55,000. I don't even think I can even borrow \$40,000. Even if I could, a loan that big, especially on top of our current debts, would burden us very heavily for a long time, hugely limiting our ability to build up an emergency fund, or maintain, or upgrade, our current house's infrastructure (we've got gutter issues, air conditioner issues — plenty to do), or maintain (or replace) our cars — they are both fifteen years old, and aren't going to make it much longer. We haven't really even furnished our house, or even really gotten unpacked; that's all waiting for the day when we have some money available. And so we are hoping for a much better offer.

***The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

Last night and this morning I finished the second novella comprising *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*, called "Sailing to the Past." This novella is certainly better than the first one; it's fun, and creepy, and contains an other-worldly horse that reminds me of something out of William Hope Hodgson's Carnacki story "The Horse of the Invisible." Also, Elric doesn't wind up banging the female character! That's a nice change. (The female character is still basically just a plot coupon, a bone that two other characters fight over, but hey, it's a start). But it's still

frustrating that in this novella, Elric thinks of the events of the first novella as just things that he experienced in a particularly vivid dream. This so-called novel, *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*, really isn't a novel *per se*. Almost nothing persists between parts. This "fix-up" is still "broken" — these are just episodes, and don't form a novel. They really shouldn't be presented as a novel.

If the events of "The Singing Citadel" and the events of "Sailing to the Past" never happened, as far as the protagonist is concerned, are we as the readers also supposed to think of them this way? This creates what is perhaps an interesting philosophical question about alternate universes, realities, and timelines, but as a reader, nothing is more maddening than getting to the end of a story and being told everything we've invested in a story is now of no real value, because it was just a dream and has no consequences that actually affect the protagonist.

The Wet Tahoe

It rained quite a bit last night and that was great, because we really need it. It's been raining on and off this morning. But apparently we left the windows in the Tahoe open all night, and that's not so great. We have a shop vac, which *might* be able to suck some water out of the carpet, but I'm not sure it still works. And I have to be at work during this day, so I can't help with this. We need to get it fully opened up and in direct sun and drying as quickly as possible. But it doesn't look like we're going to have much sun this afternoon. If we can't get it fully dried out very quickly, it's going to be a mess. The air conditioning, which could help dry it out, doesn't work, and there's no money in the budget to repair it.

And so I'm feeling like a failure, because I simply can't keep up with everything. Grace is doing her best. She got a lot done yesterday, following up with a lot of people. It's my job to take care of the things she forgets. I've been distracted, and I've been tired, and I've been feeling burned out, and fat, and ugly, and sluggish, which results in me taking more down time, which includes time every day "escaping" into my reading, which results in judging myself as lazy, which results in feeling even worse about myself and everything around me. I should just put Nine Inch Nails' album *The Downward Spiral* on my headphones and be done with it. It might be cathartic, today.

Intermittent Fasting

Last night on Twitter I saw an offhand comment about eating in an "eight-hour window," as a form of intermittent fasting. I've tried intermittent fasting before, going without solid food for 24 to 36 hours on Sundays. It works well for me, in the sense that I feel better and lose a bit of weight doing that. But it doesn't work well in the sense that it's hard for me to keep up with my obligations to the family, and get the podcast done smoothly, when I'm not eating; it leaves me with low blood sugar, and tired, and a bit shaky. But this comment about an "eight-hour window" got me thinking. We have been eating dinners *way* too

late. last night due to a number of factors we didn't eat dinner until 10:30. We know that it isn't really good to try to sleep very shortly after eating.

The eight-hour window sounds difficult; for one thing, my work day with lunch break and commute is already over nine hours when everything works out just right, and usually ten. I'm away from home longer than that, over eleven hours, on the days when I get groceries after work. So that would require me to eat at least two of my meals during my work day, and presumes I'd be able to have the third meal with my family shortly after I get home. At the moment that doesn't seem achievable. But I think it is worth considering how we might get our "window" smaller. Yesterday I ate breakfast, tea and raisin bran, at my office at about 10:00 a.m., and didn't finish dinner until about 11:00 p.m. That's about a 13-hour window. What is ideal for me? I don't know, but I'm pretty sure that isn't it.

Getting enough sleep is also a basic self-care thing that Grace and I have been struggling with, and of course the two aren't unrelated. Solving the problem of our old house would go a long way towards fixing both of these problems and lowering everyone's stress level. But unfortunately we can't *really* control that situation fully, which makes us feel helpless. And so it goes. It taints everything else. We've got to fix it.

The same rains that got us showers last night apparently produced deadly flooding in the Madison, Wisconsin area.

It's supposed to cool down noticeably tomorrow, so at least we've got that going for us.

Considering More Moorcock

I'd like to buy a copy of the Gollancz edition of *Kane of Old Mars*. Alibris shows no copies of the Gollancz edition at all. Copies of the older editions are expensive on Alibris. They show two versions of editions from White Wolf Games Studio, although I'm not sure they are really separate editions. The cheapest copy is almost \$30.00.

There are old copies of the three individual novels as well — although these are quite old now, and I don't necessarily want to order books that are going to crumble in my hands. And finding them gets confusing, since the individual novels originally appeared under different titles and were published under a pseudonym:

- *Warriors of Mars* (by "Edward P. Bradbury"), later known as *City of the Beast*
- *Blades of Mars* (by "Edward P. Bradbury"), later known as *Lord of the Spiders*
- *Barbarians of Mars* (by "Edward P. Bradbury"), later known as *Masters of the Pit*

Notice how the original title of the first novel *Warriors of Mars*, (“warriors,” plural), is almost identical to the title of the older omnibus entitled *Warrior of Mars* (“warrior,” singular). This makes it just that bit more challenging to search for a copy of the older omnibus; the first hit on Alibris today was for the novel, not the omnibus. The listings are a mess, and prices are all over the map.

It’s currently easy to find inexpensive copies of the Gollancz edition of *Traveling to Utopia* and *The Dancers at the End of Time*, but the matching editions of *Tales from the End of Time* and *The Eternal Champion* are scarce and expensive. There are older editions of both those omnibus editions, but the different editions don’t actually collect the same content. (Urgh...)

Anyway, I’m not going to pull the trigger today, but maybe on Friday, after I get paid, I will order three Moorcock books (for a total of about \$16.00 plus shipping), and plan to read them in September or October. Unless I decide that I don’t want to spend even that much at the moment.

An Offer on the Old House

We got a better offer — for \$75,000. This could work for us. I will need to confirm with my bank that I can borrow money to bring to closing, and it is contingent on the buyer’s satisfactory inspection, and the buyer’s ability to obtain a mortgage. But those are the only contingencies as the offer is currently written.

I don’t want us to get ahead of ourselves and start celebrating yet, but it seems promising, so I’m cautiously optimistic.

The Amulet Touch Screen Display

At work today I had a reasonably good day; I made some progress on the Amulet GUI code, written in GEMScript, which is not too dissimilar to JavaScript. I’m implementing controls to allow the user to set the fine-tuning offset for the iTLAs (integrateable tunable laser assembly) in our instruments such as the TLX1. It is partially working now with temporary artwork. The microcontroller code will also need a little work. Fortunately it won’t need a lot of new code, since most of the infrastructure for handling this setting is already in place. This is because the fine-tuning offset is already accessible via the remote control interface.

It may seem strange to say it, but when I look at the amount of code that I’ve already written over the last few years for this project, and shipped out, it seems hard to believe. When I am feeling low because I haven’t felt very productive for a few days, I should remind myself of this.

I went to Costco after work and brought home a small load of food: a package of chicken salad, bananas, lamb steaks, grapes, and some hamburger buns. I had the idea that Grace could chop up some strawberries and Joshua could make a batch of biscuits and we could have lamb steaks for those who wanted them,

chicken salad sandwiches for those who didn't, and strawberry shortcake for dessert.

What actually happened is that the house was quite a mess when I got home, Grace was directing the kids to finish their chores, and the box of Bisquick biscuit mix was empty, since the kids had used it up, but put the empty box back in the pantry. So we had to spend some time getting things ready. I made a quick batch of pancakes to eat with the strawberries. The lamb was delicious. I also ate a little more of the loaded potato salad, mostly because I am trying to avoid throwing any out. It's edible but not great. Maybe I will take the rest to work for penitential lunches.

Grace and I signed a paper copy of the \$75,000 offer and tomorrow I will scan it and send a copy back to the realtor. Grace has doctor visits in the morning and so I will be staying home for half the day with the kids. I'll probably feed them granola and I'll probably finish the third and final novella comprising the so-called "novel" *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*.

Wednesday

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

Last night the bedtime story for the kids was another chapter from *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Just one chapter, because it was pretty late.

The chapter is primarily a character sketch of a street artist named Bozo. Bozo is interesting because, as our narrator learns, he maintains a stoic philosophy. He refuses to blame himself for his reduced circumstances, and insists on maintaining what personal dignity he can. He refuses to pick up used cigarette butts as many of the men do in his circumstances.

He's literate, and knows a bit about astronomy; he spends his evenings observing meteorites. He's an atheist of an interesting and, occasionally, relateable sort: he doesn't seem to disbelieve in God so much as despise him. I'm reminded of Elie Wiesel's holocaust story about putting God on trial.

There's another interesting aspect to Bozo's character: he accepts charity, but refuses to feel gratitude *per se*, especially to the religious charities like the Salvation Army, who Bozo seems to believe are doing charity more for their own benefit, to improve their own souls, or to do what might now be called "virtue signaling."

This seems to go along with a kind of crypto-socialism, which he cannot express in his street art without running up against pressure from the police; Bozo's foot injury was due to an accident, and as a socialist Bozo believes that societies should take care of their own, and thus he does not owe gratitude for the minimal care he gets. His future is bleak, but he is not portrayed as cynical or depressed. Aside from the recurring anti-Semitic notes, this chapter remains fascinating; it packs a lot into just a few pages.

***The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

I stayed home from work this morning so that Grace could go to a doctor appointment. I finished reading *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*. The third novella is a modified version of “The Jade Man’s Eyes,” published in 1973. This is a pretty good story, and reminds me a bit of the film *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*. It’s a jungle exploration adventure, and a sort of treasure hunt, and it’s almost as bleak and brutal, in terms of body count, as that movie is. The “Jade Man” is a giant statue of Arioeh, Elric’s patron, Lord of Chaos.

“A Portrait in Ivory” by Michael Moorcock

Then I wound up flipping a few pages ahead and reading the short story (a novelette, I guess, since it is broken into short chapters?) “A Portrait in Ivory.” Strictly speaking I was getting ahead of myself, since this doesn’t come until a bit later, reading the stories in publication order. But it was there and it was pretty short. It’s quite a good story. In Elric’s chronology, it takes place after the events of “The Dreaming City,” when Elric’s grief and guilt at Cymoril’s death is still fresh. In this particular case it probably would have been better to read it in the order it appears in the book, right after “The Dreaming City.”

This means I’ve read everything in *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*, and it’s time for me to move on to *The Revenge of the Rose*.

Up Next

In publication order, it’s now time for me to read the novel *The Revenge of the Rose*, found in my copy of *Elric: The Revenge of the Rose*. I’m looking forward to it, because the reviews I’ve read suggest that this one is lighter in tone, even humorous. After the unrelenting grimness of *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* and “A Portrait in Ivory,” I’m ready for an Elric that takes himself a little less seriously.

I’m not sure I feel ready to recommend how *you* should read the Elric material. I still think it was the right call, for me, to read the old novellas first, in publication order, at least through the end of *Stormbringer*. Some of the later stuff like “A Portrait in Ivory” fits very naturally in between the early novellas. But after that, I don’t know that I can really advise you. Maybe when I’m all done, I can at least rank the material. My ranking wouldn’t be to say “don’t read this,” but rather to say “I think these stories are better, and I recommend you read these first, and read the other stories only if you are really enjoying them.” I think I probably will track down a copy of *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*, so that I can try reading some material that isn’t in the Gollancz editions, like the original novella “The Jade Man’s Eyes,” before it was revised to be part of *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*.

I’m headed off to work, to work a half-day.

When I got to work, I found that my work computer had rebooted due to a blue screen of death crash, which is discouraging; after replacing the memory, it has been working much more reliably, although I have had one more strange “snow crash,” where the video turns into a wall of jittery stripes. I hope I’m not going to have to start chasing Windows crashes again.

The predicted low temperature tonight is 52. It sounds heavenly. I’m planning to sleep with the bedroom window wide open and I hope to wake up in the wee hours shivering.

Thursday

Dinner was leftovers: chicken salad, drumsticks, salad, some of that loaded potato salad.

The Revenge of the Rose by Michael Moorcock

The kids didn’t actually do the cleanup they promised me they were doing last night. We didn’t have a story last night, because it was getting too late. I got only a little reading done in *The Revenge of the Rose*. The style is such a departure from the earlier novellas that it is a bit jarring. It’s a pastiche of Elric and Victorian adventure stories. Engaging so far, although I think it will require more concentration to finish.

I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention that I think the title is an offhand play on the title of a famous medieval poem, *Le Roman de la Rose* (The Romance of the Rose), written in Old French. It’s an allegory about romance and chivalry and, from what I can determine so far, *The Revenge of the Rose* has nothing whatsoever to do with it.

We got our bed made. That seems like a trivial thing but with six kids at home and chores constantly piling up, it isn’t trivial.

It was indeed nice and cool last night, although it rained some. The forecast failed. That happens a lot and it seems to me that it happens more recently. Are the forecasts getting worse? Does anyone track their accuracy?

Tonight, I’m taking Sam and Joshua to see *2001: A Space Odyssey*. We’ll see how that goes. I am hoping they don’t get completely confused or lost. So during dinner I sketched out what they would see, from the “Dawn of Man” segment to the ending, focusing especially how to interpret the big transitions and the appearances of the monolith. I hope it helps and they can stay engaged with the film.

We got another offer on the house, for \$70,000. For now, I think we consider this our backup, if the offer at \$75,000 doesn’t go through for whatever reason. I’d have to borrow a little more to accept this one, but it might still be doable.

Friday

It's always stressful trying to do a thing with the kids right after work. I left my office right at 6:00. I was afraid that I'd be stuck in stopped traffic; several times this summer I've been stymied getting across town due to crashes and closures that can leave me sitting in traffic for hours. Even under normal circumstances, in the 6:00 hour traffic still winds up stopped dead, usually only briefly, in a few stops. Fortunately last night's commute involved only the usual few minutes of sitting at a dead stop or crawling at 5 miles per hour. My commute is nominally seventeen minutes, but I made it home right at 6:30, which is typical if I leave work at 6.

My mind keeps jumping back to Ann Arbor in 1990; things were different. We frogs weren't all boiling yet. But reminiscing just makes me sad.

Anyway, I had to switch cars because the Element has no rear seats at the moment. But I got the kids loaded up and we made it to the movie without incident — in fact, we were there ten minutes before the printed start time, which meant (I think) that we had to sit through twenty-five minutes of inane ads. Well, at least we saw the whole thing. *2001* was shown in an IMAX theater. The kids had not been in an IMAX theater before and so were a little gobsmacked by the size of the screen.

***2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968 Film)**

2001 was originally designed to be shown with a musical overture before the start of the film, an intermission, and an “exit music” section after the credits. I seem to recall that at some screenings there would be a title card during the overture and intermission. In the IMAX presentation, the screen was blank during the overture. At the start of the intermission, “intermission” appeared on the screen for a short while, then the screen was blank until the second part started. We didn't stay through the full credit sequence to see if the exit music was played.

There were only nine people in the theater. It was a Thursday night, a school and work night, but even so, I was startled. This is the fiftieth anniversary of one of the most significant films ever made, an enormously influential landmark. And the only people in the theater were a couple of other middle-aged dads like me, and a couple of their children then were bringing to see *2001*. Did you see any advertising for this 50th anniversary release? I sure didn't. I discovered it only by accident. There weren't even any posters inside or outside the theater itself. How sad.

An enormous amount has been written about *2001*. I've read only a fraction of it. I have a few thoughts after seeing the film again.

Time and Space

First, regarding the way that film uses time. It's damned fascinating. There are sequences that are deliberately slow, almost in real-time. But there are

also critical scenes where things happen and are given the absolute minimum of screen time necessary for the audience to glimpse what has happened (or fail to glimpse; for many viewers, it's not obvious what is happening). And then there are the huge leaps: millions of years, eighteen months, several years, where large portions of the "odyssey" are vanished from our view.

I saw the film and read the novel when I was quite young. There is no one alive who can confirm the date for me, but it was probably when the film was re-released in 1974; I would have been seven years old in the summer of 1974. I don't recall for sure, but I probably read the novel a year or two later. I know I had a copy of the paperback on my shelf throughout my later childhood years. And I remember that the movie broke my young brain in the best possible way.

Because the plot is a bit cryptic, don't worry about "spoilers." I think it's actually best to read the novel, which does not precisely match the events of the movie but will give you the gist of it, or at least the Wikipedia plot summary in advance.

There is no padding in the film. Let me repeat that: *there is no padding in the film*. You may dislike the deliberate and contemplative way in which Kubrick portrays some of the events in the film, but it isn't padded. Padding appears in bad films where the director does not have enough events or story or dialogue to fill out the minimal needed running time and so fills the screen with things like footage of a car driving away, characters walking across the street, or stock footage.

Padding would have been the inclusion of unnecessary footage that didn't work to tell the story. After the monolith on the moon "sings," producing a radio signal in response to exposure to light, Kubrick could have subjected us to many minutes of additional footage in which the scientists, still in their suits, walk back up the ramp, enter airlocks, hold meetings, and discuss contingencies. None of this would be critical to the story. Instead we get a dramatic compression of time, jumping to 18 months later when *Discovery* is underway. We need to know about the discovery of the monolith on the moon, and we need to know that this discovery led to the mission to Jupiter. But we *don't* need to see all the details. That would be padding.

After Bowman disconnects HAL's higher functions, the mission still has years to go. We could have been subject to scenes of Bowman's tedious survival aboard *Discovery*, or a montage. But again, we don't need to see all that detail, so we cut directly to the next discovery.

Kubrick was in no danger of not having enough material. Even the theatrical cut is trimmed from the original running time.

If you watch carefully — and it's not really possible to watch carefully enough when viewing this film on a small screen — you will note that in the slow sections of the film there is always a lot going on, and Kubrick is always editorializing. There's eye candy everywhere: matte inserts of people, in cockpits, behind

windows.

One could call the whole long sequence in which Heywood Floyd travels to Space Station 5 “slow.” But I believe here that Kubrick is actually doing a number of things, all at once:

- He’s commenting on the nature of travel: how travel even with our modern technology consists of a lot of waiting while our machines move us.
- He’s commenting on the future of travel: illustrating a hoped-for future where traveling to a space station, and then on to the moon, would in 2001 be so routine that a passenger like Floyd could wind up sleeping through much of it. (Spoiler: we got the bad timeline instead).
- He’s overturning some of our preconceptions about the nature of space travel: that it is furious, violent, and dangerous. In Kubrick’s future, it is placid, a gravitational ballet set to *The Blue Danube*. (In the real world of 1968, launching humans to orbit was nothing of the kind, but he could dream).
- He’s giving us an *amazing* discourse on orbital mechanics, explaining visually how spinning a structure can provide pseudo-gravity, how a shuttle can dock with a spinning structure by matching the vector and rotation.
- He’s constantly demonstrating, using a huge variety of stunning camera angles and rotational frames of references, that in orbit and in space there aren’t really unitary, common, privileged concepts of “up” and “down.” In fact he’s giving viewers a taste of principle of relativity, in which physics work the same no matter where you are standing or how you are moving.

This was pretty radical then and it’s still pretty revolutionary. Consider your average driver. In 2018, your average driver doesn’t understand that tailgating a huge truck might be a bad idea, or that stopping distance changes depending on your speed. But Kubrick had enough faith in his audience to believe that he could give them an intuitive education about orbital mechanics and space travel, with not an equation in sight.

In 1968, humans had not even set foot on the moon yet. And yet Kubrick created this film which takes place partly on the moon — and it still reads as pretty convincing, although of course now Kubrick’s future is a nostalgic retro-future.

I think it is probably impossible to overstate how influential *2001* was to filmed science fiction that came afterwards — and how almost all of that work feels cheaper, less realistic, and less convincing.

Acting

I think in an era of melodrama we might have a tendency to think that the acting in this film was not very good, because it is almost always calm and deliberate and modulated. But watching it now, I think it’s exactly the opposite.

David Bowman is preternaturally calm through most of the events of the second part of the film, only briefly raising his voice. But let's consider who he is, the circumstances he is in, and what he has trained to do. He's an astronaut. That means he's an extremely skilled pilot with many years of training in navigating crises and danger.

He's been presented again and again, probably for years, with multiple-catastrophic-failure scenarios and had to learn to navigate them calmly. Bowman's preternatural calm is his training, asserting itself. But every once in a while, a little raw primate fear breaks through. He raises his voice to HAL, when HAL will not open the airlock door. At the end of his psychedelic journey, he's trembling in terror.

Heywood Floyd has an amazing moment where he's being grilled about the events on Clavius. His colleagues want to know what the hell is going on. They've heard rumors of an epidemic on the moon. They've heard about a colleague who was denied an emergency landing. Floyd knows, as we learn later, that the epidemic is just a cover story — the cover story that was allowed to leak. So he has to say to his colleagues "I'm sorry, Dr. Smyslov, but I'm really not at liberty to discuss this." His reading of this line is *amazing*.

By comparison, it's interesting to note that Frank Poole, who seems to be a little more excitable than Bowman when HAL starts to act up, very quickly winds up dead. I believe Kubrick is saying something here about the importance of ruthless self-control and rigid training in the face of terrifying contingencies.

And the character with the greatest emotional range in the film? That, of course, is HAL. The way the humans act as foils to HAL's breakdown is also utterly remarkable.

1968 in 2018

The transfer looks gorgeous. However, I'd be lying if I didn't admit that the scaling-up of the resolution reveals a few flaws I hadn't noticed before. When Heywood Floyd addresses the assembled scientists, there's a speck of lint on his left shoulder. The disappearance and reappearance of the lint is a good demonstration of how scenes in films are shot versus how they are pieced together in the editing process. It's a bit distracting.

The animation of some of the spacecraft looks just a bit jerky in IMAX.

Some of the little films-within-the-film, matted in here and there, reveal a lot of flicker and grain and color shift. There's one particularly bad one. The footage of Floyd that appears on a screen inside the sealed HAL 9000 flickers badly, maybe enough to trigger a seizure in people who are susceptible to that sort of thing. I'm not entirely sure if it appeared that way in the original 70mm film, or if this is an artifact of the transfer process.

Veronica has been away visiting with her cousins, and I thought she was going

to be gone through the weekend, but she came back early — in fact, while we were out at the movie last night.

So today I was considering trying to take her to see a showing tonight — there’s a 10 p.m. showing. Maybe I’ll do it. I’m not sure it will, or could, mean to my kids what it meant to me, but even just getting them to watch something from a different era, with different demands on our attention, seems like a victory.

There might even be a few more people in the theater.

If you have a chance to see this amazing and historic film during this limited run, I can’t recommend it enough. It’s one of those movies that simply has to be seen on a large screen, as it was designed to take advantage of that format.

***The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

Last night and this morning I was able to read a bit more of *The Revenge of the Rose*. It definitely represents a significant shift in style, but I’m finally getting into the story. I have finished the first three chapters.

The plot here, involving a world-circling road and thousands of mobile cities that crawl along it, reminds me of *Inverted World* by Christopher Priest, one of my favorite works of science fiction from the 1970s, in which a city moves around a planet on tracks.

That novel, I believe, likely influenced Kim Stanley Robinson’s portrayal of the city of Terminator on Mercury, which features in his novel *2312*, and was also a setting in his Mars trilogy. I know it also featured in at least one more of his works; was it in *The Memory of Whiteness*? I have that book in my library, but I have not read it in some time. And I also have unread copies of the books of his “Three Californias Trilogy,” but the print-on-demand print quality is so poor that I haven’t even tried to read them.

But anyway, I wonder if *Inverted World* influenced Moorcock’s *The Revenge of the Rose*?

Having not even finished the first third of the novel, I can say that I am enjoying this Elric story quite a bit, although as it is so much more complex, stylistically, it requires a bit more concentration and work from the reader. And so it’s not so easy to appreciate, in the reading time I have, when I am often quite tired, or there are noisy kids distracting me.

This evening I will go to Costco and pick up a few things. Our budget for the week is already tight. I don’t regret spending money on three tickets to *2001*, though. Veronica is back, so if I can, I will take her to see the movie before it is gone.

It’s quite nice now, but it’s shaping up to be miserably hot and humid on Sunday, when we have to record the podcast. I hope it’s not too awful in the basement.

Saturday

I finished out my work week reasonably well — the laser fine-tuning feature on the MX and TLX family instruments with iTLAs is now working with both remote control, via SCPI, and local control, using the LCD GUI. It needs some thorough testing a little code cleanup, but the basic implementation is finished.

I went to Costco last night for groceries, and came home to total chaos as a big cleaning operation was in progress. But we managed to get everything back together, and ate salmon and salad for dinner.

2001, Again

I took Veronica to see the 10:00 showing of *2001*. I thought a few more people might show up for the Friday night showing, but no — there were a grand total of four people in the IMAX theater.

Veronica reports that she liked the movie, but the music “creeped her out.” Even the Strauss! She found the scenes of space flight, paired with “The Blue Danube,” to be a quite intense!

Apparently earlier in the year, some theaters had showings of an actual new 70mm film print of *2001*, made from the original elements. I would have loved to see that. I’m hoping I might get to see it, someday.

I never saw the film in 70mm back in the day. I think for most people the 4K IMAX restoration is the closest thing available, and don’t get me wrong, it’s very impressive. But I think in 70mm some of the detail might be even sharper, even if the unrestored color and contrast might be a bit shaky. For example, there are a lot of spots in the film where we see printed instructions or reports or signs. Only the larger print is legible in the digital transfer. I think more of it might be readable in 70mm, although I can’t really do a direct comparison.

Today we met with our realtor, who drove down from Saginaw to visit and talk with us. We have signed the “receipt of offer is acknowledged by buyer” section of the \$75,000 offer and it has gone back to the buyer’s agent. Apparently more showings are happening, which is promising and suggests that we might really get this done.

We’ve got guests over for dinner this evening, and so I’ve got to wind this up. I have no reading completed to report.

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 Sleeping Sorceress* by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)

- *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- “A Portrait in Ivory” by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- *The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell
- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968 film, 2018 4K restoration for IMAX)

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, August 25th, 2018

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