

## 2018 Week 36: The Week Ending Saturday, September 8th

Paul R. Potts

### Sunday

#### **“The Flaneur des Arcades de l’Opera” by Michael Moorcock**

I read “The Flaneur des Arcades de l’Opera,” the Elric story. This one is actually a “metatemporal detective” story, and it’s a big mess of overlapping tropes: seven or eight characters, alternate history, multiverse stuff, Moonbeam Roads, the Cosmic Balance, Edwardian-era settings and clothes, etc. The Elric character is an avatar of Elric in a different plane, with a sword-cane that is somehow an avatar of Stormbringer. It has some nice descriptive language and settings, but it really just seems like there is too much crammed into this thing — I suppose you’d call it a “novelette,” as it is a long-ish short story broken into chapters, but doesn’t seem long enough to be called a novella. Whatever you call it, I enjoyed some of the bits and pieces, but there is just too much flying by, too fast, to care about the characters and fear the threats they are fighting.

On Saturday night I was planning to read more of *The Conquest of Bread to Grace* but the kids were very slow to quiet down, so I couldn’t read out loud. Instead I started reading the last of the Gollancz volumes of Elric stories that I bought a while ago, an omnibus edition of three novels called *Elric: The Moonbeam Roads*. The first novel is *Daughter of Dreams*, originally known as *The Dreamthief’s Daughter*.

#### ***Daughter of Dreams* by Michael Moorcock**

I am a little suprised to say it, but I’m really enjoying this novel. The writing is tighter and rich with symbols, visions, and dreams, and feels like the work of a more mature and settled and confident writer. It’s an Elric story, but, elliptically. The Melnibonéan sorcerors, as part of their education, lie on dream couches and take drugs that allow them to experience dreams that, subjectively, last tens, hundreds, or thousands of years while only a day or two of time passes in Melniboné. In this novel the protagonist is an albino aristocrat, Ulric von Bek. This Ulric is the son of the protagonist of the earlier Moorcock novel, *The Warhound and the World’s Pain*. He seems to be an incarnation of Elric, or else maybe Ulric is dreaming that he is Elric, or maybe Elric is dreaming that he is

Ulric.

The precise nature of their connection is a bit mysterious at this point. While in the metatemporal detective novelette I found that annoying, in this context, where the story elements are given room to develop and everything feels less crowded and frenetic, I don't mind it at all. I also think it is less frustrating because we are discovering von Bek's overlapping identities along with him. This novel is deeply entangled with Moorcock's Eternal Champion themes and characters that crop up in many different works under many different names. As I've only read his Elric stories, I really don't know very much about all this, but apparently the rabbit hole goes quite deep. In some of Moorcock's novels we have characters that are almost, but not quite, identical, as they seem to exist in separate but very similar planes. In the Multiverse wiki, we learn about Ulric and Ulrich von Bek:

There is something curious about Ulrich von Bek.

*The Dreamthief's Daughter* (also known as *Daughter of Dreams*) is about *Ulric* von Bek, who was living in the 1930s and at odds with Nazism. He's locked up in a concentration camp in 1935, but soon escapes and thereafter has heroic adventures alongside Elric, an Eternal Champion, and falls in love with the elfin Oona.

Meanwhile, *The Dragon in the Sword* is about *Ulrich* von Bek, who was living in the 1930s and at odds with Nazism. He's locked up in a concentration camp at some unknown time, is freed in 1938, and then escapes into the Middle Marches in 1939 after he tries to kill Hitler and thereafter has heroic adventures alongside Erekosë, an Eternal Champion, and falls in love with the elfin Alissard.

Fortunately, it doesn't seem like I really need to solve all these puzzles to enjoy this novel. And because these novels form an intricate knot and overlap in time, I don't think it's really necessary to read them in any particular order. So far it's really quite engaging, and a novel about the rise of fascism in Germany seems quite relevant these days.

### **The Moonbeam Paper**

I didn't notice it initially, but the Gollancz omnibus edition has an unusual property. It's apparently printed on paper that has a lot of ultraviolet-reactive dye in it, the same kind of stuff that is in some laundry detergents and which makes clothes look "whiter than white" — they emit more light than they (apparently take) in, because we can't see the ultraviolet light they receive, but can see the visible light they give off. The effect is that, when reading it under our LED room lights, the paper gives off a faint purple glow. It is visible mainly where the paper curves into the binding, and so there's a shadow there — a shadow where a faint purple glow is visible. I managed to take a picture of the effect, although it doesn't look as bright to the camera as it does to the naked eye. I have to believe that this was a deliberate design choice, for a book with a

title that mentions moonbeams!

### **The DSA Picnic**

We were slow and sluggish to get going on Sunday morning. I eventually made pancakes and bacon. There was a Huron Valley DSA picnic at Prospect Park in downtown Ypsilanti. We took the family. We didn't bring any food, but as we expected, there was more than enough food, and at the end of the picnic folks were trying to figure out what to do with it all, so we didn't feel too guilty for mooching. The kids played in the park. It was breezy, which make the hot day feel much more bearable, but it was making life difficult for the folks who were trying to grill burgers. We don't really know the DSA folks all that well yet, and even among socialists I'm just not very good at socializing. But we spoke to a few folks, and the kids had fun. Joshua tells us he made four different friends. I was wearing a t-shirt that said "C.O.W." (for College of Wooster). One guy there recognized the shirt and it turns out he was a college of Wooster alumnus, class of 2009 (graduating twenty years after I did!)

I forget his name, but I should see if I can get in touch with him; maybe he'd like to join us on the podcast, to talk about millennial economic issues?

Before we left for the picnic, Grace put a loaf of customized banana bread into the oven to bake. We were trying to use up a number of very bruised bananas that no one was going to want to eat. The "customization" was the addition of the leftover taco meat substitute we made for last Saturday, which was made from ground walnuts and contained some of our cayenne chili peppers.

The result was banana bread that left my mouth burning slightly.

The combination wasn't really bad, but just a little disconcerting. The kids ate it all, but no one was really excited by the flavor combination. When trying to think about how we might improve it, all we could come up with was "take out the chili peppers and just use the walnuts." That would yield a pretty standard banana bread with walnuts. In other words, we couldn't really think of a way to improve on a basic banana bread with walnuts. Maybe add small chocolate chips? I don't know.

We've had some heavy rain in short bursts over the last few days, and I'm grateful for that. I think we're still way behind on rain, because the storms haven't lasted very long. And it is showing us that our gutters are all screwed up.

### **Recording the Pottscast**

I didn't have a good plan for the podcast — or, rather, I had two many articles and things to talk about, but no ideas that were well-organized. I considered writing an essay about McCain, but didn't get it done. Fortunately our friend Elias Crim was available, so Elias joined us via Google Hangouts last night. It wasn't a very long conversation. It was under 90 minutes. So I was on track to

getting the show completed fairly early in the evening. But I ran into a little problem. The hard drive that holds all the Logic projects was full.

I had not even noticed that it was getting full. So I had to transfer a number of projects to another hard drive. That took a long time. I moved most of the podcast projects from the last year. That came to about 100 gigabytes of data. That freed up enough room to work with, at least for now. For the last few years I've been planning to buy some new, larger hard drives, but while the house is still our financial responsibility, it hasn't been a high enough priority, so I've been getting by with older, smaller drives.

I can get bigger drives, but if I am going to continue to create 100 gigabytes or more of raw recordings a year, that's going to add up. Drives are cheap these days, but everything I consider worth keeping, I have to consider worth backing up, and that requires at least two backup drives for each working drive. I should give some serious thought to a formal retention policy. I should probably just go ahead and delete all the raw files from the podcast projects, and keep the finished WAVE files that I use to create the MP3 files. I don't think I'm ever actually going to need or want to remix or re-edit the podcast episodes. I don't think my kids are going to want to open old Logic projects (and it probably won't even be possible without a lot of software archaeology). But I still have a hard time deleting old work.

Dinner was a pot roast recipe, modified. The original recipe called for instant onion soup mix and a can of pre-made cream of mushroom soup. Several of us aren't eating dairy. Grace put the recipe together with dried mushrooms and coconut milk and other things we had on hand. It was pretty tasty, although the coconut milk "broke" and curdled a bit.

After finishing the show about 1:30 a.m., I did some kitchen cleanup and got to bed quite late, not until about 2:30 a.m. I read a little more of *Daughter of Dreams* while Grace got ready for bed. I've finished the first four chapters. Still, I do want to get back to *The Conquest of Bread*. I'd like to be able to talk about Kropotkin a bit on an upcoming podcast episode.

## Monday

### Old House News

We haven't been getting good news about offers on the old house. Our realtor tells us that one guy who viewed the house said he would consider offering us \$20,000. And she had showings yesterday, but from these showings we only got one offer, for \$60,000. I have to look at the offers; I think this might have been another offer submitted by the folks that previously wrote an offer for \$70,000. All this is not encouraging. As I mentioned on the podcast, "we're in deep trouble."

This morning (well, it was closer to noon) I made a pile of paleo pancakes with the paleo pancake mix. I used up the rest of our blueberries. We've been trying

to use them up, because some of them have been in the refrigerator too long.

It's about 2:20 p.m. and we had another brief downpour. We were planning to grill this afternoon. I have buns, and I was going to grill some salmon burgers and some black bean burgers. But I'm not sure the weather is going to cooperate. And really, I feel like I could use a nap. But first, Joshua wants to check his e-mail.

## **Tuesday**

It rained on and off repeatedly for much of the day yesterday and so we did not grill out on the deck. The day had a feeling of disappointment, frustration, and helplessness about it. I felt like I spent half the day cleaning up the kitchen. The situation with our old house is weighing on me, every minute. Our financial situation is weighing on me, every minute, and leaving me constantly nervous. One thing went better this long weekend, though: I did not feel constant heartburn. So that was an improvement.

For dinner I toasted buns and baked black bean burgers. These burgers tend to be dry and so need a lot of toppings, like guacamole. I ate mine with sauerkraut and mustard. There was nothing wrong with them but after imagining all weekend that we would cook them on the grill, what we actually made was bound to seem a little bit disappointing. We ate them with more of our favorite kale salad from Costco. We made a dozen burgers, but we only ate eight of them. So I packed up two bare black bean burgers on buns and put them in a glass storage container along with two unopened packets of guacamole to bring for my lunch today. The lid would not fit on the container, so I wrapped it in plastic wrap and put it on the top shelf of the refrigerator, hoping I would remember to bring it.

## **Elanor's Health**

Elanor was a bit off, yesterday, and so we're watching her closely. She did not feel feverish, but just slightly clammy. I can't think of a better way to describe her other than "spaced out." She would lie down for a nap, but not really sleep, just sort of stare into space. She sat in her chair and drank from a bottle of water and ate some black bean burger and guacamole, but she did it sort of robotically, without whacking the table to demand more and her usual yelling and waving her arms to communicate. She was wetting diapers and seemed like she was plenty hydrated, so we were not really *that* worried, but it wasn't like her.

Later in the evening, she went off to sleep and seemed to be sleeping normally. This morning before I left for work she seemed a bit more like her old self, and smiled at me. Grace will keep a close eye on her today. We are hoping that maybe she was just fighting a virus, or maybe is having an immune response to the vaccines she received a week ago. I feel perhaps just a touch feverish today

and so maybe I'm fighting the same virus. That might help explain why I was feeling pretty listless myself yesterday.

Before bed, I read Joshua and Sam a few more chapters from *The Wild Robot Escapes*.

### ***Daughter of Dreams* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

While Grace got ready for bed last night I read more of *Daughter of Dreams*, finishing the first part of the novel. Things have started to go magical, and I'm pleased to say that the transition happens smoothly, and pretty convincingly. Moorcock still has lots of pages in which to screw up this book, but it remains really enjoyable. Our protagonist has gone down into an underground realm, which borrows a bit from the hollow-earth world of Burroughs' Pellucidar stories, a bit from the giant underground sea imagined by Jules Verne in *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and a bit from stories about the lost continent and civilization of Mu. Moorcock puts his own spin on these underground world concepts, and I really like what he's done with the place.

This led to me thinking a bit about the nature of inspiration and "early" work versus "late" work. I've come to think of the early Elric stories, written by a very young Moorcock, as genuinely inspired, ecstatic work, written under the influence of the genre and the language. That's one way to write great work: in a blast of youthful energy and inspiration. But it's not the only way to write great work. One can also revise a great work into existence, outlining it and drafting it and diligently working it and re-working it until it is also glistens. It might not have as much of the raw exuberance as the first kind of work, but it can be as satisfying, or even more satisfying.

What doesn't seem to work well is trying to write in the hot blast of inspiration when the inspiration has left. I believe Moorcock's mid-career works — and it seems like he had a mid-career spanning decades — fall into this hole. He wrote them quickly for money, but the inspiration and drive that used to let him write so quickly peter out as a writer's internal editor grows in knowledge and prowess. And stretching out the short works into long works didn't really do them any favors, because they didn't have enough structure and polish to be successful long works.

I think the real tragedy of Philip K. Dick is that he never really developed a later style. For whatever reason, and his biographers supply lots of them, from drugs to mental illness to physical illness, Dick continued to work as he did when he was very young, writing in binges, even as his ideas demanded more serious and sustained treatment. And so some of his greatest works like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* are hot messes of brilliant insight and world-building combined with poor editing and riddled with internal inconsistencies. In the case of *Androids* this mostly adds to the hallucinatory quality of the novel, but I have no doubts that *Androids* could have been revised into razor-sharpness if Dick had approached the writing process with more diligence.

## Late Style

If Moorcock has a so-called “late style,” *Daughter of Dreams* is a work in it. Moorcock deliberately and consciously attempted to bring his whole *oeuvre* into a single intricate pattern. In the introduction to the Gollancz volumes Moorcock writes that he has created:

...a new Elric/Eternal Champion sequence, beginning with *Daughter of Dreams*, which brought the fantasy worlds of Hawkmoon, Bastable and Co. in line with my realistic and autobiographical stories, another attempt to unify all my fiction, and also offer a way in which disparate genres could be reunited, through notions developed from the multiverse and the Eternal Champion, as one giant novel.

I think it’s debatable whether this was a worthwhile program, or a self-indulgent and gratuitous project. Were readers *asking* for all their favorite Moorcock works to be tied up like this? But it seems like along the way, the attempt produced a “late style” and what seems so far to be a pretty successful and visionary work of fantasy for grown-ups.

Edward Rothstein wrote, in his review of Edward Said’s book *On Late Style*:

What artist does not yearn, some day, to possess a “late style”? A late style would reflect a life of learning, the wisdom that comes from experience, the sadness that comes from wisdom and a mastery of craft that has nothing left to prove. It might recapitulate a life’s themes, reflect on questions answered and allude to others beyond understanding.

But even if that kind of culminating style is not granted to an artist, observers want to discern it. We want to be reassured that there really is something progressive about human understanding.

I’ll be fifty-one years old this month. I freely admit that when seek, and perhaps find, in Michael Moorcock’s work, a narrative of his development as a writer, I’m also seeking evidence that maybe I’ll be able to experience some of my own. I hope that I will be able to do some Canon Welding with my own pile of work, in the genres of criticism, personal essays, and autobiography. And, maybe, I’ll be able to get some traction on the next project, whatever it is, because I am starting to feel the limits of both time and inspiration. I keep in mind that the first goal must be to keep having goals. As *They Might Be Giants* put it:

*No one in the world ever gets what they want and that is beautiful  
Everybody dies frustrated and sad and that is beautiful.*

When I left the house this morning, I almost forgot my black bean burgers. I was partway down the driveway to Crane Road. Driving in reverse back to our house is difficult, but I did it. I went to get my wrapped-up lunch, and was infuriated to discover that one of my burgers was gone. No one would confess to eating it, but I confess that I got angry at them. Finally Veronica told me that

late last night (I think it must have been late last night), our housemate asked her if she could eat one of the burgers, and Veronica told her that she could. Of course it's not our housemate's fault, if she asked and got permission. But I'm angry at Veronica, because I packed them for myself, and she didn't check with anyone else before giving one away!

And of course all this happened while I was already running late. Because even though Grace and I got to bed fairly early, we slept like logs, and didn't wake up until quite late.

There was another burger that I had put in a plastic bag, but it was one that I deliberately did not pack for myself, because it was liberally sprinkled with vegan "cheese." I like a lot of vegetarian foods a lot, including tofu, and some dairy substitutes like cashew milk ice cream; they're great. But vegan "cheese" is an abomination. It has the texture and taste of the plasatic insulation that I strip from wires when I'm building an electronic project. If I went vegan again, I'd just live without cheese rather than eat that fake stuff.

### **Like a Wrecking Ball**

Anyway. I had a few goals for yesterday, and they didn't seem like they would be that hard to achieve. I needed to move some money between a savings account and a checking account, to get ready to write a check to the guys who did the plaster and paint work on the old house. I did that. I was supposed to sort through my clean laundry and get things folded and put away. I failed to do that. And I was supposed to ask Grace to trim my beard, since it's time. I failed to do that, too. I did manage to give Benjamin a bath and wash his hair. I want credit for that — washing our four-year-old's hair is not so easy. Last night as he sat on the toilet, Benjamin started singing, and completely cracked us up. He was singing "Wrecking Ball" by Miley Cyrus, the chorus that goes "I came in like a wrecking ball..."

I discovered this weekend that the kids have apparently broken the garage door opener. It looks like they were whacking at it with a broom handle or something. There's a torn wire dangling. It still runs, but won't stop running when the door has gone all the way up or down. And because the garage is full of boxes, I can't get a ladder in there to climb up and examine it.

"I came in like a wrecking ball" is now stuck in my head. Benjamin will turn five in a few weeks.

### **The Water Softener, Again**

Something is wrong with our water softener; it is just not maintaining itself. When I hold down the button telling it to do an extra regeneration, it seems to start, but it won't actually do the cycle. The salt storage container has plenty of salt in it, but it doesn't seem like it is pushing water through the container; it still has as much undissolved salt in it as it did a couple of weeks ago when

we had the service technician come out and get it working. Sometimes when I examine it the display, several indicators are blinking, including the “service” indicator. Sometimes, none of them are blinking. The water is yellow-green, not the worst it’s been, but not what it should be. We need to get the service technician out to our home again. He told us that the last service call was, I think, “good for thirty days,” which ought to mean that he will come again for free. But I’m not happy to contemplate what he will tell us. If the system needs an expensive repair or some part replaced, we just can’t afford that, but yet I also don’t want to ruin our clothes and our water heater.

## Wednesday

Grace mailed a check for \$1,000.00 to the paint and plaster guys yesterday. We are still chewing over the question of what to do next, re: the old house.

Last night I got home quite late. Grace was putting the finishing touches on a birthday cake for one of our housemate’s children and dinner was on the table. The food per the birthday child’s request was pasta. The cake was a layer cake with strawberry filling and pink icing. I ate an embarrassing quantity of cake.

## Elanor’s Health, Continued

Elanor was still not feeling her best but again nothing seemed seriously wrong. She stuffed herself at dinner as usual and didn’t seem as spaced-out as she was at dinner on Monday.

Then, cleanup. I got a round of dishes going, but there was more cleanup than I could finish. And I was distracted from working on dishes. Elanor was wearing so much of her dinner that Veronica stuck her in the tub to clean her up, and she promptly pooped in the tub. I dealt with that, and it turned out to be a big pain. The bathtub drain, running very slowly to begin with, became completely clogged. So I had to sit in the bathroom and run several rounds of drain cleaner down the drain, waiting for the chemicals to do their work. That took quite some time. It eventually worked, though, and the drain started moving reasonably well again, although it isn’t completely clear like the bathroom sink drain. I will try using our enzyme cleaner for a few days, although I’m not sure it really does very much.

The tub drain is hard to do anything with, because it has a built-in stopper that just lifts up a bit leaving a small gap around it. It isn’t removable. I can’t even fit one of those thin plastic snakes down the drain to pull out hair. We’ve tried those mesh strainers that go over the drain to catch hair, but they don’t fit well over the built-in stopper. At some point I want to have the built-in stopper mechanism replaced with a more standard drain that I can clean out.

While Grace got ready for bed I read a few more chapters of *Daughter of Dreams*. The story is continuing to move along and I don’t really have anything to add to my comments from yesterday.

We gave Elanor some gripe water and some infant Tylenol and she seemed to sleep well, better than Monday night.

### A Counteroffer

This morning Grace is going to get in touch with our realtor and see if we can counter the \$60,000 offer at \$70,000; we might be able to borrow enough to close at \$70,000. I think that's about all we can do, though. We are nearly out of ideas and feeling quite despondent and stressed about the whole mess. I'm running numbers to see if there is any way we can afford to have the furnaces replaced, and wondering whether that might actually gain us anything in the long run. If we can get Liberty Mutual to actually cough up our remaining reimbursement that would help, although we would still need to come up with over \$4,500.

### *Star Wars: the Last Plinkett Review* by RedLetterMedia, Reviewed

Yesterday I listened to *Star Wars: The Last Plinkett Review*, a YouTube video by RedLetterMedia. I'm a fan of the "Mr. Plinkett" reviews, although not an uncritical one; the jokes about rape and murder of sex workers really never were very funny, but they also have held up very poorly over time, as the culture has left that kind of joke further behind. But wrapped up in all that is a pretty damning critique of Lucas and the prequel films, which are indeed awful train wrecks.

This brand-new review of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, which at this point is quite belated since the movie came out nine months ago, really doesn't show the same degree of insight as the original prequel reviews. "Mr. Plinkett" has some good criticisms; the movie is in fact too long, and the Canto Bight scenes drag. The four-plot structure is a little bit too busy. These are valid criticisms, although I also think he's over-emphasizing simplicity. In his first prequel review, he says:

When you're in a weird movie with like aliens, and monsters, and weirdos, the audience really needs someone who's like a normal person like them to guide them through the story. Now this of course doesn't apply to *every* movie, but it works best in the sci-fi, superhero, action, and fantasy genres.

I think this is smart and true, to an extent. When *The Phantom Menace* came out, there hadn't been a new *Star Wars* movie released for *sixteen years*. The movie really *did* need to re-introduce *Star Wars* to a new generation of fans, while still appealing, if possible, to old fans — and, as "Mr. Plinkett" demonstrates, it did a terrible job at that. But in his current review, he seems to be asking us to hold the *eighth* movie in the franchise, and the *middle episode* of a 3-movie series, to that exact same standard; he's constantly carping on how it doesn't follow the template of a basic-but-serviceable genre film. I don't really think it was *necessary* for *The Last Jedi* to do that, though; I think "Mr. Plinkett" underestimates, and condescends to, the film's audience. And as I'll discuss, I

think he's doing that to provoke a reactionary response in his audience, for the clicks, even though his real opinion of the film is more nuanced.

### Into the Comments Section

I know getting into the comments section on YouTube is like jumping into a mosh pit of angry teenagers with body odor and fleas, but I did it anyway.

In response to "Chris Scorpio," who wrote:

How can ANYONE watch this hour long breakdown, and STILL think The Last Jedi is a good movie???

I replied with the following comments (slightly edited):

Because, back when it came out, I watched it several times, and thought hard about it. I do admire the film, although this review has given me some food for thought about pacing and asked me to re-think the story and its weaknesses in *The Last Jedi*.

I'm considerably older than the gentleman that produced this video and I've been thinking and writing about the *Star Wars* movies for a long time. I love the old films, but I'm not dumb enough to believe they are perfect. And I'm not dumb enough to believe they are free from politics, or plot holes, or humor.

From my perspective, "Mr. Plinkett" takes *Star Wars* way too seriously. Worse, he apparently thinks *Star Wars* takes itself very seriously. It doesn't. *Star Wars* has always contained a lot of comic elements. Watch for the actual gags in Episode IV. The movie is constantly injecting little jokes.

He apparently thinks the movies were consistent about what the force is. They haven't been. In fact, in his old reviews, he brutally mocks the scene in *The Phantom Menace* where we learn that a person's ability to use the force is due to midichlorians in their blood. Then, in this review, he mocks this movie for contradicting that idea, because I guess that's canon now, and he thinks sticking to the established canon, even the stuff introduced in the prequels, which he rightfully dislikes, is more important than telling a good story. I don't respect that perspective.

*Star Wars* has always played fast and loose with facts and at best can only be called science fantasy, not science fiction, because the world-building doesn't really bear any scrutiny. And that's been OK for several generations of fans now.

*Star Wars* has always contained a lot of hand-waving and plot holes. It features a ship that "made the Kessel run in less than twelve parsecs." That was a gaffe, an error in the original script, where Lucas didn't bother to correct it to make sense of the word "parsec." Even ten-year-old me watching it for the first time knew it was a dumb gaffe. But now it's canon. (I haven't seen *Solo*, but I hear they actually tried to make sense of this, rather than just letting it fade.)

The original movies were always about implausibly close shaves. Hell, the *ending* of the first movie is all about an impossibly accurate shot delivered at the last possible second. “Mr. Plinkett” goes on and on about how Rose and Finn skid their stolen spaceship into the rebel base just as the door is closing. Did he ever criticize the scene in the very first *Star Wars* movie where Luke and Leia swing on a cable across a bottomless shaft in the Death Star, just as stormtroopers are about to force open a door and reach them? The timing of that scene is *awfully* convenient, don’t you think?

But no, he mocks the implausibly close shaves in this movie, not the old ones. Like many *Star Wars* fans he can’t *see* the lovable flaws in the old movies. He can’t see them because he puts the first three movies on a pedestal, because he imprinted on them at an age before his critical faculties were fully formed. I’m not asking him to disdain the old movies, but I *am* asking him to apply his critical insight consistently. No one could tell *him*, apparently, that *Star Wars* has always had flaws that don’t hold up under excess scrutiny. But yet now, he seems to be adamant about telling a new generation that if they enjoyed *The Last Jedi*, they’re wrong, because he thinks he has nothing more to learn about film.

*Star Wars* has always contained a lot of politics. The originals were an allegory about Nazis and resistance fighters and featured a line of heroes that literally inherit their special abilities. Those ideas were old then, and they were political. That’s OK. But why is it not OK to subvert those stale tropes now? Because most *Star Wars* fans are *reactionary*. This movie presses their buttons rather than comfortably patting and stroking their feelings and their world view with its nationalism, American exceptionalism, white supremacy, male domination, and unexamined views about race and inheritance.

So, he’s given me some good points to think about regarding the length of the film, and plot holes. But you know what? I’ve thought all those thoughts already. I thought most of them while I was in the theater. And I grimaced for a moment and shrugged them off and continued to enjoy the film simply because there is a lot in it to enjoy. I even went back to see it again, to absorb more details that I missed the first time, and I enjoyed it even more the second time. I didn’t conclude that this movie was so terrible that I should boycott *Star Wars* films forever.

Because deep down I’m not a reactionary crank.

I still respect “Mr. Plinkett’s” reviews of the prequels, though. The prequels are awful and deserve every bit of scorn he heaps upon them.

And honestly it’s pretty funny how this review is basically a soft remake of his famous prequel reviews, only this one isn’t as funny, insightful, or convincing. Let it never be said that “Mr. Plinkett” doesn’t know how to use irony.

But honestly this comment by “btron3k” sums it up better than I did:

Plinkett has jumped the shark. Just another clichéd review jumping

on the “*Last Jedi* is terrible” bandwagon. Plinkett was better when he actually deconstructed the films in a thoughtful way and the side jokes were a natural part of the review. Now it’s repeating the formula and just looking for negatives to make the review stand out from the million other negative Internet reviews.

And put even more simply, “The Chosen Chub” replied:

It’s fundamentally a great movie despite its flaws. I enjoyed it.

I think it’s too early to claim that *The Last Jedi* is “fundamentally a great movie.” I think it has a lot going for it, though, and it deserves thoughtful consideration. “Mr. Plinkett” doesn’t agree, though; while, in the introduction, he says “it both succeeds and fails for me at the same time,” by the end of the review he is emphasizing only the failures, and jokingly (or not so jokingly) calling for a boycott of the next one.

### Heat Without Light

This video is much more interesting and convincing, illustrating *why* the script of *The Last Jedi* takes such great pains to overturn expectations, while “Mr. Plinkett” doesn’t really *explain* the director’s iconoclastic approach, instead referring to Rian Johnson’s attempt to make a great movie that subverts expectations as “trolling,” and asking “why troll the situation at all?” As if iconoclasm wasn’t a time-tested and proven strategy for making memorable movies. And he accuses the director of actual hostility and disdain for the audience, while at the same time speaking condescendingly of that same audience. He claims that Johnson

...didn’t want to give the audience what it wanted, what it craved.

(Apparently they wanted Brawndo, with electrolytes!)

And what it craved was the familiar, the heroic... the adventure. He was kind of like a schoolteacher that was rewarding us with “movie day.” But instead of showing us something fun, he showed us something fun, but educational, too. That’s not fun!

I’m still scratching my head wondering just what he thought *The Last Jedi* was trying to educate us about. Of course what he really means it that he thinks it was trying to *indoctrinate* us with a world view. And that’s true. But it’s *also* true of all the old *Star Wars* movies. It’s just that the world view is the world view of a newer generation and not the prematurely aged unwilling to consider that there rigid world views might run better with software updates.

The audience wanted wanted Luke to come out of hiding, show that he was a true Jedi badass and help Rey stop Snoke and Ren.

## The Future We Didn't Get

Imma stop him right there and say that clearly, yes, a lot of “the audience” wanted that. But I didn't. Why? Because *it was too late for that*. That would have worked great in a movie made in 1985, *thirty-three years ago*, a movie released a couple of years after *Return of the Jedi*, a movie picked up the story a few years after the events that movie, a movie about the resurgence of the Empire and the re-awakening of the resistance. But that movie never happened. Instead we jumped reality tracks and we're on the bad timeline, where the bears are named Berenstain and we got Jar-Jar Binks. Then we got a “soft remake,” *The Force Awakens*, because it was *necessary* to pretty much re-introduce *Star Wars* after such a long hiatus, and we got the First Order, just because.

*Thirty-five years* after the *Return of the Jedi*, it was too late to the sequel. That broken timeline can't simply be duct-taped back together and decades edited out to let Luke come back as that “true Jedi badass.” In-universe, we'd need some *really* good explanation for why Luke wasn't *broken and changed*, but just chose to hide out for all those years on Temple Island while the First Order rose to power. I suppose they could have had him frozen in carbonite, but other than that, it wouldn't make *sense* for Luke to be actually tanned, rested, and ready to return; did he just have really bad Internet access, so couldn't get any news? And of course in in our bad-timeline universe, real-life Mark Hamill is 66 now. Would he really make a convincing Jedi badass? Harrison Ford, now 76 years old, already got his wish, to leave the franchise, and Solo died in a terrific scene in *The Force Awakens*. And Carrie Fisher — well, I still can't really talk about it, okay? She was sixty, but seemed older; a healthy lifestyle, she had not, as Yoda would say.

“Mr. Plinkett” also asks “why not take the audience in an entirely new direction?” He mocks the idea that the *Star Wars* universe is “played out.” And I agree, there's lots to do in the *Star Wars* universe, as in any fictional universe. But I don't think he's actually asked thoughtful question, in good faith. Is he seriously proposing that the long-awaited *eighth* film of a series beloved by generations of fans should just bail out completely on the characters and situations set up by the previous seven? And he knows very well that *Star Wars* is never going to end; press releases have already announced that there will be another trilogy, and it won't feature the Skywalker family, or any of the well-known locations. What we're watching when we watch *The Last Jedi* is the middle episode in a trilogy that has been constructed to wind up an arc, and pass the torch; basically, to do what Lucas himself utterly failed to do when he chose to focus the prequel trilogy on the story arc of an an iconic but lightweight character from the original trilogy.

“Mr. Plinkett” says:

Our black-and-white, good-versus-evil space saga is now a muddled ambiguous gray.

Yes — because this *Star Wars* was made to appeal to grown-ups, who are ready to ponder ambiguous and serious messages.

I wrote a long review of *The Force Awakens* on my old blog a couple of years ago. But I still have not published a detailed review of *The Last Jedi*, because I didn't feel the need to, but in my 2017 wrap-up I wrote the following (slightly edited):

After *The Force Awakens*, it was not entirely clear to me what direction Episode VIII would take. Would it just remake *The Empire Strikes Back*, or would it do something bolder? It would have been a safe choice to follow the story arc of *Empire* closely, and a lot of fans probably would have enjoyed that, but to really open up the possibilities for future films, it needed to do something bolder. It actually really impressed me and won me over emotionally in scene after scene. In fact I'd say it isn't just "good for a *Star Wars* movie," but actually a good movie even considered outside of the narrowed criteria of *Star Wars*, or even science fiction, fandom.

...

I get that arguing about all this is not actually going to "fix" the movie, for anyone who went to see it and found themselves thrown out of the story by the iconoclasm of the new one. For those people I can only suggest giving it a second chance. Each time the director broke with the storytelling tradition established over the previous seven *Star Wars* movies, I felt myself puzzled at first, but then I came to feel that at each of these points, he had successfully used the breaking of the convention to tell a bigger, more open, more universal, and yes, more inclusive, story, and it worked for me.

I first saw *Star Wars* before it was called Episode IV, in the initial 1977 release — actually, in a sneak preview showing before the film officially opened. It was probably on May 24, 1977. That summer, I was nine years old; young enough to be completely wowed by the movie, but old enough to bring some critical judgement to the movie as well, especially to my repeat viewings. I saw it again at least a half-dozen times over the next year. The movie moved me, pushed back the boundaries of my imagination, shaped me, and gave me, and has continued to give me, a lot to enjoy, chew on, think about, and re-think over the years.

Those years, though. They've gone by. It's been *forty years*. You can't keep telling the same story in the same way. I think this new movie really does a fantastic job of breaking out of the limitations of the original film, bringing *Star Wars* to another generation in a way that allows it not to be constrained by the limitations of the aging cast or the original story. Anything can happen, now. And *Star Wars* is made great again.

Meanwhile, "Mr. Plinkett's" own review contradicts itself many times, revealing the lack of good faith in his argument.

## I Find Your Lack of (Good) Faith Disturbing

He talks early on in the review about how many people were concerned, after *The Force Awakens* which was a “soft remake” of the first *Star Wars* movie (although he insists on calling it a “soft reboot”), that *The Last Jedi* would be a remake of *Empire*. It isn’t really a remake of *Empire* — not really — although of course there are *some* parallels.

He makes this point when he points out the huge differences in plot structure. But then, towards the end of the review, although he has not been focused on the parallels to *Empire* for most of the review, he comes back to further criticize the movie by contrasting scenes *The Last Jedi* with scenes in *Empire*, pointing out how scenes that he now claims are *parallel* have different moods.

Which is it? Is *The Last Jedi* a remake of *Empire*, or a different movie that isn’t directly comparable? “Mr. Plinkett” seems to want to have it both ways, and criticizes *The Last Jedi* both because it is, and because it isn’t, a remake of *Empire*. That really reduces his credibility, and makes him seem like he’s reaching for any reasons to criticize the movie, even reasons that contradict each other.

At many points in the review he finds things to like about the movie, and tells us so. He says the script “has its moments.” He says “you really can’t fault how great this movie looks.” He says “Another thing people take issue with is the ‘low-speed chase’. You know, I’m OK with this. In a weird way it kind of reminds me of *Star Trek*... it was different, to say something positive.” He says “I’m not here to take a huge dump on this movie.” He says “you got me movie, I’m interested now.” But then in the last few seconds of his review, he claims that the movie “fails spectacularly on every level.”

## That’s Where the Money Is

There’s a reason for the disconnect. While “Mr. Plinkett” spends much of the movie talking about technical problems he finds in the script and story, poor blocking, and supposedly contradictory statements by characters (which are mostly not really contradictory, but reflect different circumstances in different moments), and hating on the jokes, he’s *left out* the arguments that justify his claim that the movie “fails spectacularly on every level.” He’s left them out, because to include them he’d have to say the things that he’s not comfortable saying out loud, but really only wants to hint at.

He didn’t make this particular review to convince an unbiased person; the actual case he builds against the movie isn’t all that convincing, and demonstrates a “more in sorrow than in anger” attitude. Watching it, I don’t believe he *really* despised the movie; he had a mixed reaction to it. A mixed reaction doesn’t justify saying the movie “fails spectacularly on every level.”

But he had to come to that overwhelmingly negative opinion. Because that’s where the clicks and shares live — in a cynical kind of rancid negativity.

In his reviews of the prequels, “Mr. Plinkett” did use negativity and button-pushing jokes, but they weren’t in the service of something entirely cynical. His nasty jokes wrapped well-structured and well-thought-out criticism of the prequel films, criticism which I believe is still convincing. In this review? Not so much; he cherry-picks weak moments (his comments about the really stupid fight choreography in Snoke’s throne room is absolutely correct), and nit-picks plot details, and claims that these add up to a terrible movie. And he also claims that moral and emotional ambiguity (also known as “complexity” and “realism”) *also* completely ruin the movie.

Clicks and shares, baby. Clicks and shares.

“Mr. Plinkett” crafted this particular review video not to convincingly review the movie, but to cater to the angry, toxic *Star Wars* fans, who have attacked the cast of *The Last Jedi* on social media.

At this point in his career, “Mr. Plinkett” is a disguise that the successful Mike Stoklasa no longer actually needs. He’s earning plenty of money from his ventures now; his other video series are extremely popular. Why is he still dragging out “Mr. Plinkett?”

Because he’s *hiding* behind that identity; he’s using it to shield himself from the criticism he deserves, for producing work that panders to reactionaries.

Do you think I’m exaggerating? At one point in the review “Mr. Plinkett” jokingly yells the following:

I wasn’t expecting such outdated and sexist sailor talk from such a progressive film. How dare they! I’m protesting! C’mon Antifa, let’s get *Star Wars* next!

He’s mocking “political correctness” that he finds in this movie by imagining a viewer who would find it sexist to refer to the *Millennium Falcon* as “she.” But no one’s done that. He’s joking about the politics of an imagined fan of this movie, *without really making a good-faith effort to talk about the politics of this movie.*

It’s lazy. And he’s addressing this right at an audience that thinks Antifa is a punch line, and feminism is a punch line. Remember, he’s doing this as “Mr. Plinkett.”

This is why this all seemed weird and bad. When they’re on the casino planet, and Rose is complaining about, like, the industrial-military complex of the universe, or whatever?

Yeah, that significant scene in the film when Finn, a former stormtrooper, is beginning to come to grips with the moral consequences of his whole previous life, and his complicity in the First Order. I hate it when a movie makes me think.

At best “Mr. Plinkett” is channeling the reactionary world view of Fry in *Futurama*, who famously said that “clever things make people feel stupid, and unexpected

things make them feel scared.”

He sets himself up as arbiter of That Which is Acceptable in filmmaking:

Twists and turns are one thing, but confusing actions and motivations that are literally incomprehensible? That’s not acceptable.

Thanks for weighing in, boss. I’ll make sure management gets your memo. This really seems odd.

And Stoklasa, now a multi-millionaire, is just a funny guy punching up, right?

### **Plinkett v. Stoklasa**

Personally, I don’t think joining the chorus of those criticizing *The Last Jedi* from the alt-right shows courage, or convictions. I’d like to think that Stoklasa is smarter than this, because I really do enjoy a lot of his work. But now I think maybe I’ve been over-estimating him, giving him the benefit of the doubt that doesn’t deserve. And maybe “Mike Stoklasa” is the real mask, covering up the truth about the man behind this review — that inside, he really *is* Mr. Plinkett.

How does that phrase go, the one that’s been kicking around social media for a while? The one attributed to Maya Angelou, well-known feminist and member of Antifa?

Oh yes — “when someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time.”

### **While I’m Hating On Things: I Hate *Big Bang Theory***

I also hate The Big Bang Theory. Just, you know, in case you were wondering.

### **I Also Hate My Phone**

Last night I spent a little time trying to figure out how to disable as many of the Google apps on my phone as I could. I never installed or opted-in to these apps; they installed themselves, and they are constantly updating themselves, and they are constantly turning on new tracking or notification features that I don’t want. Even though I don’t use them, they use up an increasingly large chunk of storage on my phone, to the point where they are starting to generate notifications complaining that they don’t have enough storage space left to update themselves.

The only app on my phone that I’ve deliberately chosen to install is Twitter.

It seems to be possible to delete the updates, turn off notifications, delete the space by, kill, and disable these apps. I’ve done this to a number of them and that freed up a lot of space. I’m not very confident that they will remain killed and disabled; I guess I’ll find out over time. I need to try the same thing on Grace’s new phone, which is pestering her constantly.

If this doesn't work, I guess the next step is to try to install a completely new OS. I've done a little bit of Android hacking, just enough to know that this could be a huge time sink.

Here's an article with a few more tips.

Where's a fully open source, surveillance-free phone that I can purchase and use with T-Mobile?

## **Thursday**

### **A Death in the Family**

My father called me late yesterday afternoon for an update. His older brother, my oldest uncle, died. I can't consider flying out to attend the memorial.

I unfortunately never got to know this uncle well. I only met him a couple of times. And I think the last time was twenty-five years ago.

This is the lasting consequence of the way my family split apart and wound up spread thousands of miles apart.

My father would like to find some way to help us deal with the house, but neither of us is quite sure what he can do. We're just not sure that putting any more money into it at all would help us get it sold. I've been trying to figure out a way to do that which will leave my credit rating intact, but we're running out of options and it may be time to just bite the bullet and allow the lender to foreclose, leaving it to the banks and attorneys to figure out. Without even one viable offer at this point, trying to get a short sale completed before winter doesn't seem possible.

Last night I got home relatively early, about 6:30. The kitchen was not ready for a meal. The kids were working on that. Grace was engaged with paperwork for doctors, so I sat and worked on the blog for a while. After a while it became clear that no one really felt like cooking, so we went ahead and ordered a couple of pizzas.

### **Elanor's Health, Continued**

Elanor seemed chipper when I got home, like she must be feeling better. But Grace told me she had not really been well, and had slept for a good portion of the day. Again, she never seemed to have a fever to speak of, except perhaps a mild one. But Grace was concerned enough that she set up an appointment yesterday for 8:00 this morning.

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

At bedtime I read more of *Down and Out in Paris and London*. I'm getting closer to the end of the book. Orwell writes in this part of the book about the various professions employed by beggars, about English slang, about the hierarchy of

beggars, and his theory as to why begging was so disreputable. (His interesting conclusion: it isn't because of the nature of the work, since many people in English society do menial or useless work, but it's really entirely because it isn't sufficiently remunerative. I want to read this section on the podcast, and talk about it). I also read more of *The Wild Robot Escapes*.

### **Elanor's Health, Continued**

Despite the labor savings that came from ordering pizza for dinner, we did not get to bed very early. In fact it was about 1:00, and we set our alarms for 7:00. We did not want to give Elanor medications that might hide her symptoms. She slept badly, with mild fits of coughing, and a lot of yelling, so of course we slept badly too.

Grace got her to the doctor this morning and they seem to be taking her symptoms seriously; they wanted to get a blood test, but could not access a good vein. They also want a chest x-ray. So they sent her home for us to get her as hydrated as we can. (She drank water from a bottle at dinner last night until she refused to take anymore, so I'm not entirely sure this will work.) I think they want to rule out pneumonia, so Grace and I are a bit worried. Apparently chest infections are common in infants with Down Syndrome.

Grace also heard from Mott yesterday trying to confirm an appointment on Monday. We are confused because we didn't think she had anything scheduled until December. So Grace will try to confirm that. Maybe it is best if they move it up given her recent illness.

Grace's schedule is stacking up with a lot of appointments and it is a lot to keep on top of, especially combined with our ongoing concerns about getting the old house sold, which is sapping our concentration.

### **Contractors from Hell**

The Saginaw contractors are a gift that keeps on giving. Yesterday Grace got a call from a duct-cleaning contractor because he couldn't get into the house. He couldn't get into the house because we had been informed that the duct-cleaning company had finished that work something like six weeks ago, and we have since removed the contractor lockbox and put on a different realtor lockbox.

Apparently they never completed the cleaning and were trying to complete it yesterday. Grace was understandably infuriated. We've been telling potential buyers that the ducts were professionally cleaned. We had to spend a chunk of our own money to have asbestos remediated to get this done. Back in July. We both feel like suing this company, or at least reversing the credit card charge. But unfortunately none of that will actually get the job done, so we will probably wind up just grinding our teeth and scheduling a time when Grace can meet the contractor up at the house.

We've been constantly, repeatedly gob-smacked by the utter incompetence and carelessness of *everyone* involved in getting repairs done on the Saginaw house, and that includes (oh boy, does it ever include) our insurance company.

We don't have word back from our realtor on the buyer's response to a counter-offer.

Of course our highest priority is our baby's health. There's not a lot I can do from here. I'll take off work if it seems like that would help.

So, there are plenty of things hanging over our heads right now. Low blood pressure should not be a problem!

## Friday

Last night Grace was very tired, and I don't blame her, since she had to get up and out early on Thursday morning. We gave Elanor a dose of infant Tylenol again at bedtime and while she complained a lot about *going* to sleep, once she was asleep she stayed that way without coughing or waking up and griping.

The kids weren't very cooperative getting dinner together. It sometimes happens that when Grace and I are stressed out, the kids actually start to act out worse and worse. We theorize that they pick up on our stress level and it stresses them out. Don't ask me to explain it further than that, as I really can't. But it happens fairly reliably that when we are at a low point and need them to be calm and well-behaved, they do the opposite.

### ***The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 2, Chapter 2: "The Council of Elrond"**

I wasn't willing to read most of the kids a bedtime story because they were so bad about getting ready for bed in a timely manner. But Sam got one — I read him part of "The Council of Elrond," the next chapter in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. That book was by request. This is a great chapter, one of the most famous. It's very talky, and it may be hard to get through for first-time readers, but there's so much back-story unfolding and so much detail. And the voice of each character is quite distinct.

When we left off, Elrond had just brought Boromir up to date on the recent history of the ring. The idea that Boromir's people have known about Imladris (their name for Rivendell) for many generations but never tried to go there is maybe a little hard to swallow, although the in-universe explanation is that it is hard to find Rivendell if the elves don't want you there. The idea that Boromir basically got the Microsoft Outlook meeting notice inserted into his calendar via a dream, and managed to arrive the morning of the meeting, is also perhaps a bit much — when did Elrond send the message, and how long did it take Boromir to find the place? The text says:

‘Here,’ said Elrond, turning to Gandalf, ‘is Boromir, a man from the South. He arrived in the grey morning, and seeks for counsel. I have bidden him to be present, for here his questions will be answered.’

Boromir reports that:

‘In this evil hour I have come on an errand over many dangerous leagues to Elrond: a hundred and ten days I have journeyed all alone.

Boromir tells us that his brother (Faramir, though we have not heard his name yet) experienced a dream, several times (“...a like dream came oft to him again...”), and Boromir experienced it too (“...and once to me”).

Is it implied that Elrond sent the dream? To make that work, he would have basically needed administrative access to the whole calendar! That suggests that someone above his pay grade made these arrangements. This idea isn’t really emphasized a lot in Tolkien’s work, but it pops up occasionally; Gandalf mentions to Frodo early on that he believes “Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker.”

### Compiler Gripes

I got myself prematurely excited because it appeared that my compiler for the ARM SAM4 family, part of the Keil MDK-ARM, supports **long long**. It’s mentioned in the online documentation that 64-bit numbers are supported (I know they wouldn’t be natively supported by the microcontroller core, or fast, but I thought they might be supported by a standard library).

But in fact this is a sort of feint. Apparently some compilers support it, but not others. They must share a front end, or something like that: this compiler accepts **long long**, and **unsigned long long**, and the size-specific **uint64\_t** and **int64\_t** types, and long long constants, signed or unsigned, and the **%lld** and **%llu** type specifier strings for **printf**. But it’s all a ruse. It actually silently compiles the code to use 32-bit values. And the debugger gives strange results; viewing two **uint64\_t** values in the watch window will show the same value twice.

So that’s very annoying. If the compiler can’t actually handle **uint64\_t** and related types, it shouldn’t pretend to. It should issue an error.

I’m working on this because I have to come up with a way to calculate wavelength values that are accurate to more digits than I can calculate with 32-bit floating-point numbers. Our laser modules allow tuning in 1MHz steps. The corresponding change in wavelength is small. So if we can specify two adjacent frequencies, for example 191,529,986MHz and 191,529,987MHz, I want to be able to display a similarly precise wavelength value when we switch between them. This is easily calculated using double-precision floating-point, yielding approximately 1565.250769 and 1565.250761. (I will display these values with 5 fractional digits).

If you do the calculation using single-precision floating-point, though, which is what the LCD GUI and my SAM4E microcontroller both support, there's a problem; the precision tops out at about seven digits. There aren't enough floating point values available to uniquely represent these result values that are close together. So when the user is turning the encoder knob to adjust the fine-tuning offset, the frequency value on the screen changes continuously in steps of 1MHz, but the displayed wavelength value only changes about every 16 ticks, with slight variations due to rounding. That's ugly and it's going to confuse users.

I'm not out of tricks yet, though; there's a 64-bit integer library that might run on the SAM4E. I'm going to try using that to do the calculation. I wasn't able to find a fixed-point type library that seemed suitable, but this one might do the trick. It implements 64-bit integers using a **struct** containing two 32-bit integers. What to do with the truly gigantic integer result, after calculating it, might get a little bit tricky. I can only pass data to the LCD GUI using 16-bit words, or strings. I can't use **snprintf** directly on the structures. The saving grace will be, I think, that I know how many digits, in decimal, the result is going to be. So I can divide by a large power of ten to scale 64-bit values down to 32-bit values that I can work with directly, using groups of digits. If I have a modulus operator that would be great, but if I don't, I should be able to fake it with division and subtraction.

### **Elanor's Health, Some Information**

Grace tells me that Elanor is slightly anemic, and she told me about some new research that suggests that this sometimes happens to babies who were born by C-section. So we'll look into supplementing her diet. I don't think all the blood test results are back yet.

Our realtor told me that she has given more showings, and we're waiting to see if any of those showings result in offers. I heard last night that one buyer offered \$65,000. I am really struggling to decide if I want to try to make that offer work. I'd have to borrow about \$30,000 and that is a lot to borrow, especially on top of an existing pile of debt. It will leave us burdened financially for a long time.

Grace has been looking into options to lease the house, and it's possible we might wind up considering doing that after all, although it is not my first choice.

I'm headed to Costco.

### **Saturday**

I indulged myself yesterday and had breakfast at Zingerman's Roadhouse. It's been a few months. I like to have a breakfast dish, sometimes one of their breakfast specials, sometimes not, and a side of fruit, which is little platter of very good fruits. Their basic "Roadhouse Joe" coffee is strong and bitter, but not very acidic. I drink it with cream but no sugar. I have asked at Harvest

Moon Café if they would consider putting some kind of fruit on the breakfast menu — anything, really. I'd settle for a scoop of frozen berries, or some pre-cut melon, or a banana. The waitstaff tells me they get a lot of requests like this, but at present they have nothing like this available at all.

***The Fall of Gondolin* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Edited by Christopher Tolkien, with Illustrations by Alan Lee**

I went to Nicola's Books and they had the new Tolkien (both J. R. R. and Christopher) book, *The Fall of Gondolin*. This is not really new material, exactly; I think most or all of the text exists in *The Book of Lost Tales, Unfinished Tales* and *The Silmarillion*. Christopher Tolkien has done a lot of work to tease out those different threads of the story and put them in one volume as the last of three "great tales." The first two were *The Children of Húrin* and *Beren and Lúthien*.

I believe that the first of these three is the smoothest and most coherent. I've read that one. The next one contain fragments of stories that don't entirely match up in style, and which were written decades apart. Even the character names are inconsistent. I believe this one is the same way. I think it is actually to Christopher Tolkien's credit that he *didn't* try to homogenize these pieces. But I think that also means that the latter two books are really only for hardcore Tolkien fans who are willing to accept the inconsistencies.

Oh, and there are also gorgeous illustrations by Alan Lee. I haven't actually started reading the text, but I confess that I did eagerly page through it looking at Lee's amazing drawings.

I also picked up a mass-market paperback edition of Kim Stanley Robinson's older novel *Icehenge*. This story weaves itself into the story of Earth's colonization of Mars, although I think it doesn't ever actually match up with characters and events in Robinson's terrific Mars trilogy.

I bought a fairly modest load of groceries at Costco last night, as Costco loads go. For dinner we had salmon, salad, and an apple pie. I brought home a couple of fresh whole chickens and some red meat. I should have gotten eggs, too. Some things are getting more expensive. I haven't gotten cashews in a while and I wanted to get a container of cashews, but they are now \$21.00. That just seemed too high so I didn't do it, although brown rice with cashews and sriracha sauce is a favorite snack in the Potts household.

I also got one more lantern to keep in the basement for future power outages. I've been buying one a week for a few weeks now, and we have six. I think that's plenty for us to get through a power outage. Next week I will get more spare batteries. Costco also has some smaller lanterns and flashlights that might be useful. I also want to get a set of 3 dish tubs, a small container of dish soap and a small container of bleach, paper plates, and paper towels, and bundle these things up on a shelf to have ready for washing up when we only have bottled

water. I would also like to have a whole-house surge protector installed, get the electrical panel rearranged and correctly labeled, and have it wired up so there is a place to hook in a generator. Some of that has to wait until there is more money available. I'm hoping we can get through the fall without a lengthy outage.

### ***Icehenge* by Kim Stanley Robinson**

The kids were not very cooperative last night, in getting ready for dinner, and cleaning up after dinner. So we had no story. While Grace was getting ready for bed I read the first few pages of *Icehenge*. It's quite an engaging story and a quick read as well, although I wish this reprint paperback edition had been re-set and looked better. It's not as bad as some terrible-looking print-on-demand books I've looked at recently, but it doesn't look very good, and Robinson's story really deserves better.

This morning I picked the book back up, and finished the first section. It features some of the same themes that are important in *Aurora*, notably the difficulties in creating a sustainable closed ecosystem inside an interstellar spaceship. It's impressive work, and really deserves a better edition. It's especially impressive considering that this was his first published novel (although it is really sort of a fix-up, as the first two parts were published earlier as separate novellas).

Grace has been juicing. Her breakfast for a few days has been a celery/apple smoothie. This seems to be helping her feel better and lower her blood pressure, so I'm all in favor. I will have some, although I don't really love the flavor of celery juice the way she does.

It has cooled down quite a bit, and I am grateful! We might try to get out for a walk this afternoon. Grace and I were pretty lazy this morning. I made bacon and blueberry pancakes and haven't done much else.

### **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 Flaneur des Arcades de l’Opera” by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- *Daughter of Dreams* by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Moonbeam Roads* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- *Star Wars: the Last Plinkett Review* by RedLetterMedia (YouTube Video)
- *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell
- *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 2, Chapter 2: “The Council or Elrond)

- *The Fall of Gondolin* by J. R. R. Tolkien, edited by Christopher Tolkien, with illustrations by Alan Lee
- *Icchenge* by Kim Stanley Robinson

*Pittsfield Township, Michigan*

*The Week Ending Saturday, September 8th, 2018*

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