

2018 Week 39: The Week Ending Saturday, September 29th

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

After Grace woke up from her nap, she was amenable to the idea of going for Chinese food, and our housemate was pretty happy about the idea, too. So we asked Veronica to make a pot of rice and ran out to Meijer for paper towels, two cans of oven cleaner, and two of those long-necked lighters to replace a couple that went missing. Then we continued up Carpenter Road to King Shing and took home a pile of takeout: orange chicken, beef with broccoli, rice noodles, dumplings, sesame balls, and two big bottles of ginger ale. The meal was a hit.

Daughter of Dreams by Michael Moorcock, Concluded

Before bed, I finished reading *Daughter of Dreams*. I'm still chewing over my impressions of the third part of the book. Overall, for now I'll just say that it didn't end as well as I hoped it would. There are some nice action scenes, but there are also a number of rambling passages where von Beck blathers about the rise of fascism. I'm about as sympathetic an audience to this topic as I can imagine, but this just tended to let the air out of the story's tires. I also wasn't really happy with the way Moorcock treated Oona in the last few chapters; she's there, but she is off-stage for much of the action, and has little to no dialogue. And so my impressions of the book are mixed. The first part is really exciting, but the rest of it fails to live up to that excitement. I'm feeling ambivalent about whether I want to try to read the next Moonbeam Roads novel, *Destiny's Brother*. And I feel like I can't really recommend *Daughter of Dreams* without reservations, although it is better than some of the "mid-career" Elric stories I discussed before.

Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood, Continued

This morning I read a bit more of *Oryx and Crake*. That book moves along pretty quickly and so I expect that I will probably finish it by the end of the month. Atwood's style in this book is really light and engaging, often flirting with the comic, although the setting and circumstances are incredibly dark. I'm enjoying that combination a lot.

Today I made a late breakfast of paleo pancakes (made with the Birch Benders mix), with the rest of the blueberries. There weren't enough blueberries, so we salvaged some blackberries that were starting to go bad and cut them up into the mix too. I also turned leftover white rice and leftover salmon from Friday night into a big frittata, started on the stove and finished in the oven, baked in our largest cast-iron pan. That was a hit.

I spent quite a while after the meal working on the kitchen. Grace went through the refrigerator and pulled out things we could dispose of. There was a fair amount. I gave the oven a thorough cleaning, which involved removing the bottom of the oven compartment so I could scrub off some burnt-food that had dripped through crevices. I finally got all the black burnt material off the bottom of the oven. Some of it was burnt plastic. I was able to get most of it off by going through yet more of the green scrub pads, but some bits were so hard that I finally wound up chipping them off with a steel screwdriver. The ceramic coating over the metal is so hard that this didn't actually scratch the surface. I wore gloves, but they weren't long gloves, and so I got a couple of mild burns from oven cleaner that wound up on my arms. I also put a nice long gash on my leg, scraping it against the corner of the drawer that goes under the oven; it's got sharp corners. I got the oven racks mostly clean of burnt-on goo. Sam helped with that a bit, scrubbing the racks while I scrubbed the oven.

While I worked on the oven, with the sliding door open and two fans running, I had *Cheap Trick at Budokan* playing in the family room, turned up loud enough so that I could hear it over the fans and the sink. Benjamin was walking around with his hands clamped over his ears complaining that it was too loud. I just told him that if it was too loud, he was too old.

A Laptop Hard Drive Failure

Our housemate showed me her laptop, which is not booting properly. After I was done with the oven, I took a look. It won't get through a disk check, throwing all kinds of sense errors. The hard drive is pretty unambiguously failing. So I have to ask her what she wants to do. I have some 2.5-inch backup drives that I don't need. I could probably successfully swap out the existing drive. But I can't restore Windows and I don't have a backup of any of her files. I'd have to make it an Ubuntu MATE machine. So I'm downloading an Ubuntu MATE install DVD image and I'll ask her if that would be OK with her. If she wants it to run Windows, I will have to take it back to the shop out by my office and see if they can replace the drive and reinstall a Windows image.

I finished the production work on this week's podcast and got it uploaded. This show was actually just under an hour in length, which makes it one of the shortest shows we've ever done.

And so I have finished most of the items on my to-do list from Saturday, except the one that said "finish and file those pieces of paperwork." And I have to add "try fixing our housemate's laptop." I think the laptop is next. It's only 5:00

p.m. I think we're going to have lamb steaks for dinner, which is pretty quick, and so I'm optimistic that maybe we'll be able to watch a movie this evening, or at least have a story.

Monday

Paul's House of Pancakes and Laptop Repair

I got my housemate's laptop fixed. A number of months ago I bought three 2.5 inch hard drives to use for backing up my old Mac Mini. A few months later, I found the two missing external drives that I had been using for that purpose, so the three drives became spare. I never even opened the packaging on one of them, so that one became the replacement drive for the ThinkPad.

I had printed out a web page of diagrams from IBM showing how to remove the cover. It wasn't difficult, although because everything is made of fragile plastic, snapping it back on resulted in a tiny broken plastic tab. (Recent incarnations of these easy-to-service machines always seem like they are designed to be opened up and closed back up *once*). I discovered that the internal hard drive was screwed into a flimsy little caddy, made of folded metal so thin that it looked like tinfoil, with a little clear plastic top stuck to the drive via adhesive, which I needed to peel off to remove the caddy. But the little metal tabs on the caddy, four of them, which stick out at so they can be screwed into four anchor points in the case, were not screwed down. Not one of them. I tried taking two of the screws from the drive and using them to screw down the caddy, but of course they have different threading.

The computer didn't come from Lenovo like that; this must be the work of either a previous owner, or the shop that sold me the used laptop. (I can't be too angry; the used laptop, which has been working fine for months, only cost me about \$100.) In this unsecured state, it seems possible that the drive's edge connector might come a little bit loose from the socket, especially if the laptop took a minor drop or some similar shock, as there was space behind the drive where it could slide out. It didn't seem like the original drive was loose, though. So I was not quite sure what to do. I didn't have a large assortment of tiny screws to try. I think I had some heat-resistant "Kapton" tape, but I wasn't sure where it was, and I wasn't sure what I would tape the caddy *to*; tape did not seem to be the right way to secure the drive. The screws that connect the caddy to the mounting points probably do more than just keep the drive from coming loose. They also probably serve as points where heat can escape from the drive into the frame, and dampen vibration.

I considered trying to stuff something in the case to make it so the drive couldn't slide backwards, but I wasn't sure what to use; it should be something non-conductive, vibration-absorbing, and heat-absorbing. Filling that gap with silicone caulking might work, but I think that gap might actually be important for airflow within the laptop. So I finally opted just to leave the new drive sitting in place the way the original drive had been sitting in place, burned a DVD-R

with Ubuntu MATE, installed the OS, booted it up and got everything working, and gave it back to our housemate.

I'd like to correct the situation with the drive screws eventually. Looking at the IBM parts store, it's completely useless unless you have a 7-digit "FRU part number." Looking at eBay, I see a lot of replacement caddies that look like the right part. Some of them come with screws, but most of the ones that come with screws only come with the four screws that connect the drive to the caddy, not the caddy to the laptop. I found one that comes with eight screws. It's \$7.99 with free shipping, so I ordered it. Just to get four damned screws, which I can only hope are the right ones. When they arrive, I'll have to borrow the laptop back from our housemate and try screwing down the hard drive.

I tried plugging the malfunctioning drive into the hard drive dock on my Mac Pro, out of curiosity, to see if Disk First Aid could even talk to it. The drive spun up, but the computer wouldn't recognize it at all. Our housemate had not been really clear what a hard drive even was, so I opened it up, so I could show her what is actually inside a modern hard drive.

Logic Projects

While I was in the basement, I did a little cleanup of my audio files and Logic project directories. I had been missing the source files and Logic project for the very first Grace and Paul Pottscast. I found it; I had never renamed the project, so it was still called something like "Live Setup PR40 x 2." So now I have all those archived in one place. As an experiment I tried zipping a directory full of audio projects, to see if it would actually save any hard drive space. After fifteen minutes of compressing, it turned an 18-gigabyte directory into a 16-megabyte zip file. That's not really worth the effort. I'm pretty sure I must have tried this experiment before and come to the same conclusion.

Browsing through old podcast files, I stumbled across some recordings that I had completely forgotten about. At some point Grace and I made a series of short recordings about our gardening project, little ten-minute segments. I think Sean Hurley used these for a couple of segments of his live streaming shows. Some of the details are lost to in the mists of time. I'm not even sure he has archived recordings of all the various "Sitting in the Woods with Sean" and other live shows he did in, I think, 2012 or so.

Man, that makes me want to do some live shows.

I also took a crack at tweaking my interview with Sean. I had originally panned our two voice tracks hard left, and hard right. That was a bad choice. It sounds kind of cool in headphones, but it's not very listener-friendly. So I'd like to redo these and pan the tracks more like I pan my current podcast, with my voice panned 20 (out of 64) ticks to the left, and Grace's voice panned 20 ticks to the right. But what I found when I opened the project was that some of the referenced audio files were missing. So if I want to bounce the projects again,

I'm going to have to find them. Fortunately I still have the old bounces to use as reference, so it shouldn't be too hard.

I experimented briefly with just duplicating the old bounced file and using the "channel operations" in Izotope RX to do the re-balancing. You can do that: you tell Izotope that you want to re-balance left and right, and it will obediently blend the requested percentage of sound from the opposite tracks. That's pretty cool! Although since there are clips of music and radio drama on the track, to make this work I'd have to select only the dialogue sections and re-balance those. That's very tedious. And since there are places where our dialogue sits on top of some of the music and radio drama excerpts, those overlapping parts would wind up sounding strange; the panning of the instruments would change as the excerpts faded in and faded out.

Peanutbutterjam (Eileen Packard and Paul Recker)

I also opened up one of the old "cassette restoration" projects that I did years ago. I had used my cassette player, a Tascam rack unit, to digitize three cassettes of music by Grace's kindergarten teacher, Eileen Packard, and her collaborator, Paul Recker. Together they performed and recorded as "Peanutbutterjam."

I did the first digitization of those cassettes a decade ago, but I never got the audio quality that I hoped for out of that Tascam deck. Even when it was new, it had audible flutter right out of the box. Being a sort of obsessive perfectionist, I was not satisfied with that. I should have tried to get it serviced, but for all the years in Saginaw, I never felt like I had money for that sort of thing. At some point I loaned it to a friend of mine, and never got it back.

I also was not satisfied with my attempts to improve the audio, using Izotope RX for noise reduction, and some equalization, and other plug-ins I tried using to improve the stereo imaging. It always sounded fuzzy to me. I must have burned test CD-Rs and tossed them out, unsatisfied. And a few years ago I wound up buying a used Nakamichi cassette deck at a very low price, and hoped to use *that* to try again. But it needed servicing right off the bat, and still needs servicing, and that's expensive, and I'd have to ship it off to one of the vanishingly small number of people that still do this kind of service on old cassette decks, and it is kind of costly (understandably so), so the deck is still sitting downstairs... anyway, you get the picture.

So, I'm embarrassed to say, the project has languished on my hard drive for a *decade*. The cassettes have been slowly decaying in a box. (Cassettes stored in a dry cool place actually last a long, long time, so "decay" very slowly, but they don't get *better* with time.) This means that Grace and the kids haven't gotten to listen to these cassettes themselves, or any kind of copy, during that decade.

I had vague hopes of trying to get a better recording, maybe getting in touch with the artists to see if they had ever had the master tapes digitized, or if I could help them with that, but I never did.

***Incredibly Spreadable* by Peanutbutterjam (1984 Album)**

Anyway, yesterday I finally burned the tracks from the album *Incredibly Spreadable* to a CD-R and took it upstairs to play. The recording still sounds fuzzy and terrible to me, but I have evidence that no one cares about that but me. And now the kids can hear a song that goes:

*I wonder where's my underwears?
My underwears so fine?
Oh, are they in the washer? Where's
those underwears of mine?
Well, are they on the clothesline?
Did they blow into a tree?
I have to find those underwears,
Oh gosh oh golly gee.*

Just today I did a search, and it turns out that this album, *Incredibly Spreadable*, is actually available on the iTunes store. It sounds better than my cassette. Since there was a vinyl album, there must have been a master tape that they were able to digitize.

You can find it within the iTunes application. Google can find the online preview page for the album: type “site:itunes.apple.com Peanutbutterjam” into Google. But the iTunes web site doesn't seem to handle searching within its preview pages at all. The preview page for *Incredibly Spreadable* is here, but if I click on the magnifying glass icon to search, it says “Search apple.com,” and if I type in “Peanutbutterjam” or “Eileen Packard” or “Paul Recker,” I get no results at all. I guess Apple decided they don't want people searching for music on the web pages for their service that sells music. But (taking a sip of tea) that's none of my business.

You might be able to find a vinyl rip by searching “Eileen Packard” on YouTube. I found two album rips that were uploaded just a few days ago, and if YouTube is to be believed, I was the first person to listen to one of them.

Only that one album is there on the iTunes store, though. I have two other cassettes digitized for a total of three, although Discogs only shows two albums. I never finished turning the other two albums into separate tracks. I should just do that. It won't even take much work. I really should go ahead and get the Nakamichi serviced, and I should digitize any remaining cassettes that I want to preserve, running the signal into one of the audio interfaces I've got now, without worrying that I'm not getting the best possible audio quality out of the process. I need to stop letting the “best possible” be the enemy of the “possible at all.” These are cassettes from the 1980s. “Quality” is relative; a mediocre transcription will, I need to tell myself over and over, sound better than none.

Our friend Joy arrived and she and Grace worked on a massive cooking project, involving the food we needed to use up, as well as a bunch of fresh produce that Joy brought. Banana bread, broth, beef stew, tomato sauce, lamb steaks. We

had lamb steaks for dinner and banana bread; they came out much better this time, just seared in a pan, not finished in the oven at all.

***The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter**

There was quite a bit of cleanup. I did as much as I felt that I could, as it got later and later. I read the kids stories while they did more in the kitchen. I started reading more of *Crime and Punishment*, but we have lost track of what is going on. I picked up *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter, a collection of stories. I read a few pages of the first story, the title story, and realized that it is actually a bit more explicit than I expected, so I didn't proceed further, and sent the kids to bed. But then I stayed up to finish the title story. It's a pretty great story! But... not a good bedtime story for kids. I'll finish this one myself.

It was quite late before Grace came to bed, and we didn't get the lights out and the baby quiet until about 2:00. So this morning I didn't exactly leap out of bed at the crack of dawn. I was hoping that Grace and Joy might be able to pull some boxes out of the garage and do some rearranging, using the shelving that Joy brought. But it's been raining on and off, so that might not be possible.

Two new co-workers start work at my office today. Our business unit is doing quite well!

Tuesday

Last night was busy and complicated. Joy and Grace got some organizing done in the garage even though it rained a lot and so they couldn't stage boxes in the driveway. We haven't really been able to organize much in there since we moved. It looks like it's completely full of stuff, but a lot of those stacked boxes are empty or nearly empty, and so that stuff can actually be organized and stored in much less space. I think today they're going to break down boxes. Joy found a box labeled "Fiestaware." I thought it might be mis-labeled, but we opened it up and there were indeed a few of our old pieces of Fiestaware in it. So we have even more pieces than we thought! I have taken them down into the basement storage room, but they are not packed up with the rest of the pieces yet. Right now they're just sitting on a shelf.

My boss ordered sandwiches yesterday so I ate Jimmy John's sandwiches for lunch and pre-dinner, as well as leftover soup made with pot roast and lamb broth. So when I got home I wasn't very hungry. We ate leftover greens with ham hock, very late, and went to sleep very late. Joy had brought us a special treat, something I've never tasted before: fresh, not dried, dates! Some were brownish, and those are ripe and delicious. Some of them were still yellow, and we discovered that before they are ripe, they have a very thick skin that is hard to chew, and the flesh is dry and reminds me of a crabapple. On Twitter I asked Anna, our pastry chef podcast guest, if she has ever baked with fresh dates. She posted a picture of a labneh panna cotta that she made with dates, date syrup, candied carrot, and halvah. Wow!

We didn't get the kitchen cleaned up. I didn't read the kids a story, or get any reading in myself.

Grace, Joy, and I spent some time talking in the garage about our plans for the fall. There is something in the garage that is moldy, and so makes my throat and sinuses burn. We think it is one of our car seats, the one we loaned to our housemate, who left it sitting outside in the rain. It's not clear if it can be cleaned up and salvaged. We might need to buy another car seat for the new baby.

I didn't manage to work on any of the paperwork in my bag. Tomorrow is my birthday and my driver license is expiring, so I need to get that renewed today or tomorrow. There are some bills I need to pay as well, including the trash pickup bill for our old house in Saginaw, and a small medical bill (a co-pay). After paying two thousand dollars in August and September towards the plaster and paint work, while we are still waiting for a promised \$1,700 from our insurance company, I'm hard-pressed to pay any extra bills. I'm even nervous when I have to pay for an extra tank of gas when we have to drive out of town. I've needed to put those tanks of gas on a credit card, and that credit card debt is creeping up.

I had breakfast at Harvest Moon Café and got in and out of the restaurant in under 25 minutes; my usual BLT breakfast sandwich and coffee. Tomorrow is my birthday. I don't really feel like celebrating. I think Grace will make me a cake. Then Thursday, it will be Benjamin's birthday, and we'll have another cake.

I bought myself a present: I ordered some CDs that have been sitting in my eBay shopping cart for over a year, including some requested by the kids: a Simon and Garfunkel collection for Joshua, and the soundtrack to *The Nightmare Before Christmas* for Veronica. The transaction was flagged by my credit card company as "possibly fraudulent." Apparently they don't have a warning message for "fiscally irresponsible."

Wednesday

Birthday 51

Today I am 51 years old.

Last night went pretty smoothly. Dinner was just about ready when I got home. We only had to wait for the kids to get the table set. We had sausages and sauerkraut, rice made with lamb broth, and a huge salad, which was a Costco salad in disguise, doctored up with extra additions like beets. It was delicious. I ate a lot of salad. Joy had brought us some more fresh figs, so I ate a couple more of those. They are so sweet that I can only eat one or two at a time, but they are delicious.

***Star Trek: The Next Generation* Season 5, Episode 24, “The Next Phase”**

After dinner I got a dishwasher load going, and the kids did some hand-washing, energized by the prospect of watching a movie. So the kitchen was in reasonably good shape by the time they were done. I took them downstairs to watch an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The episode that was next up on our planned skim through ST:TNG was “The Next Phase.” I’ve seen this one before. Ensign Ro and Geordi are stuck “out of phase” after a transporter accident. A Tor essay about the episode is here. In that article Keith R. A. DeCandido claims that the episode “was intended as a budget-saving ‘bottle’ episode, but it wound up being very expensive due to all the phasing effects.” I’m a little unconvinced that anyone thought this episode would save money, as there are also several scenes shot on a Romulan ship, with elaborate sets, and of course the extra actors and costumes.

The physics are crazily inconsistent (as DeCandido asks, one obvious question is “how do they not fall through the floor?”) But despite that, it’s a pretty good episode. I find the funeral sub-plot a little unconvincing. Other than Data, the crew seems to be pretty indifferent to Geordi’s loss and presumed death. Picard is pretty casual about letting Data arrange the funeral. I’d have thought he’d say “OK, go ahead and plan a memorial service, but please check in with Counselor Troi and let her approve your plans, or make suggestions.” The only part of all this that rang true for me is Ensign Ro’s belief that she and Geordi are dead, and her reaction to it: she seems almost relieved, but also puzzled. And there’s a funny line, where Worf and Data are talking about the appropriate funeral arrangements. Data says “Ensign Ro was a Bajoran. Her beliefs should be reflected as well. However, their death rituals are quite complicated.” Ensign Ro groans “Oh, please, not the death chant!” Worf says “The Bajoran death chant is over two hours long.” There’s another funny moment when Ro gets to work out a bit of her anger by shooting a disruptor right through Riker’s head, although since she and the disruptor are “out of phase,” he can’t feel it.

Editing This Journal

I’ve begun attempting to edit this journal. When converted into a Word file, or a PDF file, it’s over 500 pages of text. Weeks 1-39 total 290,589 words, according to Microsoft Word. I’m doing only light editing of the text: improving grammar here and there. I’m considering what to do with links, and how and if to try to index the whole thing. I’ve been thinking about trying to get a few paper copies printed, in book form, even just as a vanity project. It is so large that it might make sense to print it in four separate volumes, one for each quarter. If I keep writing at a similar average rate, at the end of the year I might have 400,000 words and 800 pages. I think I may be slowing down, though, as the days get short and my energy levels drop. But we’ll see how it goes. I still can’t say definitively what I should do with this, or even what I want to do with it.

It's weird to re-read some of the stuff I wrote over a year ago. In January I wrote:

Things are going to be tight in February due to the rather large car repair bills we had in December. We have a number of "carryover" bills — I haven't finished paying for the lawn care and hauling expenses at the Saginaw house in 2017. I have to write some extra checks this month. And we had some extra expenses related to Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. There were extra special bottles of wine, extra special food, and extra travel. There were some movies and meals out. There were extra fire logs. But these things were cheap compared to the car repairs.

Looking forward at October, November, and December, this is making me nervous, since we already have big bills, and in addition, unlike last year, our credit cards are nearly maxed out. It's just yet another reminder that we've got to resolve the Saginaw house problem.

When we went down into the basement to watch *Star Trek*, our friend Joy had set up a little bedroom, including a little electric candle light fixture. Earlier in the evening she had talked about the significance of the candle in the window, used by the Mennonite community as an ongoing expression of solidarity for the victims of America's imperial wars. I joked with Joy that it was "this little light of hers," and she mentioned how as a Quaker that theme of inner light was very much a part of her religious tradition.

I then noticed that the very next episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, which we plan to watch, is called "The Inner Light." Hmmm...

This morning I stopped at Joe and Rosie Creamery and had a toasted bagel with peanut butter for breakfast, with an almond milk mocha. Today I left my lunchbox at home, so Grace actually brought me a sandwich and a cookie on her way back from a conference.

I did some editing of week 1 of this journal, first going over a paper copy to mark it up, then making the changes to the Markdown source file, then producing an updated Microsoft Word file and viewing it in Word's magnified "Reader Mode," which helped me catch more errors. This is very time-consuming. It's hard for me to imagine putting in this level of effort for each week. So this has me scratching my head and wondering if I'm really ambitious enough to get these journal entries ready to appear in any kind of print form. I also experimented with adding index entries in Word, and that's very time-consuming, too. Today I'm feeling like if I can't find a simple way to mark index entries in the original Markdown source, the indexing just isn't going to happen. I'd have to take a week off work, once the Microsoft Word version was final, just to create the index. So I'll have to dig into more of the possibilities that Pandoc has to offer — it does have a way to write filters that operate on a document's abstract syntax tree.

Thursday

Star Trek: The Next Generation Season 5, Episode 22, “Imaginary Friend”

Last night we had a low-key but delicious birthday dinner: black-eyed peas, salad, and cornbread. Grace made a very dark chocolate cake, and we were planning to eat it after watching another episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. So I took the kids downstairs and we watched the episode called “Imaginary Friend,” in which a little girl’s imaginary friend actually shows up, manifested by a powerful alien intelligence. I recall seeing this one before. The child actor Shay Astar, who plays Isabella, Clara’s imaginary friend, is wonderfully creepy, reminding me a bit of Christina Ricci as Wednesday Adams. The girl that plays Clara, Noley Thornton, is quite good, too. But overall this episode drags a little bit. I think one of the comments on the Tor rewatch page, by “AlyssaT,” summed up the problems with this episode quite well:

...it didn’t quite know what it was trying to be and it didn’t have the guts to just go full force in one direction. Was it more of a family episode that explored the difficulties of raising a child on a starship (as a single dad, no less!), not to mention the difficulties of being that child? Was it a story about Troi and her job? Was it a story about friendship, and how we connect with others? Was it a freaky-deaky red-eyed demon child “horror” ep? Was it a “ship in danger” plot? And while I usually really like those community-building touches, here I felt like it made all things seem even more crowded and schizophrenic...

The episode even resorts to making Isabella’s eyes glow red when she is angry, which just seems like an awfully cheap and easy trope.

I was thinking we might watch “The Inner Light,” but I decided that I wanted to save that one for a time when Grace would come down and watch it with us.

When we got back upstairs, Grace told us that the cake, which needed to be chilled to set up, was still gooey. She gave us the option of eating it as it was, or leaving it overnight to firm up and eating it for breakfast. I chose breakfast. So this morning I had Turkish coffee (with cardamom, made in the press pot accidentally because Sam got out the wrong bag, but it was a delicious accident), and extremely potent dark chocolate cake. So I am *quite* well-caffeinated. I brought half of it in to work for my co-workers. It’s the kind of thing that one can only eat a small piece of, so I assume that I will probably be taking some back home.

Today, September 27th, is Benjamin’s birthday, so I think Grace will be making *another* cake, to his specifications.

Today Dr. Ford is testifying in the Kavanaugh hearings. I’m not going to go into it, in this journal — Grace and I will probably talk about it in a podcast. I

heard the start of Ford's opening statement on my car radio as I drove to work this morning.

I've done some more editing, and incorporated text originally written as a separate blog post on January 1st into the journal entries. This pushes my word count for this journal to over 305,000 words, and that doesn't include my review of *A Wrinkle in Time*, or the quarterly posts. What can I say but LOL?

Friday

I left work early yesterday because Grace sent me a text message reminding me of a choir open house in Saline at 5:00. I was in my car about a quarter to five, which meant that I just barely beat most traffic to downtown Saline and the First Presbyterian Church there. I found a route without roundabouts. Miraculously, I found parking on the street. The building was locked, though, so I wasted some time looking for an unlocked door, and finally had to get Grace to let me in. So I was a few minutes late. Joshua was happy to see me at a choir event, since these are usually things his mom does with him during the day. There were snacks. There weren't a lot of people fighting over the vegetable trays. Someone had made deviled eggs carved into the shape of little bunnies, or something cute like that, with the bottoms cut off the eggs so that they sat upright. We chatted with a few parents. When we left, I took Grace's car with Joshua and Pippin and she took my car. We had to wait in heavy traffic.

Start Me Up

Grace went to Bush's and picked up a Bill Knapp's pre-made chocolate cake. She also filled my gas tank. But she had trouble starting my car, as sometimes happens, and had to let it sit for twenty minutes before she could get it started. It's one of those things I can't quite explain. I've always been able to get it started, usually on the third or fourth crank, occasionally by the fifth or sixth. The battery is not dead. There's a problem with the starter or the key switch mechanism. Since I've always been able to start it, with a little effort, I haven't made it a high priority to get it fixed. It doesn't start reliably for Grace, though. I joke that my car is jealous of Grace and prefers that only I touch her. But it's so odd that it seems like it may actually be a matter of the way I touch it (or turn the key). I've probably worked out through daily practice exactly what kind of movement tends to work — exactly how fast and how hard — and I do it automatically. Then she tries to turn the key the same way and... nothing.

Benjamin asked for pot pie for dinner, and we hadn't gone to Costco, so Grace picked up a dozen small frozen pot pies. She was going to back them all, but I tried to estimate who was going to eat what and suggested we make six instead and save the rest. Then we found out that our housemate and her boyfriend and kids were going to eat with us, so put three more in the oven. Then it turned out that the kids ate far more of the pot pies than we expected. I didn't expect the littlest kids to finish even one each. Benjamin ate two. So Grace was right,

and I was wrong; we should have made the full dozen. I didn't realize how small they are; the ones I get for lunches are bigger.

Bad Eggs

Grace and I didn't want to eat the pot pies and so I fried us some eggs. After dinner I realized that there is something wrong with the Dawn Farm eggs. A number of them had a lot of blood spots. It's normal to find an occasional little blood spot, but these were big clots; I had to pick three out of one egg. Grace commented that she had to pick clots out of several of the Dawn Farm eggs as well. I also noticed that the whites were quite cloudy, rather than clear. I always crack the eggs individually into a container before putting them in the pan, and none of the eggs seemed obviously rotten, but I noticed that yesterday's cake had a strong sulfur smell and my boss at work commented on it, too. I felt a little queasy after dinner. So I'm not actually sure what is wrong with the eggs. I think maybe the chickens weren't healthy, or weren't fed healthy feed. What makes fresh eggs excessively sulfurous? Were they just stored too long? I really don't know. But I know that these just weren't quite right.

We didn't really finish a full kitchen cleanup, but instead tried to get to bed at a reasonable hour. I read the kids a few more chapters of *The Wild Robot Escapes*. Things are getting exciting; Roz has just fallen off a building and been knocked unconscious. I think we should be able to finish that book in only one or two more reading sessions. Maybe even tonight.

This morning I went to Joe and Rosie Creamery for breakfast, and had a toasted cinnamon bagel with peanut butter and a three-shot latte made with almond milk. While I ate that, I did a little more editing of these 2018 blog posts. I'm not even through January, but I'm going to slowly plug away at it, and hope that I get quicker; I'm also going to look into writing plug-ins for Pandoc in Lua.

Good Money News

There is some good money news. Grace finally got a call back yesterday from a supervisor at Liberty Mutual. They have issued a check for more of the repair cost for the family room, as well as the original window board-up they never covered. So we will get about \$2,000. That will certainly help. Working with Liberty Mutual has been a ridiculous exercise, though. We can't recommend them to anyone.

The Kavanaugh Confirmation Hearing

Kavanaugh's performance yesterday was an utterly disgusting spectacle. I wrote on Twitter:

Kavanaugh revealed himself to be a classic crybully. Unfortunately he wasn't really speaking to anyone in the room. He was speaking directly to Trump's base of aggrieved, entitled sociopaths and they

saw a knight in shining armor bravely defending his honor against smears.

They saw Kavanaugh standing up for *them*. They actually believe that he worked his butt off to get where he is now because they still believe in meritocracy.

The people who picked him and vetted him and are going to ram him through don't believe in meritocracy. They believe in power and psyops. They knew he was a garbage person. They are reveling in the anger and the distraction it is causing. Watch their other hand closely!

While this has taken over the entire news cycle, the administration is very likely quietly picking our pockets.

Last night I posted one of those colorful text messages on Facebook that simply said "Jesus Christ, what an absolute asshole."

I heard this morning that the Republicans are going to hold a vote on Kavanaugh at 1:30 p.m. I'm not at all optimistic; I don't believe the Democrats will stand against his nomination. Jeff Flake, a supposedly moderate Republican, has already stated that he will support Kavanaugh. But we'll see.

It's hard to believe that we're seriously talking about this, but William Gibson (@GreatDismal on Twitter) asked:

So is "boofing" an alcoholic enema? Recall tales of this as a means of avoiding detection on breath, but not as one of the many preppy routes to alcoholic poisoning.

I responded:

When I was in college in 1985, I heard from an incoming freshman girl that at her high school, "bufu" meant "butt-fucking." I was told that at these schools was huge social pressure to have had anal sex, even more so than vaginal sex. That's my guess at the meaning of "boof."

It also makes sense to me that *at a Catholic school* this would be a widely promoted practice; a way to have sex while reducing the risk of pregnancy and still preserving virginity, sort of.

Of course I don't know for sure what it meant to that particular in-crowd at that school at that time. That's the whole point of this sort of slang; it's meant to be inscrutable to people outside the group.

Kavanaugh's assertion that it meant "farting" doesn't even make any sense, and is just another example of his many outright lies to the Judiciary committee.

There's some debate about whether "Have you boofed yet?" on Kavanaugh's yearbook page referred to anal sex, or to alcoholic enemas. The responses on Twitter lean towards "anal sex." I can't say that I know for sure what Kavanaugh meant. But I'm very sure he didn't literally mean "have you farted yet?"

Saturday

We've been busy. Because I left work early on Thursday, to go to the chorus open house, I had to stay later yesterday. I was planning to jump in my car right at 8:00 and make it to Costco just in the nick of time to buy a few groceries. But I blew it, and by the time I was leaving, it was too late to do even a quick grocery run. So instead I went to Plum Market to buy some Achatz four-berry pies and hamburger rolls (and Jesus, Plum Market is expensive; I was going to buy some fish there, but nope). Then I went to Kroger to get some frozen fish and salad and blueberries. And I'm reminded why we use Costco; it's far more expensive to buy things in regular-sized quantities. I bought three boxes of frozen fish fillets and three bags of salad, and some small containers of blueberries. Grace and I made a plan to go to Costco this morning.

Our housemate and her boyfriend had not cleaned up the oven, so it had to stay a burnt-up mess a little longer. We ate quite late, because the kids had not gotten a handle on kitchen cleanup and were procrastinating hard.

I fried up some frozen salmon burgers for the grown-ups and the kids ate the breaded cod fillets. I ate one of them and they were actually pretty tasty. The berry pie was really good, too, one of the best mass-produced pies I've ever had. We left the second one for breakfast.

Smashed Toes

While getting dinner on the table, I smashed my food against one of the wooden stools that the kids keep bringing into the kitchen — where were actually four of them in the room at the time. This sent me onto an embarrassing tirade of f-bombs about the damned stools and how much I hate them getting underfoot all the time. I thought I might have broken one or even two toes (years ago I dislocated a little toe and broke a bone in my foot doing something similar with a milk crate). I iced my toes with a bag of edamame. They were not swelling too badly so I decided to just wait and see how they were in the morning.

For last night's bedtime story, I finished reading *The Wild Robot Escapes*. Finally! It's an enjoyable story, although maybe a little age-limited. It seems like it is right at Joshua's grade level.

This morning we were up and around reasonably early. This morning the toes don't actually seem broken. They aren't terribly swollen, although one is a lurid purple and sore, with tingling and numbness.

In the kitchen, I got the fans going and sprayed oven cleaner on the nasty spots in the oven, then put a big "X" of blue gaffer tape across it so that no one would

try and use it. The kids ate the second pie for breakfast, and Grace and I drove first to The Mother Loaf Breads in Milan, and got some great bread: a sandwich loaf, a salt-crust rye, and a small, ultra-dense multigrain loaf:

100% mixed grain madness. It's a blend of our whole grain, Michigan-grown, organic buckwheat, wheat, rye and spelt flour and groats/berries.

We're looking forward to eating that one. We also tasted their cranberry, cornmeal, and herb bread which was extremely tasty too, although we had enough. Grace and I also had them cut one of their ricotta, pine nut, and herb bialys in half, and we ate that on the drive to Costco — and wow, was that ever delicious. Still warm from the oven, an amazing combination of crunchy outside and chewy inside, with the soft, warm herb-flavored ricotta... *salivating all over keyboard...*

I need to make this quick, because we're going to a party in Grass Lake and we've got to get everyone loaded into the car in just a few minutes, as it is a thirty-minute drive. We went to Costco. It's much more crowded and Saturdays, and we kind of hate that. We brought back a reasonably-sized load of food including bagged salad, lamb steaks, carrots, celery, eggs, butter, blackberries, bananas, a couple of whole chickens, and a big bag of popcorn. So that should be plenty for the week. We also got a whole tray of wrap sandwiches to take to the party.

When we got back our housemate and her boyfriend were cooking on the stove (but not using the oven). Grace made a pot of Bob's Red Mill steel-cut oats in the Instant Pot, with dried cranberries and hazelnuts, for the kids to eat. As soon the stove was not in use, I started working on the oven again. Despite sitting soaked in oven cleaner for a couple of hours, the burned-on spots were extremely tenacious, so I had to unscrew the whole bottom panel of the oven interior (again). Our housemate did help scrub it a bit once I had that panel in the sink again. This was so unnecessary and it makes me mad.

We're getting the kids loaded up to go to the party and so I've got to get this posted and get out of here! That's the week.

Well... I spoke too soon. It looks like our Internet connection is down, maybe intermittently, since it was up just minutes ago. The urgency sensor must have detected that I was in a hurry. So I'll have to try again when we get back. This also means that unfortunately our house phone line is down. We'll have to warn our housemate.

Whoops, it looks like it is going up and down. So — up, at the moment. But how annoying.

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.

- *Daughter of Dreams* by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Moonbeam Roads* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood
- *Incredibly Spreadable* (1984 Album) by Peanutbutterjam (Eileen Packard and Paul Recker)
- *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter
- *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Season 5, Episode 24, “The Next Phase”
- *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Season 5, Episode 22: “Imaginary Friend”

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, September 29th, 2018

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