

2018 Week 44: The Week Ending Saturday, November 3rd

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

It's past midnight and I'm finishing up a podcast, creating the video version for YouTube as I write this. And now I'm uploading the MP3 file. So I'll try to quickly write up my day.

When I got up our houseguest's boyfriend was working in the kitchen, so I waited a while while he got a meal together. When he was done I went in and made blueberry pancakes with the Kodiak mix. The kids were not all that hungry, having gorged themselves on Halloween candy the night before, so I did not bother with eggs or bacon or anything more elaborate.

The pancakes make Grace feel pretty wiped out — something about the glycemic index, even if she doesn't add much syrup. It isn't great for me, but I don't crash quite as hard as she does afterwards. She mentioned the paleo mix doesn't have the same effect, so I will stick with that, although that mix is only good with berries in it and does not taste good plain. And it's well past the end of blueberry season — all I can get at Costco now is expensive organic blueberries imported from — where was it? — Portugal, I think.

So after the pancakes it was more kitchen cleanup, and attempts to direct the kids into cleaning up the messes they made with Halloween candy. Joshua and Sam had started a laundry load that was extremely over-full, and unbalanced, so we had to pull everything out and run that load of clothes through in two loads.

Editing Music File Metadata

I got to spend a little time downstairs this afternoon and I used it to back up all my hard drives, and to edit the imported CDs from the Complete Sony Recordings by Philip Glass. I like my metadata to be tidy. Mostly, I like to be able to *find* music in my iTunes library.

A 24-disc set which consists of 15 different albums presents a challenge. The "Artist" fields vary from disc to disc (some are attributed to the Philip Glass Ensemble, some to co-composers, performers, etc.), but iTunes lets me specify an "Album Artist" field, so that all these discs will sort under the name Philip Glass.

The titles are more complicated, though. Is this one big album with 24 CDs? That would suggest that the disc numbers should all be set to one through 24. But then to make them appear in that order when I'm viewing my collection, I'd have to set every disc to have the same album name, just something consistent like "The Complete Sony Recordings." Then I'd have to squeeze the album name as a prefix into song names, or something like that.

The solution I finally came up with was to name each CD something like "The Complete Sony Recordings Disc 05: Einstein on the Beach." The leading zero for one-digit disc numbers is important; if you don't use it, the albums won't support *alphabetically* in the proper *numeric* order. This is not ideal, because it makes it seem like the four-disc *Einstein on the Beach* is four different albums, but it works OK and I can find everything.

In addition, I cleaned up track names as best I could. The data that comes from CDDB is always a mess. The track names as they arrived tended to have names that included the artist and album, which was redundant, and made a hash out of the acts, scenes, parts, and other fields. I tried to make them match what the actual CD case called each track, but there's no way to add subtitles to *groups* of tracks (for example, to give Act II of Akhnaten a subtitle and then group the tracks that make up Act II underneath it). But I wanted to keep those subtitles, because they are on the CD case and they give the listener some information as to what is going on. I kept them as best I could, and so I have some tracks with very long names, like "ACT II: YEARS 5 TO 15: THEBES AND AKHETATEN, Scene 2: Akhnaten And Nefertiti."

Sometimes iTunes just seems to misbehave and become "stuck" — no matter what I do, it won't sort some tracks in the order I want. The solution to get it "unstuck" is sometimes just literally to delete and retype the album name or track name exactly the same as it was. Then suddenly it will appear in the desired order.

I tried to make use of the "Sorting" tab under iTunes to specify a "sort as" field for album names. But this doesn't work at all the way I expected it to. If I type a new album name under "sort as" to apply to some tracks, it just overwrites the album name field on all those tracks. That is absolutely not what I want and is kind of a big pain when one is editing over a hundred tracks at once.

Oh, and watch out for those "compilation" flags. They almost never do what you want, and make sorting very confusing. You don't have to set them to wind up confused by them. Some albums show up as compilations when iTunes pulls down their CDBD data, even when they aren't. So if your tracks aren't sorting the way you expect, check to make sure that flag isn't set.

When I went back upstairs, having experienced the joy of getting at least a few small tasks finished, Grace asked me if I would run out for black-eye peas and restaurant-sized boxes of Jiffy corn muffin mix. We also needed dishwasher detergent pods. So I took Joshua with me. To get everything I had to three places. First, to GFS — they were just about to close. They had the corn muffin

mix. Then, to Target: they had larger-sized bags of the Seventh Generation unscented dishwasher pods we like. But they don't have a lot of groceries, so no black-eyed peas. Then, Meijer.

Joshua has reached the age where he is starting to examine and understand things around him. So for the first time he paid detailed attention to the checkout line scanners, particularly the self-serve checkout at Meijer. He started out with the idea that the scanners worked by radio waves. But I let him check out the items at Meijer and he figured out, more or less, how bar codes work. I also explained to him how the bagging area is a scale, and weighs what you put in it, as a form of surveillance, to verify that you are paying for everything. He thought that was creepy, and talked about how it reminded him of the (pretty bad, unfortunately) X-Files episode "Ghost in the Machine."

At Target I also found a DVD copy of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them*, the 2016 movie set that is a sort of prequel to the Harry Potter stories. I thought the kids might enjoy watching that this week.

When I got home Grace had pulled out a bunch of leftovers and was sorting out and using up food. So we had a pot of greens that used up several different greens, I made the corn muffin mix in our biggest cast-iron pan, and she threw a ham hock in with black-eyed peas in the Instant Pot.

Anything but Wet Ears!

While the corn muffin mix was baking, I put Benjamin in the bathtub and washed his hair, thoroughly, twice, with only conditioner, and brushed it out thoroughly. He screamed a bit, for some reason, but not because I was snagging his hair — he put up with the detangling pretty stoically. No, he screamed this time because he didn't want his ears to get wet. That's new and I have absolutely no idea why this is now the hill he chose to fight for.

I got him out and dried off, and while his hair was still wet, I sat him down on a stool in the kitchen, got out the clippers, put on the one-half inch guard, and cut his hair much shorter. This trim was long overdue. He was developing a bunch of unintentional dreadlocks, and we needed to do something about it. You'd think the result would be shocking — I cut off most of his hair. But no, it sprang back immediately, and it looks completely normal, just shorter. I got that whole procedure done in 19 minutes. I was pretty proud of myself for getting him through it that fast. Doing it fast minimizes the amount of time a kid can spend complaining or fighting over the bath and/or the haircut. He even swept up and threw away the hair trimmings himself.

Grace also started a bread made out the leftover pulp from juicing celery and apples, with a bunch of spices added. I'll see how that comes out. It will be very, very high in fiber. That's good for Grace because in the home stretch of her pregnancy she needs all the help she can get to keep things moving: psyllium, prunes, lots of salad, and this. It might be a little too much fiber for me, though.

My colon tends to go into spasm without much warning. I don't want to have some sort of an accident while driving.

Elanor fell asleep in a chair and the rest of us ate dinner. After dinner we tried to figure out if could possibly clean up and get a podcast together. I had an idea that I might send the kids into the basement with the movie, and use a portable recorder to record myself and Grace having a conversation in the bedroom, so that she could sit more comfortably while we spoke. But I couldn't bring myself to leave the kids unsupervised in the basement, at least not when so many things are in boxes and half-out of boxes; I didn't want Benjamin taking apart DVD boxed sets or scattering CDs everywhere. So we decided to let the kids watch the movie on the old laptop upstairs while Grace and I recorded a podcast downstairs.

Recording the Pottscast

It wasn't the most organized conversation — I had not actually managed to make any notes on *The Anatomy of Fascism* by Robert Paxton. I've been hoping to read some relevant passages from that book on the show. So we rambled. But Grace and I had reviewed some talking points about nationalism while we got ready for dinner. We had just that small modicum of preparation done, so at least we had that kernel of a conversation to build on.

I've finished uploading everything. I just have to double-check that the links work, and share them on Facebook and Twitter. It's about 1:20 a.m.

I had some insight I wanted to write about — about how our housemate and her family represent, in a sense, immigrants from the “colony in a nation” that Chris Hayes talks about, and how this helps explain their food preferences, except in a reverse sense: they *are* expressing a preference for the exact foods they grew up with. But — these aren't traditional foods of any sort of traditional culture, though, but cheap, low-quality, high-sugar industrial foods that the dominant oppressor culture sells to the “colony” for profit.

From our perspective, we want to liberate them from the unhealthy processed foods that keep them in thrall to General Mills and McDonalds and all those large corporate interests. We want them to experience better health. We want to free them of some of their economic burden, too, by getting them to start eating traditional, lower-cost, local foods. But they seem to perceive this only an attempt to deprive them of their favorite foods (even if the difference between what they prefer to buy and what we prefer to buy, often because we can get things in bulk at Costco, is something we only perceive as a difference in quality — for example, their insistence on Tyson chicken instead of Costco chicken, or Crisco oil instead of California olive oil, or white conventional Kroger eggs instead of brown organic Costco eggs).

This doesn't explain everything, though; half the time, we can't figure out what their objection or issue actually *is*. It's extremely confusing. Sometimes we even

watch our housemate bring home her food choices, and cook them alongside us, almost identical to what we are cooking — like the night when we were both making mashed potatoes. And then we would watch her not eat her own food, and throw it all out.

Tonight while I was organizing the pantry I found a McDonald's cheeseburger and fish sandwich, carefully wrapped up in a french fry container, and left of then shelf. When was it purchased? How long has it been in there, sitting at room temperature? When did they intend to eat it? I have no idea. Sometimes I just go blank and have no idea how to proceed. I guess if it starts to become visibly foul-smelling, I'll throw it out. But that food has so many preservatives, that could take some time.

I'd love to get our housemate to read *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, by Eric Schlosser. But I'm pretty sure she wouldn't read it or find it any more convincing than she finds us.

Also, I should try reading *Colony in a Nation* by Chris Hayes and see if he presents any ideas that I think are worth talking about.

Time for bed. I'll be starting the week off tired. I'm hoping for a reasonable night's sleep. If I can, I'll go to Harvest Moon Café in the morning for coffee and a breakfast BLT sandwich.

Monday

So, today was... interesting.

My Vision Scare

Over the weekend I have woken up to some strange sparkles of color in my vision, flashes and arcs that would flicker when I turned my head, and when reading I'd notice some blotches on the page in my peripheral vision. It looked a bit like the kind of blotches you'll see in your vision after glancing at the sun or directly at a high-wattage bulb. I told myself that maybe my eyes were just dry and these things did seem to improve after I was awake for a while.

This morning I had them again, and there seemed to be a spot in my peripheral version that was persistently blurry, like a swirl, or a flaw in glass. As it was right on the edge, it was hard to get a glimpse of. But I became convinced that it was a real thing. So I sent a text message to my boss and told him I was having trouble with my vision and I was going to try to get an urgent appointment with an ophthalmologist, and read the Kellogg Eye Center's web page. I didn't think I actually needed to go to the emergency department. It didn't seem to be getting any worse. Their web page said had a number to call, and instructions to ask for the ophthalmologist on call.

Grace had a "non-stress test" appointment, where they monitored her, and the baby, for a while. Everything seems well. The baby is quite active. On her

way out she made a pot of tea, and there was the spice bread she made from leftover juicer pulp last night. I had tea and some of her spice bread and lay back down for a while to try to calm my nerves. When she got home, I asked her to call Kellogg for me, as I was getting very stressed out. After Grace gave their receptionist the general details, I was able to take phone and give a few more details. They told me that they would try to find a time slot for me today. I didn't have too long to wait. Grace then a 1:00 appointment with a speech therapist, at our home, to evaluate Benjamin on some of his communication issues. About 1:45 I got a call back telling me they could see me at 3:00. So Grace finished up her appointment and drove me to Kellogg Eye Center. I didn't want to drive — I was feeling very nervous, and didn't know just how much my vision had been compromised. Also, I was going to need her with me to get home anyway, as they were going to dilate my pupils, and I wouldn't feel safe driving after that.

I got checked in and didn't have too long to wait before a preliminary exam, then waited only a little longer before I had an ophthalmologist peering at my retinas. He stopped after a moment and had a technician come in and take my blood pressure. It was elevated, but not so high that it set off any red flag warnings: 143 over 90. For many years my blood pressure was always 120 over 80. In the last few years it has been trending a little higher. This was the measurement after I had been sitting calmly in the exam chair for a while. It might be spiking higher at times of higher stress for all I know.

He found a spot on the retina of my right eye; he called it a “cotton wool spot.” My discharge sheet says I had a retinal hemorrhage. He mentioned two other things: first, that both retinas were showing the early stages of damage due to elevated blood pressure. And second, that the vitreous humor in my eyes showed signs of aging.

My grandmother had macular degeneration and cataracts and by 102 she was nearly blind. She had laser surgery numerous times to try to stabilize the bleeding blood vessels in the back of her eyes. So I have expected that I might have cataracts and similar problems. But she was much older. I expected to start to have to deal with problems like this in my sixties, or seventies, not at fifty-one.

I'm not entirely sure what this means. Is it possible to reverse at least some of this damage, or is the damage that's already happened just permanent? (Fortunately it seems to be confined to a small area in my peripheral vision, so I can still read and still use a computer and presumably still drive). But in any case I'm trying to take this as a very clear and direct warning that I have to do *something* — I've got to get my blood pressure down, which I think will mean getting my stress level down. I've been hoping to achieve this by getting rid of the *stressors*, especially the house and the money situation, but I think for now I have to do something else to work around the effects rather than the causes.

Failing at Self-care

I was not satisfied with Dr. Moore's care and so I have not seen him since early in the year. We've had trouble finding care for the kids, but we've finally found Sam a speech therapist and a physician that Grace is satisfied with. But with my attention on Grace and the kids first, and what with all the other issues and expenses occupying my attention, I've fallen behind on basic care for myself. I haven't been watching my blood pressure, I haven't been to the dentist in a while, and I haven't had an eye exam in a while. And my blood pressure has been creeping up. The most likely factor seems to be stress, but we have also fucked up our diet pretty badly since we started trying to accommodate our housemate and her family.

So now I have follow-up appointment with the ophthalmologist in 3 weeks to see what is going on. I also told him I would try to get an appointment with the new doctor that Grace seems to like, as soon as possible. I'm also going to monitor my blood pressure, so I have some numbers to give to the ophthalmologist in a few weeks.

A New Old Dishwasher

During all this, my friend Regan was texting me to tell me that I could come and pick up their old dishwasher. They are doing a major remodeling job on their house, and will not have a use for it. We have a working dishwasher, but they do tend to fail eventually, especially when they get used as hard as we use ours. So before our appointment I took out the seat that was in the back of the car (only one of the two was in there). We went by Regan and John's house after my appointment and picked up the dishwasher and stuck it in the back of my Element. So we have a nice spare dishwasher. I'll stash it in the garage. At the moment, though, I don't feel up to trying to rearrange the garage to make space for it, so it is in the car.

The CBD Oil Experiment

I've been wondering if I should try CBD oil for anxiety and stress. I don't have any Xanax on hand, or I'd take that. This little incident suggested to me that it was time to try it. So on the way home we stopped at a health food store and I bought a bottle of CBD oil. This formulation provides 3mg per half-eyedropper. The bottle supposedly has something like eighty doses.

I've never used any of these products before and I'm still a little confused to find that they are apparently legal to sell through health food stores; the latest things I read about their legality was mixed. I've used some hallucinogens in the past, but my experience with marijuana is extremely limited. The last time I tried smoking it, almost 30 years ago, the only reaction I remember is that I became very tired, went to bed early, and slept until late the next day.

Today was Joshua and Veronica's birthday, so the plan was to stop at King

Shing and take home Chinese takeout. So while we waited for our food, I took a 3mg dose.

By the time our food came, I could tell that I was feeling, physically, a bit more relaxed. It was noticeable. I was able to talk a little more easily and felt a little bit less obsessive. So that seems like a win. I've had a mild headache all day, though, and it hasn't seemed to do anything for that. I had a little more of the open bottle of white wine with dinner as well.

We also picked up a bucket of Neapolitan ice cream at GFS and took that home. We ate our Chinese food, served the ice cream, and sang "Happy Birthday." Grace has gone to lie down. It's about 9:15. I would like to take some Tylenol and go on to bed myself, now. But the dining table is covered with dirty dishes and the sink is full of more dirty dishes. I've been asking Sam to finish up emptying the dishwasher for the last hour. So that's my destiny for the rest of the evening, I think — more kitchen cleanup. Fortunately I don't have to do literally everything myself; I can supervise the kids in doing some of it. But they are absolutely destroying what nerves I have left tonight, playing and fighting and bellowing inside the house as if they were on a playground at recess. And tonight, I'm really not able to appreciate it.

Tuesday

I slept reasonably well but too briefly. The kids were really difficult last night. I took some Tylenol. I woke up without the mild headache that I went to bed with. Grace had to get up at 7:00, so we set both our phone alarms, and they went off precisely at the same time. I tried to get back to sleep for another hour, but was unable to.

As I've been unable to find much coherent guidance online about how much and how often to take CBD oil, I've settled on trying 3mg, 4 times a day (before each meal and before bedtime). So I'll do that for the time being and see what happens. It does seem to be making me a little more relaxed, physically, as if I had a couple of drinks. Mentally, I think that I feel slightly calmer. I don't feel high or intoxicated or loopy or sedated. I have noticed that I seem to be having a little more trouble in conversation finding the right word.

I had breakfast at Harvest Moon and this time, in addition to my breakfast BLT sandwich, ordered hash browns. Then I remembered all over again why I don't order their hash browns. They got them brown enough this time, but they tasted bad, like rancid oil. And so now I've got a little heartburn.

I really wish that place had better food, because it is a locally owned small business in my neighborhood. It's the place I *should* be supporting. I've asked them several times if they can put some fruit item on the breakfast menu. Even bananas or frozen berries would be a start. But they don't do it. The only thing I really think they make for breakfast that is of good quality and not too loaded with carbs or sugar is my beloved breakfast BLT sandwich on swirl rye bread.

But because I can find so few things on their menu that I actually like and think are of decent quality, I don't really like eating that more than once a week.

Grace is going to try to get me an appointment with a new doctor. When that happens I'll get a flu shot and get myself established as a new patient, and talk about managing my blood pressure. I measured it at home with our little meter before bed, and right after I woke up. The first reading immediately after waking up was below 120 over 80, which was reassuring. But all the rest were higher than I'd like. I'm writing them down in a little notebook at home. I will continue to measure it. I have no idea if the CBD oil by itself might do anything, but if it does that would be great. I might also try Grace's regimen of celery juice. I wish I actually liked celery juice. I like a lot of juices and a lot of greens — but I just don't like that particular one very much.

If I had any extra money at all in the budget I'd be starting a gym membership for myself. But there's just nothing there at the moment. I just have to make do with our finances as they are until something changes.

***Moderan* by David R. Bunch**

I tried reading a little bit of *Moderan* before bed. I read Jeff VanderMeer's introduction, which contained some facts of interest but felt a little weak; I expected a distinguished writer like VanderMeer to come up with something better. I got partway into the "in-universe" introduction by Bunch himself, in which the narrator explains that he has recovered a bunch of old recordings, and the text that follows contains heavily edited and redacted transcripts from those recordings. The fake introduction has a long and distinguished place in science fiction; I'm thinking of Gene Wolfe's very brief introduction to *The Book of the New Sun* where he describes discovering Severian's manuscript. That, and the brain-melting, time-twisting ways that Severian's manuscripts come into play in *The Urth of the New Sun*.

I had a brief conversation with our housemate and asked her if she knew about the McDonald's hamburger that was left sitting on a shelf in one of our cabinets. She did; it was hers. She had left it there for later. Sitting there at room temperature. I don't even remember what I said in response, but I remember that *her* response to me talking about food poisoning and bacteria was something like "oh, really?" I should not make fun of people who did not have the education that I had. But... I still find it hard to believe that she's serious. It seems like that the kind of knowledge that someone, somewhere along the way should have imparted to her, even if she didn't learn it in school. So maybe actually it's not an indictment of her, *per se*, at all.

I'm trying to get out from behind my computer more. So I left the office for lunch. I went to Nicola's Books and picked up a paperback copy of *A Colony in a Nation* by Chris Hayes. I started reading it while eating a hummus with beef at Star's Café. I gave them back the pita bread, and had them make me a juice drink with carrot, celery, beet, and ginger. It was just as brightly colored, but

far better-tasting and healthier, than this seasonal horror from Starbucks, and I think it cost about the same.

It's cold in the office this afternoon so I'm wearing my coat. It has something to do with the team of workers who are climbing up through the roof access and seem to be installing new HVAC equipment and repairing the roof. So that's making the afternoon a little more exciting.

Wednesday

I got home fairly late last night, because I got in late and took a long lunch. Dinner was terrific. Grace pan-fried the lamb steaks. In order to clear out space for the kids' ice cream, we had defrosted last year's pumpkin, the Musquee de Provence that we roasted and froze last November after Halloween, when the pumpkin was extremely ripe and just starting to liquefy a bit. Grace made a soup in the Instant Pot with this pumpkin, leeks from our friends' garden, a cayenne pepper with no seeds for just a little heat, turmeric, Jamaican curry powder, and a can of coconut milk. The soup was absolutely terrific. I had another glass from the open bottle of Sauvignon Blanc, which has held up surprisingly well given that it was not refrigerated.

aNONradio.net

My friend Rich Wielgosz was a guest on an online radio show last night. I don't know much about that site. It says:

All DJs on aNONradio.net are members of the SDF Public Access UNIX System Community. Please join our growing online community of free software authors, teachers, librarians, students, researchers, hobbyists, computer enthusiasts, artists, musicians, and the aural and the visually impaired. We fight for and promote the distribution and development of free software and the non-commercialization of the Internet. Visit sdf.org for more information.

So there you have it. The stream was hard to listen to. It kept shutting down, or skipping. But I heard Rich having a little banter with the show DJ and talking about some of the eighties music he had picked out. The archived show is [here](#).

Whipped Cream and Other Delights... of Parenting

Grace told me that Benjamin had an interesting day. He wound up taking one of the two cans of whipped cream that Veronica and Joshua were planning to use to make a cake, and spraying it all over the boys' room. Then he lied about it, insisting that someone else had done it. Grace was furious with him and I don't blame her. He is definitely difficult. Grace thinks we need to get him a jungle gym and some materials for "sensory play," like a water table. I think that's true, and I'd love to get the kids a jungle gym or other play structure and

set it up in the yard. We have no budget for such a thing at the moment and it is not clear when we might.

I've been taking my CBD oil 4 times per day and measured my blood pressure again twice in each arm last night and twice in each arm this morning. It seems that *maybe* the CBD oil is lowering my blood pressure a bit. I feel a little less tension in my body. But it is still somewhat elevated. I don't have my little notebook with me, but if I recall correctly, my readings this morning were in the ranges of 129-135 over 85-90. The diastolic (bottom number) should not be 90, and I think that is more worrying than the elevated systolic. I have not been recording my pulse, but it always seems quite reasonable. I think it was about 70 at the eye clinic and about 60 this morning.

It would be great if CBD oil would bring my blood pressure down all by itself and I could avoid a prescription blood pressure medication, but I really can't count on that.

Hitting the Overdraft Line of Credit

And speaking of blood pressure, the check for the furnace went through overnight, and the check for the rubbish bill went through as well. So we hit our overdraft protection line of credit for \$1,900. That just brought our balance to a few dollars above zero, so things like a coffee this morning took it negative again by a few dollars. So I moved \$250 from savings to try to expenses until my next paycheck arrives Thursday night.

That leaves us only \$50 in savings. Our account with Team One also has only \$50 in savings. One of our credit cards has \$57.20 available. I am going to check the balance of the other one, but their web site is down. I think there is less than \$1,000 available. There's another \$1,700 available in our overdraft protection account if we absolutely need it. We might have to use \$1,000 of that to pay for the tree removal if the rental agreement for the old house goes through. But I'm only going to do that if we have a clear promise of additional money coming in soon. We're getting into a situation where even making the minimum required payments on our debts won't leave much. I will try to run those numbers and see how bad it is. If I die of a stroke today, you'll know what happened. I am just hoping that both cars keep running at least until late December. I will probably receive an end-of-year bonus that will help us get a little bit of money back into savings for emergencies.

Between Stressors and Comforts

Right now I see myself as situated between opposing forces: there are some huge stressors on the one hand, and then there are the comforting and soothing aspects of my life: my home, my kids (well, they are both a stressor and a comfort, depending), and a good and mutually supportive relationship with my wife. At the moment, the stressors are gaining. It seems to me like the winning strategy is not to push back harder, because some of the stressors are outside of

my control, but to find out how to step aside — how to get myself out of the path of the stressors. Of course, it also would be a huge help to get rid of the stressors, or at least to mitigate them. And more supportive community would also be a huge win. This is what we keep trying to build. Every single aspect of our late-stage, extractive, catabolic capitalist system is fighting us as we try to do that.

Moderan, Continued

Last night I finished the introduction and the first two stories in *Moderan*. The first is called “No Cracks or Sagging,” and describes a project to cover the entire land mass of the planet with a thick layer of plastic. The second is called “The Butterflies Were Eagle-Big That Day” and is the story of the protagonist who voluntarily undergoes a 9-month series of surgeries to have almost his entire body replaced with robotic components. These are not hard science fiction by any means. They are dystopian satires, partaking also of fantasy and horror. They remind me of Stanislaw Lem’s stories in *The Cyberiad*, but these are even darker, because they seem to be episodes from a time when humanity is in the process of voluntarily giving itself up to fascist ideals of cleanliness and efficiency, while in *The Cyberiad*, human beings are mostly a humorous memory.

It’s grim, but funny, stuff. Not all the slangy, jargony language really works for me in 2018. But it’s a great example of a writer taking a very, very hard and uncompromising stance for the sake of his art. His work was not widely appreciated by readers in its time. I’m glad I am getting the chance to appreciate it now.

For lunch I ran out quickly for a turkey club sandwich from the liquor store down the road, brought it back to work, and ate all the insides while throwing out half the bread. I’ll make a run to Costco this evening for a couple of things. I won’t need a lot since I plan to go again on Friday.

Thursday

At Costco last night I bought only bananas, celery, apples, a couple of bags of salad, lamb steaks, a pot pie, and a couple of bottles of wine for our upcoming holiday meals, and so it was about a \$100 shopping trip, which is well under par. We are almost set for wine. I got a bottle of the 2017 Château Reynon Sauvignon Blanc Bordeaux, and a bottle of the 2016 Chateau Grand Traverse Late Harvest Riesling. Should I try to spell “chateau” consistently? It seems right to go by what is on the bottles, and on the bottles, the French wine uses the circumflex, and the American wine doesn’t.

I wanted to buy a couple more bags of the Birch Benders Paleo Pancake & Waffle Mix, but they didn’t have any. I’m not sure if it was just out of stock, or if they have stopped carrying it. I was in kind of a rush yesterday, but maybe I will inquire on Friday when I go back for our usual Friday shopping trip.

A Halloween Candy Binge

When I got home Grace and the kids had just gotten back from Halloween trick-or-treating. She had taken the kids to the neighborhood around our old church, St. Francis of Assisi. They got out very late, and so got back very late, but still had a ridiculously large haul of candy. Grace and I should have both restrained ourselves completely and not eaten even a single piece of their candy, for the sake of our health. But we're not quite that disciplined. So I ate a few little chocolate bars, even though their chocolate formulas are all crap now, with PGPR in everything.

It's weird seeing how many different historic chocolate bars are still in production, even if they are only available as the miniatures in Halloween assortments. For example, some of the mini assortments still contain Heath bars. I haven't had a Heath bar in... well, let's just say a long time. It's one of the oldest candy bars in production, first introduced in 1914, and I have to admit I kind of like it, because it is bittersweet and very crunchy. Their formulations have all changed, though, and they are not necessarily being made by their original companies. We looked over the bewildering array of products: Almond Joy, Kit Kat, Krackel, Mounds, Mr. Goodbar, Milk Duds, Whoppers, and York Peppermint Pattie.

One of the strangest ones is the 100 Grand bar, originally known as the \$100,000 Bar. It's the candy bar equivalent of Lucy holding the football for Charlie Brown. Every few years I am tempted to eat one, and do, but I instantly regret it. The outside is a flavorless paste of crispy rice and light milk chocolate, which tastes mainly like vegetable oil and sadness, while the inside has so much artificial-tasting caramel goo in it that it forms a massive unpleasant wad in the mouth. Chewing it all up is an ordeal. Who likes these? The only thing worse is Milk Duds, which must kill people when their strength gives out and they can't pry their teeth apart. The Baby Ruth is another traditionally unpleasant bar. And every single year I'm startled to find that there are apparently still people willing to eat Butterfinger bars and Clark bars, which taste predominantly of Butane-2,3-dione. Then there are the nearly-identical crisped rice bars: Nestle Crunch and Krackel are hard for me to distinguish. Both are waxy. I don't recall ever loving these, but I am pretty sure that all of these tasted better when the manufacturers used better-quality chocolate.

It's not that I don't like peanuts and stuff in chocolate. The Chunky bar used to be pretty cool. It's not that I don't like chewy candy bars. I love Charleston Chews. I would like Snickers more if they hadn't made their chocolate so much worse. I no longer like Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, as both their peanut butter filling and chocolate have changed. In general I have switched to eating much darker chocolate and no longer really like milk chocolate very much. I am still tempted occasionally by one of the lesser-known bars, like the Zero Bar, which I'm not sure really counts as a chocolate bar *per se* because the outside is white chocolate, but it has a nice almond-flavored filling, so I still like it. I'll occasionally pick up a PayDay bar, although if I can get my hands on a

fresh Pearson's Salted Nut Roll, the Pearson's product it's much better, and a Pearson's Vanilla Bun candy bar beats just about any of the above. These are not found in that very many stores around here, sadly.

Where was I? Oh yes — we were running late last night because the kids got out late, because they finished their chores late. And they didn't do a very good job with them. Yesterday they were supposed to finish up the previous night's dishes in the morning, but didn't. Once we get behind on dishes, it is very hard to catch up during the week. They had a chance to catch up last night, though, because Grace just pan-fried two steaks and I put together half a bag of salad. We didn't even serve the kids a real meal, because it was just pointless in the presence of all that candy, although we sliced up one of the steaks so that anyone who wanted to have some could take some pieces. "Anyone who wanted" turned out to be mainly Elanor, who once again ate a shocking amount of food.

Joshua was begging me to pull out a loose tooth from the moment I walked in the door. I tried a couple of times, gripping it in a paper towel and yanking, but it seemed like it was not quite loose enough and needed another day. But then a while later her pulled it out himself.

It took us literally forever (yes, forever has passed; we're in the infinite future now, and the year is now Aleph-1, \aleph_1 , aka \aleph_1 , the cardinal number of the infinite set of real numbers, which also means that we accept the continuum hypothesis; deal with it) to get the dishes cleaned up, and it was after 10 p.m. when we were done. On other days we would have given up any plans for a video or story at this point. But it was Halloween night, so we were willing to relax the rules a bit. So we then took the kids downstairs, set up my little laptop, opened a bag of popcorn, and watched...

***Doctor Who* Series 11, Episode 4: "Arachnids In The UK"**

The gang is back on Earth and only a half-hour has elapsed since they left. Now that Graham doesn't have space adventures to distract him, he has to confront his empty flat, and his grief. The Doctor isn't really looking forward to flying off by herself. This incarnation seems to be one of those lucky people who needs people. In addition, she's been running around non-stop since her most recent regeneration and doesn't consider herself fully settled into her new self yet. And so she (very humorously) jumps at the chance to have dinner with Yaz and her family. Although, as usual, I don't think anyone gets to finish a meal.

A lot has changed in thirty minutes. In fact, a nonsensical amount, but let's ignore that for the moment. There's a plot line involving giant spiders. Really, that's just about all you need to know, because the storytelling is just about the weakest aspect of this episode. It's really an attempt to integrate a short monster movie into the *Doctor Who* storyline. The monster movie parts work really well. The integration into the storyline? Not so much.

Let me state for the record that the giant spider effects shots are *terrific*. In fact

there are individual scenes that are worth the price of admission, that make the whole show worth watching. Everyone in the Potts household loved the giant spiders. Fortunately I don't think any of us have arachnophobia.

At the same time, the episode is over-stuffed with back-story and new character introductions. This is very cool in some ways. This Tor review by Emily Asher-Perrin points out that

One of the things that's subtly excellent about this episode is how the Doctor is surrounded by women for the duration of the adventure. Yas and Najia Khan and Dr. McIntyre are by the Doctor's side for the majority of the episode as they figure out how to handle this spider infestation, while Graham and Ryan pair up a few times away from the crew to have their own terrifying fun. It seems like such a little thing, seeing four women storming through that hotel and solving all the problems, but when you're accustomed to seeing rooms full of men plus a token woman or two, it can't help but feel a little magical.

I think it's great that the show overturns the cliché about women screaming when a bug appears and begging the nearest man to squash it. It was a lot of fun seeing the women centered in the story. But at the same time there were a *lot* of new characters to get to know, all in the same episode, and each one has a back-story and pre-existing relationships with other characters that we're supposed to understand. It's a lot to cram into one episode. I think it would have been better to space these character introductions out a little bit over several episodes so they don't all pile on top of each other.

Near the end of the show I was distracted by helping the kids hand around popcorn and candy and clean up their messes, for perhaps thirty seconds or so. And the next time I was able to concentrate on the show, the main storyline was over, and I was staring at the screen with my brow furrowed, wondering what the hell happened. As Asher-Perrin writes:

...the spider conundrum isn't really brought full circle or ended clearly. Robertson kills the mother spider, but the others are meant to be killed humanely, and we're never told how that will be done. We're also never told what will be done to secure the entire hotel site and ensure that more spider-killings don't occur. Even if the Doctor had thrown in a few lines about her plans for the whole thing, that would have been better than where we're left. As is, the whole story ends up hanging in midair without a conclusion. It reads as though Chibnall accidentally cut out a scene and never remembered to add it back in.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention a couple of clear, specific references to other shows. In the opening scenes, the camera rolls around through a huge, empty hotel. I'm pretty sure that's a shout-out to the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining*. And Emily Asher-Perrin notes:

It's seems like such a little thing, seeing four women storming through that hotel and solving all the problems, but when you're accustomed to seeing rooms full of men plus a token woman or two, it can't help but feel a little magical.

But she doesn't note that when the women strap on some kind of pump filled with an improvised spider repellent, the four women look like they are right out of a scene from the all-female *Ghostbusters* remake, proton packs and all.

iTunes had a little trouble playing the episode on my laptop. Every ten minutes or so, the video would freeze, and then flicker in fast-motion for a few seconds. I'm not sure why this was happening — maybe some background task was periodically eating too much CPU time? But when I found myself abruptly watching the conclusion, I wondered if iTunes had experienced a much more serious hiccup, and skipped ahead by several minutes, right over some critical scenes. But no — they're not in the episode. This really seems like it demands an explanation. It would be nice to find out that this whole episode was originally slated for a 90-minute Halloween Special time slot, but then had to be cut back to the standard length at the last minute, and so we'll get a full-length Director's Cut on the DVD. But I suspect that isn't the case and it is just due to inept and rushed production.

Under Pressure

Getting ready for bed last night, I found that one of the kids had dropped a marble into the bathroom sink drain. And again, no one did it. Our poltergeist problem continues. Fortunately it was stuck against the plug lifter mechanism, and I was able to get it out with one of our long-tined forks.

This was a little triggering for me, because a few years ago Pippin managed to get a toothbrush stuck in the bathroom sink drain in our old house. It was not enough to block the drain completely, just slow it down. Then days or weeks or even months later, someone turned the water on full-blast and left the room. The sink slowly backed up and overflowed until we had half an inch of water standing in the bathroom and hallway upstairs. Downstairs, we noticed it when we heard the sound of water running down inside the walls.

I've continued to take my CBD oil four times a day. I thought initially that it might be having a positive effect on my blood pressure, but the readings last night and this morning were not encouraging at all. Although, I think my current readings might be partly attributable to the fact that today is our...

Confrontation Day!

Grace has been in frequent touch with our prospective renter, who is also our seller's agent, to verify that yes, she did receive the draft agreement our attorney wrote up. I'm not sure of the exact date Grace forwarded her the agreement to consider, but I think it's been three weeks, or possibly a day or two short of

three weeks. So we are going to contact her today and say “we need an answer.” It’s the first day of November, which is the lease start date.

I don’t want to actually be vindictive — I want to be forgiving. *Extremely* forgiving. I generally *am* extremely forgiving, and I *am* patient. What I’m not good at, though, is negotiating things when I reach the *end* of my forgiveness and patience. I keep my cool in sudden emergencies. In fact I become positively frosty, shutting down my emotional reactions and doing what has to be done. But it’s these drawn-out situations that tend to result in me melting down at the end. When I’ve been suppressing my nervousness or anger for weeks or months, swallowing them, at some point it has to go *somewhere*. I don’t have close friends other than Grace that I talk to regularly. I don’t have a therapist. I just have my wife, and with our very full schedule and very full house, we don’t get to talk things out nearly as often as we’d like.

I really don’t want to have a meltdown over this, but I also really don’t want to have a stroke. I’m really not sure I know how to avoid both those things. It seems like I need to vent months of accumulating stress *somewhere*. (Months working with our *current* agent; the situation with the old house has been going on for almost two years now.) I’ve recounted just how tight our finances have gotten. Having these decisions hanging over me has, I believe, been literally not just endangering, but harming, my health.

I think if we had been in negotiations, trying to iron out numbers or terms we could agree on, that would be one thing. Even if we couldn’t come to an agreement, we’d feel like we were in a mutual process and making progress. But we’ve gotten nothing back. We’ve really done everything in our power to make this possible. Even though we haven’t had a signed agreement, or even a verbal commitment to sign an agreement, we spent \$3,000 that we didn’t have to put in a furnace. We’ve been expecting a “yes,” a “no,” a request for clarification of some aspect of the agreement, or a request to change some aspect of it. But we’ve gotten nothing. This is not the first time that this person has spaced out on a critical piece of paperwork; a couple of months ago, she failed to forward a counter-offer to a prospective buyer.

She was apologetic about that, and we kept her on as our agent. But at this point, I think all this means that this agreement isn’t gonna happen. We’ll see if she has anything to say. But at this point, even if she has some very good *reasons* she hasn’t been able to get back to us with anything, and still wants to work out a deal, I think we have to say no, because it is just too stressful for us to continue trying to work with her. (What does this say about what it would be like trying to get a rent check from her, on a regular schedule?)

What Now?

That’s a very good question. I’m hoping that at the end of the day we’ll have some new data to help us decide.

This morning Grace made me a celery and apple juice and I downed it before leaving the house. The celery juice seems to leave me a little nauseated, which is one of the reasons I haven't been eager to join her and drink this daily. It seems to have helped lower her blood pressure, though. If it would help lower mine, I'd happily nauseate myself. But I still need to get myself under the care of a regular physician and go on prescription blood-pressure medication if that seems like the best answer.

I think the real "best answer" would be to buy a good treadmill, as I've been hoping to do since we moved, get out from under the financial burden of the old house, have three months' mortgage payments in an emergency fund, get our overdraft protection loan and credit card debt payed down, and have some disposable income each month to work on maintaining and improving our new house. And an even better answer would involve regular contact with friends and family and people we are intentionally building community with. Under those circumstances I suspect my blood pressure wouldn't be a problem, or would at least be much less of a problem.

I'd at least like the opportunity to find out, because I don't think elevated blood pressure is by any means the *only* way in which our chronic stressors are harming me.

The juice wasn't really enough of a breakfast, and I can't actually go completely without caffeine without inviting a headache. So I got a coffee and a couple of day-old pastries from Joe and Rosie Creamery on Jackson Road.

My co-worker Patrick, who knows I am fond of dark chocolate, brought me a little treat from Pittsburgh! It's a Special Reserve, Whiskey chocolate bar. It's 77% cacao and it's freaking delicious. He just spent a few days in Pittsburgh.

In 2005, I interviewed for a job in Pittsburgh; we were considering moving our family there. It was a weird weekend; on the one hand, I was excited about the possibility of working for the Robotics Institute at Carnegie-Mellon University, writing artificial intelligence code in Lisp. Pittsburgh seemed like a cool place. But on the other hand, I was nervous about taking a job in which I'd mostly be working on Department of Defense projects. And that same weekend, Hurricane Katrina was busy destroying New Orleans.

If I had gotten that job, and we had moved to Pittsburgh, we almost certainly would be living in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood, where just a few days ago a man shot up the Tree of Life synagogue, killing eleven and injuring six. And my family and I probably would have been in the crowd of thousands protesting Trump's visit.

It's a gloomy, rainy day and I'm not very enthusiastic about going to get lunch, both because of the weather and because of our money situation. So it looks like I am going to eat a couple of packets of instant grits at my desk and call that lunch. Maybe tomorrow I can re-stock the freezer with some more appealing lunch foods.

Friday

Last night Grace was out at a class, so Veronica put on a pot pie. She tried to enforce a strict schedule so that everyone could eat and if everyone stayed on track doing with their cleanup chores, we would have time for a story.

Spoiler: we didn't have time for a story. But we weren't *that* far off schedule. Veronica got the pot pie into the oven 20 minutes later than planned, which meant that it came out of the oven 20 minutes later than planned, at 8:20. I ate with four of the kids, including Elanor, who ate a startling quantity of chicken pot pie. Our housemate joined us for some pot pie. I got in the kitchen about 9:00 and got the dishwasher loaded up. Grace got home about 9:30 with Joshua and Pippin and they ate too.

Oven Cleaning, Again: Now I'm Even Boring Myself

Cleanup would have gone a lot quicker, but for the fact that there was once again a big burned-on mess in the oven. (It didn't come from the pot pie — that was baked on a baking sheet which caught the drips). It had happened over the last couple of days.

It doesn't seem like I can blame our housemate or her boyfriend for this one. Because I've been getting conflicting stories. Grace tells me Veronica spilled butter all over the bottom of the oven when she made toast without putting it on a tray. Sam mentioned something else he apparently did. And I also found evidence that someone had apparently used oven cleaner in the oven, but not wiped it all out afterwards, which suggests that maybe our housemate or her boyfriend had *also* made a mess and mostly cleaned it up.

All this in the space of just a couple of days — and we have asked everyone, including our kids, again and again, to please, please use baking pans under things in the oven to catch drips.

I don't want Veronica to handle over cleaner without supervision, so after dinner I sprayed the oven and let it sit for a while. Then I had her scrub the burned gunk out, with the fan running, while I supervised. Then I took the bottom panel out of the oven again and cleaned it a little more thoroughly in the sink to remove some lingering grease, while I had her clean the oven door and window. Then I put everything back together and heated up the oven a bit to dry it out.

I realize this is about the most boring topic I could possibly be writing about in my journal: "I cleaned the oven. Then I cleaned the oven again. Then it got dirty again. Then I cleaned it." It's boring the hell out of me. It feels like such a waste of my time. And it would be so nice if I only had to do this, say, once a month.

Joshua and Pippin would not stay on track for getting ready for bed after they were done eating, so — no story. They were only ten or fifteen minutes behind, but Grace wanted to make the point that they had many, many warnings

throughout the day today about staying on track. And most of the time, staying on track and getting chores done on time is the exceedingly rare exception rather than the rule.

Unauthorized Use of Prescription Medication

Looking at my blood pressure readings last night, it's pretty clear that, at least so far, the CBD oil is having no beneficial effect on my blood pressure. Grace has gotten me an appointment with the new doctor she chose for our family, but that appointment is still about ten days away. So I am trying something else — last night I took 200mg (one tablet) of her labetalol, at bedtime, to see if I noticed any change in the morning. She takes it only at night because it makes her very sleepy and unable to drive.

I didn't notice any reduction in blood pressure this morning but I will try this for a few days. I didn't notice any side effects to speak of. I will continue the CBD oil because it does seem to have a slight relaxing effect, which might be good for my mood and other bodily systems, even if it is not helping my blood pressure. So I think I will probably finish this bottle, but not get another one.

Because Grace got back so late, we did not place a call to our our real estate agent to talk about the lease agreement. We talked over various options. Since I've been harboring so much stress about this, we think it is best if Grace communicates with her. I don't want to wind up berating her or blowing my top. I think Grace is better able to be civil. We're also going to let it go for a few more days, since there is nothing we were really planning to *do* before next Tuesday, when Grace is planning to go up to the house to meet the company cleaning the ducts. Grace tells me the new furnace has been installed, so she can check on that and make sure the heat is set the way we want.

I got paid today and transferred the usual money to our secondary account. I have some bills coming up rapidly, though; there's a credit card bill and a line of credit repayment due in two weeks. And our gas expenses have increased a lot with all the driving Grace is doing. So it's discouraging. Another mortgage payment has gone through and nothing has bounced. That's about the extent of the good news.

Moderan Continued

I didn't get to do much reading. I did manage to read another couple of short Moderan story by David Bunch while Grace got ready for bed. The first story is called "New Kings are Not for Laughing," and it explains how our narrator, "Stronghold 10," leaves the hospital where he has spent nine months being transformed into a cyborg, with only a few "flesh strips" remaining of his original human body:

With my portable flesh-strip feeder, my book of instructions for new-metal limb control, my plastic mechanical tear bags (for even a King

must sometimes cry, you will allow) and all the other paraphernalia to get me started, or at least to sustain me until I should attain my Stronghold sanctuary, I sailed out from the hospital steps, the arrogant doctors watching. Something like a small iron frigate from the Old Days, I guess I was, loaded to the gunwales and standing forth on end.

There's only one problem: he seems unable to find his new home, a sort of fort, also called "Stronghold 10."

After five hours of walking hard and going perhaps a stingy mile and a half, and some of that in circles, I stood lost in a little plastic draw, and quite bewildered. The vapor shield was scarlet August that burning month, the tin flowers were up in all the plastic plant holes, the rolling ersatz pastures were all aflutter with flash and flaunt of blooms. A sheen was in the air, a shimmer, and a million devils of heatstroke walked out and wrapped me close in my shell. And I was lost on this seventh day of hot August.

Bunch's prose here really pops, full of alliteration and beautiful strangeness. Along the way, Stronghold 10 meets an unmodified, aged human who served under him during the recent war, and urges him to come join him. But the un-altered human, named Morgbawn, is unenthusiastic:

"Ah, no." But there was still that tiny spark of hope, and I thought I detected it stronger now. YES! I was beginning to wonder if Morgbawn wasn't finding it a worlds better idea, that of being up and moving with even just one flesh-strip in a pickle jar rather than to lie totally quiet out there, The Battles finally and forever completely renounced for him.

"How about it?"

"Maybe!" he said. "I don't know. Come find me where I fall. We'll keep in touch, maybe. It shouldn't be long now. When I feel myself finally going, wherever I am, I'll head for your place. I'll struggle in as close as I can get. Come find me —" His face retreated and commenced to break up then, he started to move away, and I think in that one anguished moment I understood just a little better than I ever had before what it might be like to be, as Morgbawn surely was, at the very brink of the Forever Total Dark.

Obsession with, and fear of, death is a major theme in these stories. Stronghold 10 is now effectively immortal, but "effectively immortal" is not immortal; we have read in the introduction that this world of Moderan will pass, too.

In the next story, "One Time, a Red Carpet...", Stronghold 10 finds his stronghold and approaches it, only to be warned away by automated systems. He must confront his fear of death and screw up his own courage to approach the "warning of the line," maintaining faith that his own new "self" will not destroy him. It's a crazy and funny juxtaposition, that in this future in which humans have

abandoned their mortal bodies and put their faith in efficient technology, our narrator must act on faith:

YES! we moved on toward the “warning of the line,” fixed in mind and all resolve to die. It might be long and tedious tedious years — wild crying, much praying, high yelling in the night and the gut-sickening fears that claw the hours — before we would attain this readiness again. So I increased the tempo of my going, set my hinges and traces to MAX and moved on to seize THE MOMENT at the “line” of Death. OH GOD... I was ready to KNOW... come zump blaster, come walking doll bomb, come high-up weird screaming wreck-wreck, come Death... come DEATH...

The fact that Stronghold 10 is effectively threatened by its/his own new identity is not lost on it/him. In fact, this seems to be another theme in Bunch’s stories, the idea that warfare, and the technology of warfare, alienate us from ourselves:

A man killed by his own self before he could reach himself, stood off and threatened in front of the glorious union of selves. Well, that has happened, and often, I suppose. But this seemed, at least potentially, a little different kind of killing of one’s self. And yet, could I retreat from myself now, and ever face myself again in any mirror anywhere? Chancing, in the long years to come, by reservoirs for run-off, say, the water calm and placid, fixed for mirrors, what would I do? Run screaming? Turn off my head? Switch my eyes dark? Oh, when one cannot face the mirrors anywhere, what of a man is left?

What, indeed?

Maybe these little excerpts will give you a taste of just how very strange and energetic and, yes, beautiful Bunch’s prose really is. It’s remarkable, a little like Joyce, a little like Burroughs, a little like Lem. As I said, almost certainly not for everyone. But what a unique voice he has!

Looking at this list of stories, I’m struck by how many of them are listed as uncollected. It’s great to have the *Moderan* collection back in print, but I think his work really cries out for a comprehensive edition of all his short stories — although, as the Wikipedia article states, it might not really be comprehensive, as “no definitive Bunch bibliography is known to exist.”

Retroblogging the Iraq War

As time allows I’ve been “retroblogging” — taking old blog posts that I wrote back in the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003, cleaning up as many broken links as I can, and re-posting them on Blogger. Eventually I hope to have them all done. Here’s one, from February 24, 2003. I feel that it’s important to not let the Gulf War I or the Iraq War fade into obscurity in our collective memories. It was quite possible at the time to use contemporary sources to know we were being lied into war. I read as much as I could: shelf-feet of books and articles, and

listened to hundreds of hours of interviews. There was a ton of stuff out there for people that were looking for it. And anyone with even a passing understanding of our recent wars knew that it couldn't possibly go well and achieve the stated objectives (which kept changing).

Only fifteen years later the false narrative is apparently the one Millennials and younger people grew up with. But the truth is still out there. Don't let it be lost; if everyone accepts the conventional wisdom on Iraq, they will have little or no resistance to invading Iran.

The old posts on Iraq that I'm cleaning up — they have many broken links — are here, in reverse chronological order. And there's one more nearly-finished "retroblogged" post; I worked on this post a few months ago, but it needs more work.

Saturday

Last night I went to Costco after work and picked up our usual Friday night salmon along with our usual staples like salad, chicken broth, eggs, and butter. They had some of the Birch Benders pancake mix available, but only a small amount — one flat, which was on top of a different brand. So I bought two bags. It seems like they are either low on the product or phasing it out. I'll check on my next trip.

The kids had also requested a pizza, so I got one of their giant cheese pizzas, and a pumpkin pie. So we had quite a Friday night feast: salmon, rice, salad, cheese pizza, and pie. We ate quite late, though. It was about 9:00 when we got the meal on the table. The kids were quite sluggish about chores, so it was about midnight when we started reading stories. I read Benjamin, at his request, some little comics contained in a book about Scratch programming, *Super Scratch Programming Adventure!* by the LEAD Project. Joshua volunteered to read a poem from *Runny Babbit: A Billy Sook* by Shel Silverstein — the one where Runny goes to a "rancy restaurant." Then I read a few pages of *The Haunting of Hill House* and we sent the kids off to bed about 1:00.

Moderan, Continued

I read another *Moderan* stories. I'm not going to list all the stories. As most of them are very short, I think that would become tedious. Many of them are not really stories in the usual sense. They don't have an arc to them. They are more like vignettes that capture a particular moment in the life (after-life?) of Stronghold 10, and they frequently seem to be meditations on death. In "Battle Won" we read:

But now we're in the clear, thanks to science, our once-dirty Earth ball clean now, coated with plastic, our hardly-used air, mostly a decoration now, colored in beauty with a different hue each month (oh, lovely vapor shield!), our once garbage-wrecked oceans frozen to

solid, with any surplus space-hauled long ago, and our temperatures as quiet and as changeless as ever we want them to be, through Season Control in Central. And the birds! The birds are colored tin now! And the animals all are engined. While the trees in ersatz leap through the planned Earth holes and bloom us up “real” leaves that last the course. AH MODERAN! Land where leaves do not drop; land of the plasto-coated land — sweet sweet my shard-hard home.

It’s hard to get a sense for whether my blood pressure is improving or not. I take four readings, two from each arm, each time. Some of the readings are pretty close to each other, but there are usually some outliers. If I ever put these into the computer I’ll probably wind up doing something like throwing out the highest and lowest, assuming they have a fair amount of error, and average the other two. But each reading is two numbers, so I’m not quite sure how to choose what to throw out. Anyway, I get an occasional green light on both numbers, but most of the readings show up on the meter with one or both lights yellow. I’ve never had a red light, so I guess that’s something. I took another one of Grace’s pills last night but it was hard to see if there was a clear effect in this morning’s numbers. Maybe on the weekend I should add an midday reading.

It’s quite cold in the house today as the heat is still not on. It was down near freezing last night and it’s only in the high forties now. There’s not much sun today, so we aren’t getting any solar gain to speak of through the windows. Maybe we’ll get some sun this afternoon and the house will warm up a bit. We have an appointment for boiler service on Wednesday the 7th, so we have at least a few more days before we can get the heat on. I put on another Duraflame log, although the fireplaces don’t truly warm up the house much.

Don’t tell anyone but I didn’t get a shower or bath today and don’t intend to.

Grace got up and made herself a giant celery and apple juice, and me a less giant celery and apple juice. So I started out with that. Then I made us something more substantial. I fried up some small pieces of bacon, and then sautéed some sad leftover asparagus that has been in the refrigerator too long. It was past its prime, but I chopped off the tops and bottoms of the stems. I made two four-egg omelettes out of this bacon and asparagus, one for Grace and one for myself. Sam showed up so we gave him part of them. For the rest of the kids I toasted a tray of cinnamon raisin bagels with butter and served them with cream cheese. Joshua says he thinks they have too much cinnamon in them. No one else agrees with that assessment.

I think we’re going to have a relatively quiet day at home. I’m going to try to get through my bag full of medical co-pay bills and other bills and paperwork. The sun is coming out a little bit, so maybe the house will warm up. Maybe we can get out to Rolling Hills for a walk.

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 Complete Sony Recordings* (2016 Boxed Set) by Philip Glass
- *Moderan* by David R. Bunch (New York Review Books Classics 2018 Edition)
- *Doctor Who* Series 11, Episode 4: “Arachnids In The UK”

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, November 3rd, 2018

This work by Paul R. Potts is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.