2018 Week 4: The Week Ending Saturday, January 27th
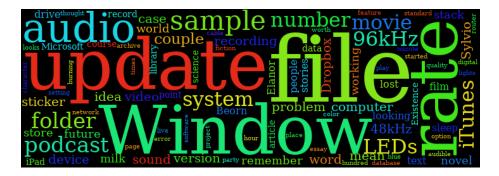

Figure 1: Word Cloud

Sunday

We ate the pot pie.

I settled on turning off all the lights and using an LED flashlight to closely examine the surface of the whole thing for glass. I didn't find any. While the burnt crust looked terrible, almost all of it was edible. Only the edges of the top crust were completely irredeemable.

Pippin even ate the pot pie. He had been doing this thing he does, where he believes passionately that he deeply hates some food, and won't taste it. But if you can convince him to actually taste it, suddenly he has no objections to it, and eats it with gusto. I'm not sure just when this started, but it has happened a number of times now, with a number of different foods.

Grace had made a very tasty paleo cake for dessert, with ground walnuts and coconut flour, so that helped take our minds off the burnt pot pie.

The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien, Chapter 7: "Queer Lodgings"

Our plan was to work on the Pottscast last night, but Elanor was cranky. I read the children most of the next chapter of *The Hobbit*, entitled "Queer Lodgings."

It's another great chapter. Beorn represents an archetypical vision of a powerful, ancient, shape-changing vegetarian who will kill to protect his estate and his guests. He is also the last of his kind, or at least the last one we meet. And so he fits into the pile of Tolkien's "myths out of their times," a category that includes Treebeard and the remaining ents, Tom Bombadil, Shelob, the wizards, and of course the elves. The vision of a world that is changing irrevocably is such a powerful trope in Tolkien.

I'm still coughing up green goo. I tried going a couple of days without using my albuterol inhaler, on the theory that while it had been helping, perhaps it was also irritating my lungs a bit too, and so keeping me from getting completely over this cough. But no, not using it just meant that there was green goo in my chest that I wasn't getting up. When I took a dose, a few minutes later I was once again coughing up stuff that I didn't want to keep in there.

It's foggy this morning in the woods and about 38 degrees. There's a fair amount of snow left on the ground, but bare patches are starting to show.

Windows Updates *Ad Nauseum*

Windows continues to harass me about updates. This morning when I first sat down with the computer, it would not let me do anything without a restart. So I restarted it. Somehow it destroyed my background screen setting, leaving it black. Then it had messages about failed updates, and the update control panel listed updates that needed a restart. So I restarted it, again. Three updates still show the annotation "Requires a restart to finish installing."

I ran a troubleshooter program that I downloaded from Microsoft, and it suggested that I "Repair Windows Update Database Corruption." What is corrupted, and how did it get corrupted? My computer hasn't crashed; I've had no blue (or any other color) screens of death. If files are corrupt, it's due to buggy system tools. Is repairing the update database manually going to have to be a regular part of operating my damned computer?

I told it to fix everything, and now it has a summary for me. It says "Windows Update components must be repaired," and shows a red dot with an "x" through it, and the status "not fixed." In the "detailed" troubleshooting report, it just says "Windows Update components must be repaired" and tells me this problem was "Not Fixed."

It's one of those annoying programs that pops up a window without warning. So I was typing in a different window, and it suddenly threw up a window and stole the focus. Some key strokes wound up going to the new window, which caused it to do something. I'm not sure what. Probably, hitting the enter key triggered the "Cancel" button, and the window disappeared.

So I've run through the troubleshooter program another couple of times and it still reports the same thing.

I've tried running through this procedure manually. Many of those steps don't work and don't seem to apply to the version of Windows I'm running. I completed the steps I could complete, but that process gave me no further insights beyond the one I already had, which is that Windows Update is an awful mess.

Have I mentioned that I really despise what Windows as a whole has become? In one pop-up message the text actually read "Windows is a service." Which means nothing, except they don't want you to think of it anymore as an operating system that you can install, or purchase pre-installed, and manage yourself. They want you to buy a subscription and pay and pay, with ever-dwindling control of your computer. If they could make it work, Windows would be coin-operated. "Want to save that file? It's gonna cost you! Either send us Bitcoin, or agree to view five minutes of ads from our partners." Which just pushes me further towards the day when I decide that any incompatibilities I might encounter with Linux can't be worse than dealing with Microsoft.

There's an option to submit feedback, but *that*'s another extremely Microsoft-ified experience. You have a couple of tiny text fields (tweet-sized). It tries to channel you into signing in. Your "reward" for successfully submitting feedback is to see a picture of a group of Microsoft employees standing on a stage holding up cards that spell out the words "THANK YOU." No need to thank me, please. No, really. That's not actually helpful. It's the opposite of helpful. If you want to help, fix the software.

One of the error messages I'm getting means, according to Microsoft's help pages, "0x80240001 WU_E_NO_SERVICE Windows Update Agent was unable to provide the service." This is like saying that "an error occurred because an error occurred."

Update 1: Oh! I found a fix for one of the updates! On Reddit. It seems like that might have shaken loose some pending updates and gotten things unstuck. After that fix, the troubleshooter showed green. Although it looks like there are still problems. I am now getting "Last failed install attempt on 21-Jan-18 - 0x80070bc2" as the status of update KB4056892. After restarting, update KB4056892 failed with an error 0x80246010. That error message isn't even mentioned on the update page. So, I'm going to try to install it using a separately downloaded installer.

I'm starting to feel jealous of Windows users who have died. They have no more pending updates, the lucky bastards.

Update 2: Well, the standalone installer claims that the update is already installed. So maybe the issue with this update is that the updater keeps failing (with a random error message) because it is already installed, but somehow the system can't detect that?

I uninstalled the specific update, restarted, and am now running the standalone installer. After that, and restarting yet again (I think I've restarted a dozen times this morning), Software Update still shows the update as pending. I think

this is still the same broken update I mentioned last week, the one where:

> Even though the update was successfully installed, Windows Update incorrectly reports that the update failed to install. To verify the installation, select Check for Updates to confirm that there are no additional updates available.

But there is a twist. I have two pending failed updates with the same number (KB4056892), but different names: "2018-01 Cumulative Update for Windows 10 Version 1709 for x64-based Systems (KB4056892)," and "Security Update for Windows (KB4056892)."

There's also a mouse driver update that keeps showing up, "Synaptics - Mouse - 1/5/2018 12:00:00 AM - 19.3.4.201." In the installed update history, there's a clickable link for that update, but when I click on it, it takes me to a generic "Driver Information: coming soon" page that says "The More information feature is not available yet. We apologize for any inconvenience."

I think this may be re-triggering the problem where my currently installed driver, installed via a Lenovo app, is later than the one Windows is providing, and so the update fails. But it seems crazy that the Windows update process is so fragile that it can't track version numbers in some kind of semantically meaningful way and recognize the situation.

I also think I have an answer for why my background color became black. When I went to look at background color setting, it was still set to a blue color. But it wasn't applied, for some reason. So I switched to a picture, then back to a color. And now when I showed the available colors, the palette had shrunk. A software update had changed the set of available colors to the winter 2018 collection. Since my color, chosen from last season's colors, is not in the current set of stylish colors, the system would only show black. This is frankly ridiculous, software as fashion, but it's what we've got from the industry standard operating system, apparently.

And so I've wasted a large portion of Sunday morning on this bullshit. I should just acknowledge that I've blown the whole day, give the kids a stack of videos to watch, and go back to bed.

Bloody Sunday

He's only been up for twenty minutes, and he's been fed, but Benjamin's already had one screaming meltdown.

Grace and I might try going to the T-Mobile store to see if they can fix up our phone service. There's also a DSA get-together at a café early this afternoon, but I'm not sure if we'll be up for it. And we have committed to finishing some sort of podcast episode.

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I made pancakes.

We're 45 minutes late for "Sunday Socialism" at the Common Cup Cafe, but as I was waiting for Grace, I discovered a Microsoft troubleshooter tool that will let me hide specific software updates. So apparently I can't turn off automatic updates, but I can hide specific broken ones. So I'm trying that. It's a bit confusing to use, because it seems to list all the recent updates in with the pending updates.

Update: it doesn't seem to work. And, in fact, I seem to recall trying this solution before. The broken updates can't be uninstalled, and they still show as pending and requiring a restart. Can't go forward; can't go back. It seems that once they have the status of "pending updates" they can't be "hidden." So it appears that I'm stuck with these broken updates until some future update fixes them.

Sunday Socialism

Grace and I made it to the get-together, over an hour late. We got ourselves a couple of coconut milk lattes and toasted jalapeño bagels with butter. (Grace, on her authority as a person of Jewish ancestry, claims "those ain't bagels," but we still enjoyed them.) We had some fun conversation, though, and met some new people, including some who might be interested in joining us on the podcast.

Then we stopped at the T-Mobile store on Washtenaw and set our two phones up on a monthly plan. I've resisted setting up a plan, preferring to have no recurring bills but just buy minutes in order to use them, but the truth is that we will save money on an unlimited talk-and-text-only plan, as compared to the amount we spend on minutes now. So we'll see how that goes. Our phone numbers are the same.

We're back home and baking fish sticks for dinner, and then Grace and I will head down to the basement and try to come up with something to talk about for this week's podcast. Then, whatever we will record, it will probably take me upwards of two hours to produce and upload the podcast, so the shape of the rest of our evening is becoming clear. And it will probably take longer than usual, tonight, because we're out of practice. But we'll see.

We had fish sticks and rice for dinner. For some reason the Airport Express in the basement stopped working, and would no longer connect to or extend the network created by our WiFi router upstairs. So I messed around with that for some time trying to figure out how to fix it. One fix involved running a fifty-foot Ethernet cable all the way down the stairs. It was just barely long enough for the job. But that didn't help. So I wound up putting the Mac Pro directly onto the WiFi. I have no idea what went wrong, as the Airport Express still can communicate on both Ethernet ports. Maybe it's just simply a hardware failure.

It's almost 8:00 and Grace and I are going to head downstairs to work on the

podcast, and that will probably take the rest of the evening.

Monday

It's a strange day today. I didn't get a lot of sleep, as Grace and I finished the podcast quite late and because it's been over a month since I last produced one, it took me a while. I've also made a lot of small tweaks to the process, and so it was less familiar, and required extra time and attention.

Taking away the Airport Express changed the network topology, which meant that I had to figure out why the Mac Mini in the storage room couldn't connect to the Mac Pro in the office. (Basically, I'm still mourning the diminution of support for the AppleTalk protocols in MacOS X; all this stuff used to be considerably easier to use.) The problem was that the Mini and the Pro were on different subnets, and I got that fixed up by putting both on the private WiFi network. The printer is now connected to the Mac Pro without using a router, just a switch. I'm not sure if I can get the printer sharing working again, even though the Pro is configured to share the printer; I'm not sure Windows devices will be able to talk to it. There's probably a way, but again, I miss the nice AppleTalk lookup protocols. They were limited and a little problematic with large modern networks, but they made configuring small networks like our home network much easier.

There is also some kind of problem where the printer drops off the network after it sits idle for a while. Often to get a print job going, I have to turn the printer off and on again, and then the Mac Pro will be able to talk to it again. There might be a configuration option buried somewhere in the printer settings, but I'm not too keen on putting time into that at the moment. Again, I feel like a lot of things have gone backwards, as far as ease of use.

The Pottscast

Neither of us felt very ready to record a podcast and we had not actually gotten a lot of prep done. Grace read through the first article I asked her to read and skimmed two others. The time I had to spend re-reading the articles and highlighting bits to quote got sucked up cleaning out the 2017 raw files that were starting to eat up a lot of space, and verifying that everything was working right with the new sample rate.

I started recording at 96kHz when I rebooted the podcast last summer, semi-accidentally. I didn't really set out to record at a high sample rate. I think the Logic project I copied to start with was set to 96kHz, and I just left it that way. Once I got the FA-66, Cloud Lifter, and PR-40 microphones all working together on the Mac Mini, the resulting files sounded quite good to my ears, so I did not want to change anything, at least not until I had time to fix it again if I messed something up. That meant changing things over our holiday hiatus. I think the component most responsible for improving the sound of the podcast is actually

the Cloud Lifter. It gives me a hotter signal from the microphones, and I can lower the gain on the FA-66 preamps. That gives me a better noise floor.

It turns out I wasn't even recording at 96kHz *per se*. The hardware interface was actually set to 48kHz, while the Logic project was set to 96kHz. That means, I think, that Logic was doing sample-rate conversion on the fly, presumably via interpolation, to record 96kHz audio files. The fact that I liked the audio quality I was getting, even though the hardware was not actually sampling the audio inputs at 96kHz, suggests that I don't actually need 96kHz to get good results. I didn't do a true A/B comparison, but I liked the sound of the files that were effectively 48kHz. All I was doing, recording at 96kHz, was eating up twice the hard drive space.

What Sample Rate Should I Use?

I have read arguments that the digital effects I apply in post-processing, such as the Renaissance Vox plug-in, can produce better results with less aliasing if they have "spare" bandwidth in the frequency domain above the audible range. I think there *may* be an argument for doing the mixing and applying effects at a higher sample rate than the finished product, and down-converting the finished mix to 44.1kHz, 16-bit, and using that as the source of the compressed MP3 file. But I am not completely convinced of that. Sweetwater's Mitch Gallagher takes on the subject here. He says:

> ...frequencies above the [Nyquist] limit can appear as spurious signals in the audible audio spectrum. This is referred to as "aliasing," and must be prevented by band-limiting (filtering) the analog audio before it's converted to a digital format. Effectively, this means that analog-to-digital converters (ADCs) have a low-pass filter at the Nyquist Limit that stops those out-of-bandwidth-frequencies from getting to the converters. The implementation of that filter in the ADC is key; if done well, it should be completely transparent; done poorly, the filter will degrade the quality of the audio. By sampling at 88.2kHz, 96kHz, or even 192 kHz, the implementation of the anti-aliasing filter is moved above the audible frequency range (which means that even less-than-optimal filter design will be inaudible). This was a much bigger issue with early ADCs, where the filters could audibly degrade the signal. With modern technology, it's much less of an issue regardless of sample rate.

But he also says:

> In addition to this, some plug-ins sound better at high sample rates. Experiment and see what you think, both when recording and mixing.

So that's... well, not really all that much help, to be honest. The FA-66 *is* a pretty old box. Its "prosumer" ADC implementation is certainly not as good as fully "professional" ADCs available now. It's possible that by accident, my

mismatched sample rates were actually giving me the best possible sound, at the "sweet spot" for both the FA-66 and my Logic project. If that's the case, I should probably keep everything the way it was.

Is There a Case for a New Standard?

It's interesting to think that there may in fact be an optimal sample rate for digital audio. In this paper (note: that link goes to a PDF file), Don Lavry explores the idea that while it is obvious that there are sample rates that are too low for quality audio, there are also rates that are too high:

> In my paper "Sampling Theory" I already pointed out that increased speed (bandwidth) reduces accuracy. No one advocates sampling at 10 kHz because that would exclude audio signals above 5 kHz. Clearly, no one knowledgeable in the subject would advocate audio conversion at 100MHz, either. It would bring about poor audio performance due to high distortions, noise and more (which is beyond the scope of this paper). I use these extreme examples to show that sampling can be done too slowly, and it can also be done too fast.

Lavry goes on to explore the reasons for an upper limit, first in terms of audible frequencies and the Nyquist limit:

> Of course I want to accommodate the most sensitive ears, and with some serious "safety margin". However, even after adding an extra 10kHz, we are talking about bandwidth no higher than 40kHz. That is why 88.2 or 96kHz are preferred rates for audio quality.

Lavry suggests that:

> At [a] 60kHz sampling rate, the contribution of AD and DA to any attenuation in the audible range is negligible. Although 60kHz would be closer to the ideal; given the existing standards, 88.2kHz and 96kHz are closest to the optimal sample rate.

This leads me to wonder — is modern professional audio gear missing a rate, a rate that might be closer to optimal? What if new gear introduced a new rate? It could be 60kHz, but for practical reasons it might be better to make it 66.15kHz. Why? Because 22.05kHz and 44.1kHz are standard sample rates already. And so conversion from 66.15kHz to standard "CD quality" at 44.1kHz could just involve obtaining 2 samples from 3 (discarding every third sample, and then filtering). Converting to and from 48kHz and 96kHz are not so nice, but 66.15kHz sits pretty close to the midpoint between 48kHz and 88.2kHz. The exact midpoint is 68.1, and it's only about 3% off from that value.

Another possibility would be a value chosen between 48kHz and 96kHz: 72kHz. That gives us some nice ratios for up-converting or down-converting to the "professional" rates of 48kHz or 96kHz, but it seems like if we are going to sample

at 72kHz, we may as well use the existing 88.2kHz standard, since it's over 80% of the way there.

A better number is a nice round value, 64kHz. This is a rate that fits nicely in the pretty big gap between 48kHz and the next highest commonly used format, 88.2kHz. In fact 64kHz is close to 1/3 faster than 48kHz *and* 1/3 slower than 88.2kHz. It is also 1/3 of the existing 192kHz rate, so there's easy conversion between those formats, and converting from 64 to 48 would involve interpolating 4 samples into 3. Easy conversion to and from 48kHz also means that 64kHz would play nicely with music for film. Resampling down to CD standard, 44.1kHz, would still require some uglier math, but we can't have everything.

I am not aware of any products that are about to introduce new standard sample rates, but it seems to me like it is often the case that an idea is out there, sort of pending, in the noösphere, and then some imperceptible "kick" happens, and it becomes a real thing. So I would not be surprised if, a year from now, at least one major manufacturer and at least one major provider of digital audio workstation (DAW) software were promoting and supporting a new standard sample rate, and that sample rate was 64kHz. I think with that format, producers might be able to stop obsessing about whether they were recording too slow or too fast and finally feel that the porridge was neither too hot or too cold, but just right.

But Again, In the Real Word, Given What I've Got, What Sample Rate Should I Use?

When I mixed last night's podcast, I used a Logic project set to 48kHz, with audio files recorded at 48kHz without sample rate conversion. The result sounded pretty good. I thought I heard some more noise. But the hardware setup is not exactly the same. I have a second audio interface plugged into the Mac Mini. It could be contributing a little electrical noise to the converters in the FA-66. The cables are run differently. If you are listening to your sound under a microscope, it's hard to factor out how every change might be contributing to the finished product. And I'm not *completely* sure if there is any audible difference in quality between the shows mixed at 96kHz, and this one mixed at 48kHz. I don't have a good way to compare the results using a single recording. Audible differences in the finished project might be due to the effects of the sample-rate conversion.

There's a lot of banter online about whether recording at higher frequencies is worthwhile at all. There are folks who say that if you record at high frequencies, with mediocre hardware, you may actually be making things worse, because there will be a lot of ultrasonic noise, which will then cause intermodulation distortion in the audible frequency range. See this article.

I know my friend Rich thinks there's no real benefit to recording at 96kHz. I'm pretty sure he is sold on recording with 24-bit samples, though, so he's not just some kind of Luddite. I'm not entirely sure whether he thinks there might be a benefit to recording at 48kHz, as compared to 44.1kHz. As for me, I think I've settled, at least for now, on recording 24-bit files at 48kHz. 24 bits, because

there is a definite, audible dynamic range improvement. I've been aware of the difference between 24-bit and 16-bit sampling since back when I was first experimenting with digital recording in the nineties. 48kHz because, like the author of that article, I'm pretty sure I can hear improved clarity with 48kHz.

96kHz was an experiment. When I first got my Ensemble, and started recording stuff for songwriting competitions, I was open to the idea that maybe I should *use* its higher sample rate capabilities, because why not try it? Could I really detect any big improvement? I'm not sure that I could. And sample rates above 96kHz? I'm very skeptical that they provide any real-world benefit at all. It's very likely that there are other places in my signal chain that would make a bigger improvement, starting with the AC power, and including the microphones, the cables, the preamps, the converters themselves, perhaps the clocking… *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*. Based on my reading it sounds like 88.2kHz — twice the CD standard — might be worth trying, but my FA-66 doesn't support it. That might be worth trying the next time I do a major hardware upgrade. Which, to be honest, probably won't be anytime soon.

So for 2018, with this gear, it looks like I'm sticking with 48kHz.

To Save, or Not to Save, the Original Recordings?

Meanwhile, I'm also trying to decide what to do with the podcast source files. They take up a lot of gigabytes, especially recorded at 96kHz. Two raw voice tracks for a podcast 3 hours long eat up almost 6GiB. At that rate, a 1TiB hard drive holds only about 170 hours of raw audio. And the files are too big to back up easily to other media, like CD-R, or even DVD-R.

After I mix the podcast, I produce a WAV file at 16-bit, 44.1kHz. That's CD-quality audio. Is there any use for the original 24-bit, 48kHz (or 96kHz) source files? Will I ever want them in the future, for anything? I don't edit the new podcast much at all, so there's not a trove of outtakes or unused conversation.

I'm sort of torn here. I like the idea of archiving everything at the highest-possible quality. But I also like the idea of keeping my digital archive more manageable. Every file that I choose to maintain winds up on at least three hard drives: one in the Mac Pro, and two back up drives, which I rotate. Hard drives are cheap now, but not free. And every hard drive is a burning house. You must have an escape plan for the data.

Probably I should just keep them for a year, in case I need to redo an episode for some reason, then one day each year, I should drink a shot of ice-cold vodka and purge the previous year's source files, keeping only the lossless "finished product" WAV files.

I don't imagine that in ten years I'll be thinking that what the world really needs is a completely remixed set of my conversations with Grace. With the multi-track music projects, there is a better case to be made that I might want to keep the original files, to remix them in the future as I get better at mixing.

In my songs-for-songwriting-contests projects I have, for the most part, already deleted all the flubbed takes, because no one, myself included, needs to hear me fuck up the same guitar part 20 times (or more) in a row before finally getting a take that I was willing to settle for because I was working with a deadline.

Anyway.

Our topic last night was "millennial economics" and we are hoping to come back to that topic in future shows, and to bring in some real live millennials.

Whoops — it looks like I failed to update the production podcast feed file. No one seems to have noticed, which suggests that the people who are listening (and we know there are a few) may be using YouTube or playing the MP3 in their browser, rather than using a podcast application that actually reads the feed file.

Fifty-Two Degrees in January

It is a grim and strange day. It is 52 degrees in Ypsilanti — on January 22nd. This morning it was very foggy, as the snow continued to sublimate. It rained all night. On the drive in, along I-94, I saw that a few of the flowering trees looked like they were already budding. That's ominous. If it stays this warm, Michigan is likely to lose a lot of fruit trees.

This is weather, of course, not climate, but the temperature swings have been bizarre for years now. Last February, when we came down to Ann Arbor to close on our house, it was shirt-sleeve weather. But we've also seen extreme cold in the same month. The weather is chaotic. But the upward trend is not mistakable, except for those who have excluded facts and their own observations from their epistemic bubbles. It ain't good. Per Weather Underground:

> Some of the ups and downs in the northeast U.S. have been head-spinning. In Burlington, VT, a daily record low of –20°F on Jan. 7 was followed by a record high of 61°F on Fri., Jan. 11. By Sunday morning, Jan. 13, temperatures were back down to –5°F. Just as impressive, given how cold it's been: Albany, NY, has failed to set even one record low all winter — but it did manage to score a daily record high on Friday, with 63°F.

And, per NOAA…

Oops. Well, it looks like I can't visit the NOAA web site, because of the government shutdown.

I guess that's one way to deny anthropogenic global warming.

Lunch

Grace brought my lunch to my office about 4 p.m. I made a lunch from leftovers last week (for Thursday?) and have forgotten it several times. Unfortunately I

had gone to Culver's to grab a couple of chicken sandwiches about two hours early. But it's in my office refrigerator now and, G-d willing, I'll eat it tomorrow and not get food poisoning (from either the chicken sandwiches or the leftovers).

Publishing Workflows

I noticed a little detail in the text of *Existence*. There's a passage that has a faint dotted underline. I think this must have been a leftover hyperlink that was not disabled in the final text. I'm not sure what tools Brin used — Microsoft Word, or something like Scrivener? It's just an odd revelatory detail. I'm increasingly curious about publishing workflows, as I've accumulated hundreds of pages of essays and want to do something with it soon. It seems like age 50 might be a good time to publish a collection of 50 essays. But I don't want to create only an e-book; I want a paper book with decent typography.

I'm feeling a bit queasy and headache-y tonight, so for dinner I'm having a glass of diluted pineapple juice, and then I'll try to go to bed early.

Tuesday

When I got home, I fixed up the podcast feed. Apparently I had tested the RSS file entry for the new podcast in the "staging" feed file, which I use for testing, but not the regular one. It was all ready to copy over; I just forgot to upload **index.xml**. I also added to the show notes a link to the sewing book that Grace referenced. And while I was at it, I went back through all the show notes in the podcast blog and updated them with new "How to Listen" and "More Information" subheadings, for readability.

I'm not really sure if the feed gets much use. I think my friend Ken might listen to the show in iTunes or in some other application that uses a podcast feed. I know I use it sometimes, although I don't tend to listen to the shows much after I'm done producing them, other than double-checking that the intro and outro sound correct and the file is complete. I know some folks are listening on YouTube.

I got myself worked into a tizzy before bed, because I read Rod Dreher's latest article in *The American Conservative*. Wow, I have a lot to say about that article. I should probably save it for the podcast, though. Grace and I wound up talking it out for a while before bed because I needed to process my rage before I could sleep. I'll just say here that what passes for conservatism in 2018 really is just neoliberalism plus open contempt for the vulnerable.

And don't get me started about the Democrats and the government shutdown.

I didn't sleep all that well, and didn't get to bed early. The kids have torn the cover off one of the baseboard heaters in the boys' room. But I did feel better after skipping dinner and sleeping. I'm still coughing up alarming green goo. I feel like my low-grade fever may be back. I thought I had gotten past the worst of that.

Feeling bad, and coughing, is really getting old. I slept until about 9:00, got a shower, and got out. For breakfast I stopped at Biggby Coffee and this time got a 20-ounce cappuccino with coconut milk. That's unsweetened, which must be better for me than the mocha, which was disgustingly sweet. According to their web site, the soy version has 123 calories (it doesn't list the coconut milk version). I also had two toasted everything bagels with butter. That might be another 600 calories. Maybe I should have one bagel.

I have leftovers for lunch, the food that Grace brought me late yesterday afternoon.

At work, I got in a little RS-232 level converter board, but Patrick is out today, and I want his assistance before I try to wire it up to a motherboard.

Spectre and Meltdown

This is interesting: Intel is advising people *not* to use the first round of patches for Spectre and Meltdown. And Linus Torvalds has weighed in. While one might criticize his tone, no one should discount his opinion on the technology:

> The whole IBRS_ALL feature to me very clearly says "Intel is not serious about this, we'll have a ugly hack that will be so expensive that we don't want to enable it by default, because that would look bad in benchmarks."

> So instead they try to push the garbage down to us. And they are doing it entirely wrong, even from a technical standpoint.

> I'm sure there is some lawyer there who says "we'll have to go through motions to protect against a lawsuit." But legal reasons do not make for good technology, or good patches that I should apply.

In fact this is exactly what I would expect from Intel, because they are more concerned about doing their duty to shareholders than they are about meeting the security needs of their customers. In 2018, corporations are people and shareholders are people, but angry customers are abstractions, isolated behind mountains of legal terms and conditions.

The entire thread is interesting, although I have to confess, even with a background in Computer Science, I don't have a detailed enough understanding of the Intel CPU architecture to fully understand the proposed patches. I know just enough about it to know that the security problems are indeed very bad, and that patching them in software is bound to be ugly no matter how it is done; the best-case scenario that can be hoped for is to minimize the ugliness and the hits to throughput (which seem more likely to be issues for big data centers and programmers developing big web-scale applications that run on these data center machines, than for people like me).

The Olympus LS-10

I did an experiment with my old Olympus LS-10. I have three or four of these — I bought them on eBay because the thing was just so damned useful and I didn't want to be without one if my first one broke, so I'd watch auctions and try sniping them for cheap at the last minute. They have different firmware versions with slightly different features, although the hardware seems identical. One of them has an option to configure it as a USB audio device, instead of a media device. In other words, you can set it to appear to your computer as a sound card instead of a hard drive.

I thought maybe it could be useful for the computer to have access to the LS-10's microphones, which probably sound a lot better than a typical laptop microphone. I thought maybe if it behaved as a two channel in, two channel out audio device, I might even be able to use it to help me record Skype calls.

It sort of works. The LS-10 will show up as an audio input device. As an input device it seems to pick up sounds from the built-in microphones. It does not present an output device, though. So it doesn't seem like I can use it, say, as a little USB DAC/headphone amplifier. When it is in audio device mode, it seems to disable playback and recording, so for example I can't play a previously recorded audio file and have the digital audio show up on the input channels.

Also, the device seems to constantly disappear and reappear from the USB bus. I think that might be a bad cable. I'll try it again with a different cable. Or, it could just be that they never really got this feature working reliably, and it doesn't send the expected keep-alive packets on schedule, and so the host computer constantly thinks that it has disconnected.

If it is reliable with a different cable, then I might be able to use it for streaming Elanor's first birthday party. I'll try plugging it into my laptop. I would probably have to mute the laptop speakers to avoid getting feedback while streaming, which means it wouldn't work well with, say, Google Hangouts. I wouldn't be able to hear other people. But we'll see.

Do any of the other hand-held digital recorders double as USB audio interfaces? That might influence some future buying decision. It might open up some options for using Skype or one of its alternatives.

Wednesday

Sylvio **(2017 Film)**

We watched *Sylvio*. I wasn't entirely sure what to expect — the film is unrated, so it could have had some kid-unfriendly elements. But in fact it is a very sweet, low-key story under the basic surrealist elements, with a side of kitsch. The kids laughed uproariously, and so did I. Two of the kids did not laugh quite so much. Sam, I think, thought parts of it were too silly to bear. I could not get a really coherent critique out of him. He may have just been objecting to

the premise itself. If you can accept the premise, which proposes that there's a mild-mannered gorilla living and working alongside humans in Baltimore, then it all sort of flows from there.

There is no CGI or motion capture. The film is beautifully low-budget throughout. Sylvio is played by a guy in a gorilla suit, Albert Birney (one of the writer/directors), wearing sunglasses. The credits list Sylvio Bernardi as himself. Birney took no pains whatsoever to make Sylvio look like a *realistic* gorilla. He can't speak. He gives out occasional grunts and sighs. But mostly he participates in conversations using meaningful nods and head tilts. There is a gag where he can type (very quickly) on a computer keyboard and it will read aloud what he typed, but the film uses this only a couple of times.

Veronica picked up on something that I picked up on, too, which is that the film is "perfect," in a sense. It follows through on its own internal logic with perfect whimsicality. Oh, some scenes drag just a bit, and I think the filmmakers, paradoxically, could have gotten a more perfect low-budget look with a higher budget. There are scenes that don't quite work, like a confusing bit where Sylvio walks through an urban woods and meets some horses. Sylvio doesn't really convince us that he has some kind of a deep spiritual connection to the natural world, given that the Baltimore environs feel entirely like a decaying urban setting and the natural settings don't look very healthy. The filmmakers were working with what they had. But mostly, the film is very funny and even touching.

What does it mean? Oh, I think you could try to make the case that it is an allegory about race relations, about black folks trying to tolerate the well-meaning but fumbling acts of solidarity by white allies, about social media, about attitudes towards hip-hop culture — all kinds of things. However, I think to do very much of this is really to stretch it beyond the intentions of the filmmakers. I think they really just wanted to make a funny, weird, touching film with the resources they could easily obtain, and they did. So the allegory is paper-thin; it's about the struggle of an artist to earn a living making the art he loves.

In the closing credits, the filmmakers list their Kickstarter contributors. It's an amazingly long list. Apparently *Sylvio* began life as a series of six-second videos on Vine — *eight hundred* of them. That fact alone seems somehow more absurd than anything the filmmakers could put into a mere film. The Vines survive on YouTube. I don't know if there is an official source with better video quality. And you might be able to get a sense of the finished film here.

Sylvio the gorilla loves to make video puppet shows. He has a little hand puppet of a balding white man, called Herbert Herpels, and he loves to make tiny props and create very slow-moving little clips in which there is no dialogue and almost no action; we might wait a minute for a tiny piece of toast to pop up, or a tiny plant to sprout. To me, there's something immensely appealing about the idea that one can make "quiet" art — stories in which almost nothing happens, slow readings, ambient music, audio recordings in which someone takes a walk in the

woods, long conversations about scholarly topics, essays that go into depth about a book. These are the kind of thing I always feel compelled to make. When I try to make things using the conventions of popular media — aggressive storytelling, fast-moving plots, narrow escapes, vulgarity, loudness — I always feel slightly fraudulent, unless I'm simultaneously *undermining* those tropes. I don't think Sylvio, the gorilla, is at all interested in cultural criticism or undermining tropes, or anything. He just wants to make his art. May we all get to do the same.

Dropbox: Silent File Synchronization Failures

I think I've found and fixed a problem that's been plaguing me with Dropbox. In fact I have discovered that the problem went deeper than I thought. Fortunately I don't think I lost any data. The underlying problem? *Silent failures* in file synchronization. The user thinks that everything is going fine, but in fact it isn't, and the software gives the user no warning about this whatsoever, leading to possible loss of data.

I use Dropbox to synchronize a folder full of files between my Mac Pro, a machine running Windows 7 at work, and my new ThinkPad running Windows 10.

In and among the contents of that folder are files and folders that I've saved (moving them from burning house to burning house), files from Macintosh systems that existed long before MacOS X.

On the old Macintosh, the original HFS file system — a step up from the original-original MFS file system, which didn't allow folders within folders — was quite permissive in the set of characters it allowed you to use when naming files and folders. Files on versions of MacOS prior to MacOS X typically didn't use extensions to indicate their type, since there were file type and file creator codes in the file metadata which would help identify which application to associate with a file. This was not foolproof, of course, but it worked pretty well for many years.

I had old files and folders with names like:

- **letter to art?**
- **Drunks are us!**
- ***filterProc article**
- **assembler.mar.paul;**
- **Beynd the Req Suite 5/92 MSWORD**
- **MS MAIL incoming <= 3-4-94**
- **Dar Tellum/ Stranger from a Distant Planet.page**
- **R*chTEXT.GIF**
- **revision 2.**

It was legal to include question marks or exclamation points in filenames. It was legal to include forward slashes and asterisks. The pre-MacOS X file system was not adapted from the UNIX file system, so didn't use forward slashes as directory path separators. It was legal to use less than and greater than signs

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(also known as "angle brackets.") It was legal to end filenames with a period. In fact, the only character one couldn't use in a filename was a colon. Filenames could not be very long, so I (and other Mac users) often came up with little typographic conventions to help tag them. I think (but it's been a long time, and so I might not remember this correctly) that I used a leading asterisk to indicate which version of file I was currently working on, and I used a trailing period to indicate that a file was final. I used less than and greater than signs when I was making files that contained data organized by date ranges. Filenames with trailing semicolons came from a VAX, which used this convention for automatic version numbering.

Dropbox apparently chokes on all of the above examples. But it doesn't issue errors. It's eager to tell me every day that my Dropbox is almost full, because it wants to sell me an upgrade, but it never utters a peep if it can't upload certain files and folders and synchronize them across devices.

These limitations all stem from limitations in Windows.

I discovered this when I was trying to rearrange files on a Windows machine. I was reorganizing folders and moving old folders into new folders. Dropbox doesn't really have the notion of a "move," so it deletes and adds files and folders. But some subtrees of folders could not be deleted. On my Windows machines, these appeared to consist of trees of empty folders. I could delete them, but Dropbox would immediately add them back.

Apparently this problem occurs when one of the devices Dropbox is syncing with won't "let" the files get moved. So it appeared that my Mac, sitting at home, was refusing to delete the old folder, perhaps because it was not emptied, or flagged somehow as not fully synchronized (although all the folders on all the machines had green checkboxes indicating they were fully up-to-date). So I started investigating further and found a number of "stuck" files that existed on my Mac, but not on Windows. Because they were not synchronized, when I moved the folder on a Windows system, those files were not included.

If I had decided that the Windows folder structure was the one I wanted to keep, going forward, and turned off Dropbox on my Mac and deleted the old folders, I would have lost those unsynchronized files, having been given no warning or error messages of any kind. The only warning was in the form of this strange folder behavior, where on Windows a folder that I had apparently successfully moved to another folder would keep reappearing after I deleted it.

Let's say I was using Dropbox to migrate a large archive of files from Mac to Windows, permanently, with the intention of wiping the Mac when I was done. I'd have seen no error messages. But those files would just be lost forever, with no warning.

Storing Files in Burning Houses

None of these files were truly important to my current work. Most of the files in question contained very old e-mail messages, letters to friends, college essays, Apple documentation, or old class assignments from Computer Science classes I took thirty years ago. I mean, here's a bit from a journal entry I've saved since 1994:

> So, tonight I didn't do much at work and then came home and started a batch of laundry. My beef for stir-frying had turned gray and gross-looking and my bean sprouts were mostly liquid so I went to Kroger and got some more food. Their broccoli still doesn't look very good. I got the last batch to look better by cutting off the stems and leaving them in a cup of water in the fridge. They perked up quite a bit and weren't bad, although they were going yellow slightly. I don't care about that as long as they aren't liquid.

I've succeeded in simultaneously boring and grossing myself out, by reading that. But I *do* want to keep these old files — these are the things I've chosen to keep, and worked to keep. They take me back to a time and place. They are important to me not because they are truly interesting, but because they are the things that have *survived*. And they didn't survive by accident; I didn't just leave a computer in a garage for 24 years. I've worked to keep them, and it's cost me money and effort and attention.

A few years ago I rescued an old essay I wrote as my junior Independent Study thesis at the College of Wooster. It was on Stanislaw Lem's *Fiasco*. and I wrote a new introduction for it. In the introduction, I wrote:

> The computer file containing this essay has been on a long, strange trip. It started out on a Macintosh floppy disc. It must have made it onto a hard drive at some point. From there it may have migrated via a Bernoulli disc and passed through several more hard drives, lived for a time on a Magneto-optical disc, then a CD-ROM disc containing a disc image of the Magneto-optical disc, and made it to my Macintosh Pro, 28 years later. While 2016 versions of Microsoft Word would not open the original file without displaying a lot of garbage, I was able to use an emulator, SheepShaver, to run a very old version of MacOS and Microsoft Word, open up the file, and copy the text out, then turn it into a Markdown file. This process is not for the faint of heart. Just getting the emulator to work properly with old disc images took hours of trial and error. Most recently, in 2022, 34 years after I wrote the original file, I have migrated the Markdown file onto a RAID file server connected to an Intel NUC running Ubuntu Linux. From there, I will finally get it onto a web server in HTML format. In short, the file has escaped from burning house after burning house, as media and devices failed and technologies and file systems and file formats changed, and it is a

small miracle that even by regular diligence and effort it was saved.

If at any step along the way I had relied on software tools which were written with as much casual disregard for the user's data as Dropbox, that essay wouldn't have made it. Generations of engineers working on file-system code understood this, but the ones working for Dropbox either didn't, or were told not to bother putting any effort into preserving users' files.

My Old Files: An Island of Lost Toys

There are HyperCard stacks which I can't run. There are data files that used spreadsheet and graphics applications that are long-gone, like CricketGraph, Claris Resolve, and WingZ. There were applications with resource forks that probably broke long ago because there were issues where early versions of MacOS X did not preserve resource forks when copying files using the **cp** command-line tool, but they shipped it anyway. But I've been able to preserve most of it because in general the folks that work on file system code are diligent. Silent failures are not supposed to happen and it's been a design goal of most of those "burning houses" — dead computers and drives — to not lose your work without warning (although it *does* happen; I think I've lost folders on HFS volumes, that just vanished at some point, because HFS is not truly reliable).

And some of the stuff *is* of more interest to me, in 2018. For example, there's a HyperCard stack I made way back in the day. I'm not sure if I can run it, and I'm not sure if it is uncorrupted; it is probably missing its resource forks, because it is not in an **.hqx** or **.sit** archive file. But it was a database of all the books I owned back in 1989, and that's of interest to me. I had forgotten about a number of them. Knowing their titles and authors might help me track down more of the "books that wrote me" — works that were formative, but that I've partially forgotten. So I'm really glad I've managed to preserve this file, even if I can't use it quite as intended. (I have uploaded it to a site that claims to be able to run old stacks online; we'll see if that works; meanwhile, I *can* look inside with a plain text editor and see the contents of the database fields, although reading them that way is ugly.)

If Dropbox wants to be on the side of those of us trying to save their data from the burning houses, and not an accelerant for the fires, Dropbox needs some work. I would have been happy to fix the filename issues long before, if it had generated some kind of warning to tell me that it couldn't support those filenames. In fact I would have felt good about the tool, had it explained that it couldn't synchronize files with those names across different operating systems. It would have suggested to me that the developers had a deep concern for, and understanding of, file systems.

I am fortunate that I discovered the problem. If I wasn't quite computer-literate and not aware of the history of file systems, I very well might not have.

Do any of the other cross-platform cloud storage tools — Spider Oak, say —

do this better? I'm not really *happy* with Dropbox, but I've been using it because it lets me synchronize a small number of files (under 2.5GiB) for free, and aside from this problem, it's worked almost flawlessly. I've never been truly happy storing things in the cloud, but was willing to do it because it is so very convenient, to be able to work on a file on three different computers and have files silently updated between them. But this has shaken my confidence in the service.

Existence by David Brin

I haven't stopped reading *Existence.* It's just that this book is quite long. I'm about a third of the way through its thousand or so pages. The story is interesting although the writing rambles, cutting between multiple characters and narratives. It's a valid criticism to accuse Brin of using too many "infodumps" — bits where a character says something like "well, as you know, Dave" and then explains something the audience should know. These are just a commonplace in science fiction, and so I generally tolerate them pretty well, but sometimes they get to me.

Thursday

I neglected yesterday to mention something cool I got in the mail on Tuesday night. A few months ago, after setting up the WiFi router and cable modem in our new bedroom, I noticed that these units are both covered with bright LEDs, some in the blue spectrum. These are problems for a light sleeper like me who is very sensitive to light. I can sleep fine around one or two red power LEDs, but the WiFi router has *twelve* orange LEDs on the front. They aren't on all the time, but a number of them are. And the cable modem and Vonage telephone adapter both have a number of very bright blue LEDs on them, as well as some yellow and green LEDs on their Ethernet ports.

Bright Lights in the Bedroom

Between the sheer brightness and the blue light, the combination is very disruptive to my sleep; see this article.

I had an ad hoc solution involving hanging a towel in front of the router, but it is so bright that it lights up the towel. I'd consider putting everything into some sort of cabinet, but for best signal strength I want the WiFi router to be on a high place, out in the open. Months ago I found myself wondering if anyone made stickers that would darken the LEDs, and was considering what it would take to create them. But I discovered that someone has already done this.

So I ordered some. They come in a regular envelope like a letter. You basically get a sheet of little black stickers. I ordered the "original strength" stickers, which still allow you to see the LEDs but lower the brightness dramatically, but

you can get "blackout edition" stickers that block all the light, and white and silver versions.

They work. When I got them in place over all the LEDs, the difference is like day and night. The LEDs are *dramatically* dimmer. In a dark room, I can still look at the router and see which ports are on, but they don't light up the room. The LEDs inside the router are still shining out a bit through the case, where the case has perforations for cooling, and the stickers don't help with that, but that's just due to the design of the device.

They are a bit hard to use. The black material sticks to the clear plastic backing quite firmly. The backing material is partially cut, which means that when trying to peel them off, you may wind up pulling apart pieces of the backing with the stickers remaining firmly in place. The sticker material is thin and crumples easily. They are hard to position precisely. If you need to reposition one, it is easier to just peel off and throw away the old sticker and start with a new one. You get a number of round and square and rectangular shapes on the sheet, over a hundred stickers, but you might find, like I did, that none of the shapes are quite right for some of the LEDs you want to cover. I needed some long narrow shapes. They included a whole separate blank sheet that you can cut yourself. I was planning to cut that into some long strips, but one of my kids wandered off with it, peeled it off its backing, and stuck it to a window before I could use it. So instead of a couple of long strips to cover rows of lights, I had to make do with cutting up some of the small pre-cut shapes, which didn't give me the exact shapes that I wanted.

It might help if the stickers were not completely cut free from the surrounding material and remained connected in strips, so you could position a row of material more easily, press down the sticker right where you want it, then detach the material around it. I'm not sure if that would actually be easier, though. If I were designing the product, I'd be doing a little more experimenting. It might have helped to use tweezers with flat tips of the type one uses for handling postage stamps. I know I used to have some tweezers like that, but if I still have them, I have no idea where they are.

Finally, the stickers work best on flat surfaces, but the LEDs on the front of the router are not flush with the surface. The little clear plastic "light pipes" that stick through the plastic case are raised. A couple of these little raised lights are also buttons. The stickers can't adhere properly in these cases. The LEDs on the corners of the Ethernet sockets are tiny little rounded beads on the edge of a square hole. There's no good flat place to attach a sticker. So I just tried to sort of fold a slightly oversized sticker down over the raised part, but it isn't ideal. In fact only the front of the cable modem and Vonage adapter have a nice flat surface with blue LEDs shining through from underneath that represents the easy and ideal surface for attaching these stickers. If you've got LED lights shining through a flat surface, these should work very well. In other cases, they might do the job, but won't be smooth and pretty.

Really, the ideal solution is for manufacturers to avoid bright blue LEDs altogether in devices that might wind up in a bedroom. Even the orange lights are too blue. They should just stick with the "classic" red LEDs. And all household devices with LEDs should have have configurable brightness. The Netgear router does have the ability to turn off all the LEDs except the power light, and to turn off blinking with network traffic. This is buried in a web interface. The other two boxes don't have an option like this. And I don't actually want them to be off entirely, because I pretty frequently have to diagnose a network problem. My preference would be to have a simple 3-way switch on the front panel, with settings for full brightness, minimal brightness, and off. It could be marketed as an energy efficiency feature; LEDs, though more efficient than incandescent lights, use a surprising amount of current. This would also eliminate the problem of LEDs, dimmed on the front panel, still shining out brightly through the cooling vents. But until manufacturers have features like that, the little dimming stickers are a cheap fix that works, even if they are a bit of an uncertain hack.

About Last Night

Yesterday was baby Elanor's first birthday. We sang for her but we'll have a proper party this weekend. At least, we were planning to, although it sounds like the plans might need to be changed.

It was a rough night. When I got home, Grace updated me on Elanor's evaluation. She seems to be doing well in just about all areas. They are concerned she might have a mild hearing problem. (She passed the basic hearing tests that can be given to babies early on, and she reacts to sounds we make, but it's possible there is some deficit there. So she'll have a more comprehensive hearing test in March.)

Note added in editing, September 28, 2018: she's had more hearing tests recently, and her hearing is just fine!

Myst and _realMyst_

I went downstairs to put Myst back on the iPad. Joshua played it a couple of years back, and wanted to play it again. So I was just going to use iTunes to reinstall the app. But it's always something, in an endless parade of bullshit. Apparently a while back, Apple took the functionality for handling apps out of iTunes. You're supposed to just use the App Store app on the iOS device to download apps directly.

I bought Myst for iPad years ago — I think it was back in 2012. It's listed in my purchases, when I review my account information in iTunes. But in the App Store app, when I show purchased apps, it's not there. So I can't reinstall it. It seems to be just gone. I don't know why. There is a newer version, though, realMyst. But of course since it's a different app, it's a separate purchase.

I really don't know what is going on; it is most aggravating. Apple's web site

still shows Myst. But if you look at all the Cyan Worlds apps, it looks like Myst is no longer available for iPad. And when I search for it using the App Store app, I see only realMyst.

There's a setting I can use to show all available apps, or iPad-only apps, but changing it to show all available apps still doesn't shake loose the original Myst. Is it the case that managing apps through iTunes lets me install iPhone apps on my iPad, but the App Store app won't? Or is there some little setting or option I am missing?

It became another case of "how much time are you willing to waste?" I could have tried to get to the bottom of this, but there was my nine-year-old, eagerly asking me if he could play Myst again. And I still had a balance on my iTunes account, since I get gift cards as a reward for using my black Barclaycard credit card. So I just bought the damned realMyst game, and he spent a few hours last night happily playing it with his brothers and big sister.

Traktor

I also spent a little time messing with Traktor and my recently-rediscovered MIDI controller. It works like I remember it, but the audio quality I'm getting, while playing back tracks from Traktor, seems a little off, a little clipped and distorted. It's long been an annoyance to me that there is no clear "unity gain" position on the gain knobs. Maybe it's just clipping? It seems like if I turn it down, it's noticeably too quiet, but if I turn the tracks up just a bit, they are slightly distorted. Is there no "snap to unity gain" available in Traktor?

I also notice that when I move the mouse, the drawing areas where the decks are represented flickers white. That's some kind of a video bug, possibly something that arose with a system update, and I've certainly never seen it before.

When I next get time down there, I'll see if there is an update, although it has been quite a few years since I bought Traktor, so there may be nothing to update without paying for the whole application again, which I really don't want to do at present. I purchased it before the advent of the Mac App Store, so there's probably no upgrading, or updating, through the app store.

King Shing

Because it was getting late and no one felt up to cooking, we wound up getting takeout Chinese food from King Shing on Carpenter. They won't deliver to our house (their restaurant is about four miles away, up Carpenter), so we had to go get it. It was worth it. We got beef with broccoli, which was less salty and with a lighter sauce than one usually finds. We got crispy fried fish, which turned out to be some plain fried fish fillets with no sauce, dry and not really anything worth ordering again. We got some sesame balls, which were delicious, and orange chicken, which was very good, although a little sweet for my taste, with orange pulp in the sauce. We got some dumplings, which the kids ate

so fast that I didn't get to taste one. We asked them to keep their white rice, because last time it tasted stale, and made our own Instant Pot of brown rice with chicken broth.

Oh, and we got their spareribs.

My. God.

I'm usually not excited about ribs, but Grace and I finished every bone. The meat was well-smoked, chewy, and flavorful, almost like jerky. The sauce was transcendent. I can't really tell what is in it. Tamarind, maybe, some kind of citrus, some kind of smoky tea, right in the sauce? It was the best rib sauce I've ever tasted. I don't think it is all that Chinese-tasting. It might be more of a Thai flavor, or "pan-Asian." But who cares? The ribs were delicious. We will definitely get them again.

In Scarlet Town

After dinner, we noticed that Benjamin had a red spot on his cheek. At first I thought it must just be some kind of contact dermatitis. Maybe he took a nap with his face pressed against something that triggered an allergic reaction. But as it got later we noticed that it definitely looked like he had hives. So the first step was to wash his whole face gently. I then tried a hydrocortisone cream, and watched him for a while to see if that might help. It didn't help. So then I was basically worried that it might be some kind of a fast-moving staph infection, cellulitis or even the dreaded "flesh eating bacteria." But the red patch did not feel hot, and it did not really seem to be getting worse, and it wasn't really painful for him.

By bedtime it was clear that he had a fever, and his other cheek was looking red too. So we stayed up for a while to keep an eye on him, and had him sleep in the crib next to our bed. He drank a couple of glasses of water, and went off to sleep. Then we were Googling symptoms. It did not seem like chicken pox, measles, or mumps. Our best guess is that he has scarlet fever, related to a strep infection. He did have a fever (102 point something), which is not super-high for a child. Grace and I then had to decide if we were going to let him sleep and try to deal with it in the morning, or if he needed to be seen right away. The "right away" part, past midnight, would mean an ER visit, probably to St. Joe's. Something like this generally takes all night, and I'd be on the hook since Grace would want to stay home with Elanor, which would mean a lost night of sleep for me. After a lost night of sleep I wouldn't be safe to drive to work, so it would also mean a lost half-day or more of work, and I had some urgent things to do at the office today. It also might represent a setback for my health, since I'm still dealing with this cough.

Considering all the facts we knew, combined with what we hope is accurate parental intuition, we decided it was okay to let sleeping 4-year-olds lie, and just check on him periodically through the night. The red patches spread a bit more,

but his fever came down a bit, and seemed to sleep comfortably for most of the night. This morning he seemed almost chipper, but still with bright red cheeks. Grace called around to set up an appointment. His doctor's office didn't have any time slots available. As I was leaving for work this morning (I got out late, big surprise after such a broken night's sleep), Grace was planning to take him to an urgent care. If it is strep, he might need antibiotics. We're hesitant to feed him prescribed antibiotics without a clear diagnosis, so hopefully they will take a culture and determine just what is going on. I'm not terribly worried since he's a physically tough little kid, and his immune system already seemed to be getting on top of it, but we'll watch him closely and get a professional opinion, and get him antibiotics if he truly needs them.

Of course after all that Googling I could feel my scalp itching, my eyes burning, my throat swelling… but I'm hoping that this is just because I'm tired and suggestible. But it is true that strep is quite contagious. At my work I'm not handling food and I don't tend to actually rub elbows with my co-workers, or even get close enough to cough on them, so I don't think I'm too likely to share it. But the kids are very likely to share it with each other, or any other kids they come in contact with. We may have to quarantine them for a few days, which means canceling a number of things like dentist appointments, and Elanor's first birthday party, and probably a DSA meetup, and Mass.

It's Thursday and we're low on money. Fortunately I get paid on Thursday nights. February is going to be a little tricky, since we've recently paid a lot of unplanned expenses, including almost two thousand dollars in car repairs. But we will get through it. It's just a reminder that we really, really have to get ourselves out from under the recurring expense of the old mortgage, somehow, soon.

The weather is going crazy again; it's supposed to be fifty degrees again tomorrow. I'm calling it; Michigan no longer has winters, at least not anything resembling normal winters. That's gonna be a problem, and a growing one, for the rest of our lives, and our kids' lives.

I don't know what we're gonna podcast about this weekend, which probably means it won't be one of our more stellar shows. Maybe Grace will have some notes ready. I've been meaning to get in contact with two of the folks we met at the DSA meetup on Sunday, but haven't yet. And Grace hasn't had any time to write up notes.

Last night I went down to the basement about midnight to get the iPad. The lights were off. When I turned them on, Veronica was standing in the corner of my office looking frightened. I have no idea what she was doing down there. She claims she was drawing, and she had a drawing pad. She wasn't surfing the web on my computer or on the iPad; the browser histories showed only what I had been looking at recently. But why was she there? *Maybe* she just wanted a quiet place to hide out, but she has her own room. She didn't seem to have gone down there in search of any particular book, and that's mostly what is *in*

the basement — most of our books. She's not supposed to have the code to get into the basement. So maybe I need to change it. There's never a dull moment.

Fifth Disease

Well, I got word back from Grace. Benjamin does not seem to have strep. He seems to have "Fifth Disease," also known as "slapped-cheek disease," which I had never even heard of. I looked it up on Wikipedia, though, and his symptoms precisely match the ones described in the article. It's a virus, human parvovirus B19, so there's no use for antibiotics in treating it. And supposedly by the time a child develops the rash, he or she isn't contagious. So we might not need to cancel things. We'll talk it over.

The main symptom in adults is sore joints, which would go a long way towards explaining my joint pain last week. I thought it must be a virus. It might explain my itchiness today, too. I was worried it might be a recurrence of shingles, but that shouldn't be happening.

This is almost as weird as the time about two years ago when we all got hand, foot, and mouth disease. In that case we really did quarantine ourselves and I stayed home from work.

You've got to love parenting. (It's compulsory.)

Existence, **Continued**

I continue to soldier on, reading *Existence* as I get bits and pieces of time. I'm starting to get a bit fed up, though. The intercutting between parallel stories is an age-old technique and I admire it when it is used well, as in *The Lord of the Rings*, but some authors (I'm looking at you, Stephen Baxter, author of *Coalescent*) seem to use it to turn several stories that would themselves be a bit uninteresting into a full-length book, or in this case a doorstop, a gobstopper, something you could stun an ox with. At this point I have to admit that several of the storylines are getting to me, particularly Hacker Sander's storyline, which seems to be going nowhere fast.

Basically, *Existence* seems like it wants to be a non-fiction book more than it wants to be a novel. It reads as if Brin had a huge Wiki of futurist ideas and wanted to include them all, so he created some loose characters and gave them some loose storylines, assigning ideas to each character's storyline. This makes every storyline feel overstuffed and much, much longer and slower than it would be if the story's architecture had emerged from the characters, or even the plot. In fact the characters aren't that well-distinguished, and I find myself forgetting which character's story I'm currently reading. It doesn't help that he drops in bits that read like encyclopedia entries about futurist ideas. They are somewhat interesting in isolation, but as part of a novel, they only serve to slow things down further.

It seems to me like Brin didn't have any faith that his audience would understand any of these futurist ideas unless he, the Great Explainer, explained them. In detail. And so it feels insulting to me, personally. I'm honestly not sure I'll be able to finish it, unless the plot starts moving a *lot* faster and these storylines show some signs of knitting together.

I just took a peek at the review in the Los Angeles Review of Books, and it isn't promising:

> As the title implies, *Existence* strives to present an unusually comprehensive picture of the future fictional world in which its events take place, though some readers will no doubt find the presence of so many disparate elements a bit distracting, especially as some of the plot strands are left hanging in the second half of the book, which involves a couple of sudden leaps forward in time. Moreover, *Existence*, after moving slowly, even ploddingly, for more than 500 pages, then ends inconclusively, the powers that be in this future world having decided to delay definitive action until they can gather more data, a process that might take hundreds of years.

Dear G-d. Well, I'm not throwing in the towel yet, because the parts set in the far future sound like they might be interesting, but we'll see. I'm always inclined to grade idea-heavy science fiction on a curve and forgive a certain lack of literary merit if the ideas blow my mind, but my patience has limits. The time it takes me to finish *Existence* might be enough time to finish three shorter, and probably better, books.

Friday

Benjamin seems to be improving considerably. He still has a fever, but was chipper and active all day today. Grace made chicken soup last night, which made everyone feel quite a bit better. Grace told me a bit more about her experience with Benjamin at the urgent care clinic. Apparently they can now complete a screen for strep throat in only ten minutes. That's amazing.

"Queer Lodgings," Continued

We got to bed at a reasonable hour after I finished reading chapter 7 of *The Hobbit*, called "Queer Lodgings." In this chapter, the traveling party stays with Beorn. Gandalf knows that Beorn is a bit cranky and unlikely to be amused by the whole party appearing on his doorstep all at once, looking for a handout, so he very cleverly starts to spin out a story that allows the dwarves to enter a few at a time. It's a callback to the scene where the dwarves first show up at Bilbo's front door, and the second to arrive, Balin, says "I see they have begun to arrive already," which does nothing to soothe Bilbo's already-frayed nerves.

I have not read this chapter in quite some time, and was reminded again how strange it is. Beorn is a vegetarian, who seems to live on milk, honey, and bread.

He turns the milk into butter, cream, and cheese, and the honey into mead. But this vegetarian is in no way a pacifist; at one point he leads Bilbo and the dwarves to see the head of a goblin he has cut off, and the skin of a warg he has nailed to a tree. (This is a beloved children's classic, remember.) I like his pragmatic attitude of "trust, but verify" — he does his own scouting to verify that the story Gandalf and the dwarves tell, of killing the Great Goblin and escaping the underground tunnels, is true. Beorn is also very concerned about his ponies, and we are reminded that the dwarves aren't necessarily all that trustworthy, as they consider taking the ponies into Mirkwood, and Gandalf has to remind them that not only would Beorn make a fierce enemy, but he is, in bear form, watching over his animals even as they arrive at the edges of the forest.

The second movie gave a good sense of Beorn's home, but did not even attempt to show his animal servants handling the table service as described in the book. That is probably for the best, as I find it hard to imagine what combination of live action and computer animation would render a convincing, and not completely laughable, spectacle of barnyard animals serving meals. Instead they stuck to just showing Beorn's giant bees. In the movie, the bear Beorn transforms into is laughably huge; I doubt Tolkien would have approved of a seven-foot man turning into a bear the size of a school bus.

There are several concepts that seem to wind up used in different ways later, in *The Lord of the Rings.* The special, filling food Beorn makes for travelers sounds similar to *lembas.* But the second movie in the trilogy also takes some liberties. In *The Lord of the Rings* Glóin says the Beornings "are valiant men and keep open the High Pass and the Ford of Carrock," but in the movie Beorn is described as the last of his people. He's also shown wearing an iron manacle, as a memento of former slavery, something never mentioned in the book, and an interesting choice given that in the book, Beorn has animal servants.

The text of this chapter also mentions "hobgoblins" along with goblins and orcs. I think this is the only time in the books that he uses this term. Tolkien seems to have been a bit inconsistent in his use of this term — specifically, whether hobgoblins are smaller and weaker than goblins, or larger and nastier. In 2018 all I can think of are the laughably bad rubber monsters in the 1988 film *Hobgoblins.* Those hobgoblins seem to be rip-offs of the creatures from *Gremlins* (the 1984 movie). *Hobgoblins* got a new lease on life when it was adapted into an episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000.*

Candy Interlude

Sweet Tarts "mini gummy bites" and "whipped & tangy" candies are the bomb(s). The "softbites" are just mediocre giant gumdrops, though, and the "ropes" always burn my throat and nearly choke me with their filling, some sort of caustic death-paste. I probably shouldn't be eating any of these, though, because they are Nestlé products. This is what I mean when I tell people "deep down, I'm

really not a good person."

My Old Book Database!

I tried uploading my old book database HyperCard stack to the Internet Archive. As I mentioned, the file was not in an **.hqx** or **.sit** archive, which preserves old Mac resource forks, so I don't think it had its resource fork anymore. But I submitted it anyway. Take a look at the announcement post for the Internet Archive's celebration of 30 years of HyperCard, requesting submissions. The site for uploading a stack is here. I'll have to try it on some of my other stacks.

The URL of my old stack, actually usable via a web browser, is here. When you run it, it actually boots up an old Macintosh emulator, with a virtual floppy disk on the desktop. You can double-click the virtual floppy disk to see the HyperCard stack icon, and double-click the icon to launch it. And it works!

I'm not sure how they fixed it up; maybe they have a way of adding the minimum resource fork needed to get HyperCard to recognize and run it.

I noticed that there are some things that don't seem to work, at least in my browser. For example, when I try the "find" feature, and type "Vonnegut," the emulator somehow reads "Cobbegut." And there aren't any books by Cobbegut in my old library. But I'm just impressed that the stack works at all. There was some HyperTalk code in it; there are "sort" and "renumber" buttons. I probably started with a model stack and modified it. I'm a bit afraid to try those features. *[Note: looking at this again in 2022, using Firefox on Linux, the search for "Vonnegut" is working correctly now].*

Awww, it locked up after flipping through the stack for a while. Oh well.

It's got plenty of typos, but it's interesting to see what was in my library. I had forgotten about a lot of these books; many of them are gone and not missed, especially a lot of pulps that I don't remember ever reading. It is possible to open up the raw HyperCard stack with a text editor, and with some painstaking search-and-replace and cutting, I was able to get a raw text version of the data out.

My Library, Circa 1989

The majority of these books have succumbed to "churn" — I've sold or given them away, often when I was broke and needed to raise a little cash. But also, it seems, I've since re-acquired copies of most of the ones that I actually remember fondly. So there aren't a lot of books that I just consider hopelessly lost and gone forever, although there *are* some oddball titles that I think might be quite hard to find in 2018.

Here are some notes that occur to me as I look through the list of books:

- I have to confess that there were quite a few books that I don't think I ever read.

- I had nine or ten Asimov books. I don't have most of these any more because aside from the robot stories and the stories in *The Early Asimov*, I can't Asimov's writing anymore.

- I had seven of Robert Asprin's "Myth" books — *Myth Conceptions*, *Myth Directions*, etc. My kids might enjoy those now.

- I had five pulp novels by Marion Zimmer Bradley. At one point I was considering writing my junior thesis on her Darkover books, but as I recall, I gave up that plan because the books all just seemed so badly written. And in 2018? Let her victims and their stories be remembered, and let her and her work be forgotten.

- I had a number of Terry Carr's *Universe* anthologies. Those are kind of hard to find now, so I wish I had kept those. Ditto with some Silverberg-edited anthologies including some books from the *Alpha* and *New Dimensions* series, and also Damon Knight's *Orbit* series. I probably should have kept these, although no doubt some of these books went simply because they took up so much space.

- I had some of Wollheim's early collections including *The World's Best Science Fiction: First Series*, a reprint edition of the 1965 collection. Those are kind of hard to come by these days; I am gradually trying to acquire a full set.

- I had *The Adventures of Terra Tarkington* by Sharon Webb. These are episodes taken from Webb's "Bull Run" series of humorous science fiction stories, first published in *Asimov's*, so this is a "fixup," a novel built out of previously published stories. Terra Tarkington was a nurse in space. Back in the day I enjoyed this but to be honest, it probably isn't worth seeking out, unless you are deliberately looking for something light.

- I had four paperback story collections by Theodore Sturgeon, along with a couple of his novels. I bought most of these from a philosophy professor at the College of Wooster, Dr. James Haden, who had a book sale on campus. I don't have these copies anymore, but I do have the entire set of Sturgeon's collected stories in hardcover. I think I am missing several of his novels, though.

- I had a habit of picking up books that I thought an educated person probably should have in his or her library, especially if they were heavily discounted. For example I had John B. Watson's *Behaviorism*, which I probably picked up when I was taking psychology classes. I doubt that I ever read it. I also probably read little or nothing from Jean Piaget's *Six Psychological Studies*. To be honest, I don't remember.

- I was interested in Zen Buddhism, but at the time never did anything about it other than attempt solo meditation. I owned and read D. T. Suzuki's *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, with forward by Dr. C. G. Jung, *The Method of Zen* by Eugen Herrigel, and *The Three Pillars of*

Zen by Roshi Philip Kapleau. Years later I attended a "peace camp" with my son Isaac and got to know some of the people affiliated with the Ann Arbor Zen Temple, but I have not really kept up with them.

- I was also always interested in popular books on physics, so it's useful to know that at one point I owned *Perfect Symmetry: The Search for the Beginning of Time* by Heinz R. Pagels. I'll keep an eye out for a used copy and see if I recognize it.

- I had several rare books by Buckminster Fuller. I still have *Tetrascroll.* I think I have *Critical Path.* I don't think I still have my old copy of *I Seem to Be a Verb.* It looks like the world has not forgotten that book, though. There's an brief piece about it here.

- I was fascinated by John Lilly, and had (and read) *The Mind of the Dolphin: A Nonhuman Intelligence*, and *The Dyadic Cyclone: The Autobiography of a Couple.* In my smart-assed notes I wrote "A couple of *what*, that's what I wanna know." But in fact Lilly really fascinated me and informed my thinking on diet, exercise, and human relationships. There was some good, radical thinking in *The Dyadic Cyclone.* For example, he advocated a paleo diet decades before the current trend. (And, yes, he was also pretty crazy.)

- Laurence Manning's *The Man Who Awoke* remains one of my favorite science fiction novels — this one is from the end of the radium age. In fact it is number 100, the last one, in this amazing list. It was published originally in *Wonder Stories* magazine in 1933 and printed as a novel in 1975. It really should be in print! Here's someone's blog post about the book. I'm pretty sure I still have this copy, and I'm glad I've kept it, although it is getting pretty fragile.

Here are a few more books that jump out at me, as I skim through the list:

- *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* by Marie C. Stopes. Published by the Eugenics Publishing Co. (!), 1932. I think I may still have this one. Old marriage manuals are fascinating.

- *The Enchanted Type-writer* by John Kendrick Bangs. This is actually a fantasy story collection. I don't remember the stories. Are they good? It looks like Bangs was an amazingly prolific writer and all his work should be out of copyright by now, so I should look into it. It could be good audiobook material.

- *Doon* (a National Lampoon parody of Frank Herbert's *Dune*). I remember this was something along the lines of *Bored of the Rings*, but not as funny. Maybe I should track down a copy and see if I like it any more after almost thirty years.

- *Dragon's Egg* by Robert L. Forward. A bit dated now, this was hard science fiction at its best, back in the day. I wanted to shoot this stuff

straight into my veins.

- I was certainly opinionated in my comments. I described Jane Gaskell's *The Serpent* as "trash." The tag line was "the fantastic journey of Princess Cija, from her Tower prison to the continent beneath the sea." I probably picked this one up because the cover made it look like it might be naughty. The only naughtiness was on the part of the publisher who re-printed it with a lurid cover.

- Now I'm trying to remember what was up with *Meanwhile* by Max Handley. Was that any good, or just strange? Was "Max Handley" a pseudonym? This book looks like it has nearly been forgotten. Whether that's a shame, or not, I really can't say.

- I noted that Frank Herbert's *Destination: Void* was a "very odd book." I had a lot of trouble getting into the books in that series, which include *The Jesus Incident*, *The Lazarus Effect*, and *The Ascension Factor*. I'm sure I read them. In fact, I'm pretty sure I read at least one or two of them a second time. But I can remember pretty much nothing about them. Every once in a while I come across used copies and wonder if I should try again. It might be best to just remember Herbert for *Dune* and, perhaps, the first two sequels.

- *Grendel* by John Gardner. This book really stands out in my memory. It's the story of Beowulf, as told by the antagonist, who was really not a bad guy, just misunderstood. It reminds me: I need to read *The Last Ringbearer*, a re-imagining of *The Lord of the Rings* as told from Sauron's point of view.

- *We are All Legends*, *Tom O'Bedlam's Night Out*, and *The Shattered Goddess* by Darrell Schweitzer. I think these were signed copies I bought from the author at Disclave. The only one I remember well is *We are All Legends.* It was pretty good, probably worth tracking down. It's possible I never finished the other ones. Schweitzer worked as an editor on a number of science fiction and fantasy magazines including *Weird Tales.* I think he was also a frequent convention-goer at the time; if I recall correctly, he signed all his books "sorry, but autographs by Darrell Schweitzer are far too common to be worth anything," or some amusingly self-effacing words to that effect.

- *Another Roadside Attraction* by Tom Robbins. This book was formative, for its frankness and exuberance of language, but I'm a little afraid to read it again, for fear of finding out that it was never really very good.

- *Perry Rhodan #100: Desert of Death's Domain.* This had to be a gift from my old friend Art. I'm pretty sure I never read more than a few pages; I remember nothing about it. The history of the Perry Rhodan books is amazing, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the English versions are any good at all.

- *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* by John Milton. I had to read parts of *Paradise Lost* for a class, but I went ahead and bought the whole thing and read it, because Milton's language just fascinated me.

- *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* by Marshall McLuhan. I don't remember a lot about this one, except that it was probably even more visual and abstract than *The Medium is the Massage*, which I also owned.

- Patricia A. McKillip's "Riddle of Stars" trilogy. I read these way back in my tweens, I think. In retrospect I don't think they are all that good.

- *Orgone, Reich, and Eros* by W. Edward Mann. I have long been fascinated by Wilhelm Reich.

- *Why Are We in Vietnam?* by Norman Mailler. I wrote in my notes "A Vietnam novel that is not a Vietnam novel." It's actually a novel about a hunting trip. I also owned and read *The Naked and the Dead*, *The Armies of the Night*, and Mailler's biography of Marilyn Monroe.

- *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing. I still have never been able to get all the way through anything by Doris Lessing.

- A whopping *thirteen* books by Stanislaw Lem. I might have a few of these copies, but I don't think I have all them, in my library today.

- *Rocannon's World* by Ursula K. LeGuin. I have an annotation in the database that says simply "not very good." I haven't read that one in a long while, so it would be interesting to see if my opinion is different now.

- *The Soul of a New Machine* by Tracy Kidder. This book was important to me back in the day! It's one of the best books I've ever read about the culture of computer engineering and programming.

- *The Amityville Horror* by Jay Anson. I read this back in grade school. "Get out!"

- Piers Anthony, the first three of the "Incarnations of Immortality" series. Yeah, I can't really read Piers Anthony anymore.

- Rock Boulder, *Generic Literature*. I still have this book. It's just too weird to ever get rid of.

- Pierre Boulle, *Planet of the Apes*. I've read this several times. The original novel is, as I noted in the database, "surprisingly good."

- Ray Bradbury, a number of books including *Death is a Lonely Business*. The world would be a darker, grimmer place if Bradbury had never lived.

- *Jane Eyre*. Yeah, I read it.

- *Phoenix Without Ashes* by Edward Bryant and Harlan Ellison. I bought this at Disclave, then must have gotten rid of it, but I have a copy again. It's an adaptation of the TV show, and interesting because of Ellison's

involvement with the project. The TV show was actually disastrous, largely because the producers kept tinkering with Ellison's story.

- I had eight Philip K. Dick books back then including some of his less-good pulps like *The Crack in Space*.

- I wish I still had *Medea: Harlan's World* and the *Dangerous Visions* books. I'll get copies into my library again someday.

- Oh, God, so much Philip Jose Farmer.

- *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman* remains a favorite, along with the follow-up book, *What Do You Care What Other People Think?*

- William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*. Nope, still haven't read it.

- Oh, G-d. *Clan of the Cave Bear*, and the sequel. Soft-core cave-porn! Now long-gone. And no, I won't be getting replacement copies for my library.

- *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf. I had to read Woolf for a class. I was not expecting to enjoy it, but discovered that I really love Woolf's writing. I especially love this book. The use of stream-of-consciousness style in this novel is amazing, on a par with, or maybe even better than, Joyce's use of it in the "Penelope" chapter of *Ulysses*.

- I had lots of Vonnegut. In particular, I picked up *Galapagos* which had come out shortly before my freshman seminar on evolution and creationism. I think I probably wrote about it for the class, possibly in a class journal, although I don't know offhand if whatever I wrote back then has survived.

- *The Silmarillion*. My annotation reads "Early history of Middle-Earth. Dense as hammered shit." (August 1989's twenty one-year-old me would probably be encouraged to know that 2018 me has gotten better at reading difficult books, including this one, and is still a fan of Tolkien).

- *First Person, Peculiar* by T. L. Sherred. This was a story collection. Sherred was apparently a fairly obscure science fiction writer. I was always looking for new (to me) writers to try, but wasn't always very diligent about actually reading the battered old paperbacks I brought home from musty used bookstores and library book sales. This one is long gone.

- Allan Sherman, *The Rape of the A*P*E*. There was an annotation on the cover explaining that "APE" in the title stood for "American Puritan Ethic." My annotation says "Comedy, history of the sexual revolution." It was published by Playboy Press in 1975. T'was a different world. Allan Sherman is, yes, the same Allan Sherman who created comedy folks songs like "Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh." Unfortunately, Wikipedia tells me that he died shortly after this book was published, and while I'm pretty sure I read it, at least parts of it, I don't remember much about it.

- *Atlas Shrugged*. Yeah, I finished it. There went nine hundred pages of my life I'll never have back again (and that's just Galt's radio speech!)

- *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.* But of course. Indispensable for anyone in love with ideas.

- *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* by Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry. Back in the day I couldn't resist gruesome true-crime stories. Bugliosi, interestingly, has gone on to write a number of overtly political books including *The Betrayal of America: How the Supreme Court Undermined the Constitution and Chose Our President* (2001; I read this one back in the day), and *The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder*, which I haven't read.

There are many more I could talk about, but I'm skipping over all of the better-known fiction like Hemingway, and a number of textbooks. And I'm pretty sure this database left out a number of books that I had back then, some of which I still have. For example, my copy of *The Wakefield Mystery Plays* edited by Martial Rose, and my Norton Anthologies. So many books. (And where has all that reading gotten me? Well, right here.)

I wish I also had a database of my books from 1999, and maybe one from 2009 too. It would be interesting to see what I had acquired, and gotten rid of, in the decade after graduating from college. There must have been a lot more churn, as I "put away childish things." At some point the churn slowed down, and became a more consistent flow in one direction: *into* my library. Not that I'm not still getting rid of books. I think there will be a big exodus when I can fully unpack and shelve everything, and take a look at all the books that I *didn't* miss. I think I'm more serious about building the library into exactly the books that I want to read and re-read, and the books I want my kids to read.

And Speaking of Wooster

While looking up Professor James Haden, I went down a brief rabbit hole looking at *The Wooster Voice*, the student newspaper of the College of Wooster, and discovered that according to a column, the comprehensive unit fee for attending Wooster for a year is now $62,100.

Jesus Christ. It was about $12,000 in 1989. That was a lot. Adjusted for inflation, that is almost $24,000 today. But it isn't $62,000. That fee has risen four times faster than inflation can account for. I'm shaken. This is certainly one piece of information feeding into my future decisions about whether I should be supporting my *alma mater* with donations. Not the only piece of information, but certainly a significant one.

I know Wooster is far from the only school where tuition has increased dramatically. It's honestly an open question in my mind whether any of these institutions are worth the price. I believe the education I got there was quite good, and I believe everyone deserves a fantastic education, right up to the limit of their interests and ability, but it's just a betrayal of a person's future to send someone hundreds of thousands of dollars into debt to get that education. Schools really

need to take a hard look at what they are spending money on. I'm speaking as someone who taught an upper-level college class and earned a couple hundred dollars a week for doing so.

It's also a betrayal of a family's future to send a family hundreds of thousands of dollars into debt to buy a *home*, when most of that money represents profit rather than the actual building or renovation costs, and in civilized countries profiteering on housing is strictly limited by law, but that's a topic for another time.

Saturday

It's already after 9:00 p.m. and I am going to wind up a few things and post this.

Last night after work I went to Costco, where I had a relatively short shopping list. It was kind of expensive because I stocked up on nuts: almonds, walnuts, and cashews. The raw cashews we get are almost $20 for the plastic jug. I also picked up one of Costco's 7-pound chocolate cakes. Grace went to GFS for vegetables.

Grace had been out with the kids for hours, as they all had dental appointments. Even Elanor got her two little teeth examined. The details of everyone's teeth I'll save for another time. A couple of the kids have some small cavities. Pippin has the prettiest teeth, beautifully spaced and straight, and he hasn't lost any yet, although a couple are getting loose. Benjamin's teeth are a mess. There was some kind of medication he had as a baby, either the intravenous antibiotics or something else, I can't recall clearly now, that made his teeth come in with permanent stains. We're hoping his adult teeth come in looking better.

We had a pretty uneventful evening, except that we watched *Sylvio* again. This time Grace joined us. She enjoyed it although she did not laugh as hard as I hoped she might. We'll talk about it briefly on the podcast tomorrow.

Elanor's First Birthday Party

Elanor's first birthday was actually on the 24th, Wednesday, but it wasn't promising to try to have a party on a week night. So tonight was Elanor's birthday party. This morning we got up and ate toasted bagels and scrambled eggs. Of course Pippin and Benjamin demanded oatmeal with bananas, which I patiently made for them, and which they of course then refused to eat.

We spent most of the afternoon cleaning up the house. The bulb in the family room ceiling fan has burned out. I had, somewhere, a box of bulbs stashed away. We couldn't find it anywhere. The bathtub drain stopped working. I put a jug of hair clog remover down the drain, and it didn't really help. So when I ran up Carpenter to Kroger for ice cream (coconut milk vanilla, cashew milk chocolate, cashew milk salted caramel, cow's milk mint cookie, and cow's milk vanilla, so that folks had options even if they wanted to avoid cow's milk), dishwasher

detergent pods, and gas, I also brought home another jug of drain cleaner. That also didn't seem to do it, but after letting it sit for a while and using the plunger on it, it started draining well again. My fingers are burning a bit because of that damned bathtub drain that has to be pulled up by hand. So I had to reach into standing water full of drain cleaner. I rinsed my hands as well as I could, but the stuff is still caustic.

I never did find the light bulbs. Maybe I'll find them tomorrow.

Grace made chili with ground turkey, mashed potatoes, beans cooked separately which we could then add to the chili or not, per our preference, and mashed sweet potatoes. So that was dinner. Grace then went out to get a young woman and her two young children. Grace has offered to watch her kids while the woman delivers a new baby in February, so they got a chance to meet and talk.

We were expecting a couple of guests for the party but one person could not find our house and another just didn't show up. We did stream it on Facebook Live. I have not used Facebook Live before and it is a bit confusing. You can't easily configure whether you want the video to be oriented horizontally or vertically.

In my first test, I had the Facebook app running in portrait mode, then turned on streaming video, and on the screen it rotated the image and turned it into landscape mode. But when I saved the video and went back to the Facebook app, it displayed the video in portrait mode, on its side. So the fact that Facebook was showing the video oriented horizontally while I was shooting it did not mean the uploaded video was oriented horizontally. I don't know how anyone watching live saw it. After I couple more experiments I determined, I think, that the way you have the app rotated determines how the video will be handled. So we streamed video of Elanor's birthday party for a few minutes, and it seemed to come out the way I wanted, in landscape.

We have an awful lot of cake left. It's a seven-pound cake and there are at least five pounds left. We were counting on having some guests. Maybe some folks might come tomorrow and help us eat the cake and the leftover ice cream. The cashew milk ice cream is really very good, but tastes a little odd if you taste it immediately after eating cow's milk ice cream. This is one of the better non-dairy dessert options available these days. It wasn't that long ago that if you didn't want dairy, you could *maybe* get a dairy-free sorbet, and *maybe* some "Tofutti Cutie" ice cream sandwiches. Those are OK, but they are a little sad-tasting compared to the cashew milk salted caramel!

We were considering a new movie for tonight, *Please Stand By*. I saw the trailer and read an article about it on Slate, and Grace also read something about it. It seemed like promising. I noted that it is having only a very limited theatrical release, but it was slated to be available on iTunes starting yesterday. Tonight I looked for it in the iTunes store and discovered that it is only available to rent. I have never rented a movie on iTunes and honestly I don't really feel comfortable paying money to download a movie that will become unplayable 48 hours after I start watching it.

I guess technically any of the TV shows and movies on iTunes could become unplayable at some point; they will only play on iTunes, which only runs on certain machines and operating systems; the machine you play them on must be authorized for your account. Stuff could become unauthorized, especially as Apple seems to gradually be making it so you can't install things from iTunes onto iOS devices. This made me lose the ability to play Myst on my iPad, as I mentioned earlier, since iTunes wont' manage installing it directly on my iPad while the iPad is connected, and it doesn't show up in the iOS App Store right on the device. I'm still looking into whether there is some workaround to that.

I suspect Apple will soon be trying to do the same thing with TV shows and movies, and I won't be able to plug my iPad into my Mac and install a movie. Instead I'll have to download it from the cloud. And if for whatever reason that breaks or the show disappears or becomes unauthorized, there's no real recourse other than complaining.

Sharing your music library on the same local network still works, at least for now. But the new feature called "Home Sharing" requires the cloud.

Really, I want to use iTunes primarily to organize the files I've ripped from hundreds and hundreds of CDs, which now exist in Apple Lossless format files that require no authorization to play. I have some songs that are lossy files from the iTunes store, but not all that many. I have considered buying movies from the iTunes store, like *Sylvio*, that aren't available on DVD or Blu-Ray yet. *Sylvio* was not a rental. I guess the rationale for releasing a new movie as a rental only, first, is to encourage people to go see the movie in theaters. But *Please Stand By* isn't even playing in Michigan.

I mentioned in a previous post that taking the whole family out to see a movie in theaters is quite expensive (almost $75 to see *Paddington 2*). So I'm thinking hard about how we can see more movies, more regularly. I have a plan for a home theater in the basement, but that won't really be possible until we can spend some money to get shelving in there, and get the basement fully set up. It doesn't seem like renting movies from the iTunes store is a good answer. I think DVDs and Blu-Ray discs are still the best deal for us, although of course I really do prefer watching movies on the big screen, especially big movies. I don't think *Sylvio* suffered a lot from watching it on a television, but *Blade Runner 2049* just wouldn't have been the same. And every movie is just naturally more immersive on a big screen.

What Am I Doing with All This Writing?

This weekly blog post, for week 4 of 2018, is almost 20,000 words. That's a lot. Week 3 is about 12,000 words. Week 2 is about 7,000 words. Week 1 is also about 7,000 words. So far this year, that adds up to about 46,000 words. That's a lot of words to write in four weeks. It's almost a NaNoWriMo's worth. So what am I *doing*?

Honestly, I really don't know. It's an experiment. These posts are not as satisfying as the more structured posts, about particular books or movies, or autobiographical essays. There is something about the discipline of recording a weekly podcast, whether Grace and I are inspired with something to say, or have to find something to say in order to hit our self-imposed deadline, that feels like it has been useful to us. I'm trying to do something similar with writing: trying to write every day, and trying to say in my writing absolutely everything that I feel like saying, at least to the extent that time allows, without worrying whether the resulting text will be interesting to anyone.

Oh, and speaking of the podcast: I managed a quick test and it looks like I can use a Google Hangout for adding a guest. It looks like Google Hangout video and audio calls really do only use the left channel for audio, so I set up the Logic project to only record the left channel, and mix it centered in the control room mix that Grace and I hear in our headphones.

I was wondering whether we might use Facebook Live streaming to share the podcast audio "raw" recording session, for anyone who wants to listen, or maybe comment live. I don't think I can make that work, though. While it seems to be possible to use the iOS and Android versions of Facebook to do an audio-only stream, the web version of Facebook doesn't seem to offer you the option of doing it without video. Maybe they will fix that in the future.

Back to the writing. What am I writing? It's not a novel, it's not a short story, it's not really an essay. Truman Capote would probably have thought that this is not writing, but just typing. I think of this partly as raw material; I might be able to mine some of it for future use. Or maybe not. Even if I don't reuse this writing, I can always use the practice. Even if it is only typing practice.

Will I keep it up? Well, it's fair to say "not indefinitely." As I get older I'm more aware that the amount of work of any kind that I can complete feels limited. For another week? I don't even know that for sure. For now I'm going to put the laptop away and watch an episode of *Star Trek*. On DVD. And we'll save the eight bucks we might have spent in the iTunes store for another occasion.

Media 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 Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Chapter 7: "Queer Lodgings"
- *Existence* by David Brin
- *Sylvio* (2017 film)

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The Week Ending Saturday, January 27th, 2018