

with plenty of capacity, none of the breaker labels had any relation to reality. The two high-amperage breakers labeled for the upstairs and downstairs stoves must have been for electric stoves that no longer exist. So I had to just throw each breaker to try to figure out what was wired to what. Finally the breaker labeled “living room socket” did the trick. Meanwhile I had cut the power to the podcast studio, so I had to boot everything back up. It’s a reminder that I need to get the gear in the storage room/podcast studio onto a UPS. My main computer is already on a UPS and that worked flawlessly when I killed the power, which is good to know.

The Google Group audio went wonky on us five minutes into the recording, so I briefly left the room to go upstairs and see if someone was streaming video, or doing something else which might be eating up our network bandwidth. I could find no explanation for the problem other than one of Comcast’s random partial service outages, and the audio improved as soon as I left the room.

I had not bothered to stop the recorder, but Grace, thinking that I wasn’t recording while I ran around trying to fix things, said some things into the microphone that she didn’t actually want in the podcast. I didn’t realize this until after the podcast was produced and uploaded. So I had to quickly delete the MP3 file and YouTube video, edit out a couple of minutes of audio, throwing in some music to cover the little break, re-bounce the wave file, re-convert it to MP3 and video, re-upload both of those things, and update the RSS feed. So that cost another half-hour, and it was about 1:30 a.m. by the time it was all done, but I did manage to use the upload time to pay bills. While I was working on producing the podcast episode, the kids were in the basement watching more episodes of *Lego Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu*. I finally sent them to bed about 1:00 because I was getting too tired to concentrate over the background noise from the TV show.

I didn’t really get any dinner as such, but Grace did set aside two potato latkes for me to gobble down before getting into bed. I had to leave the kitchen a mess. I am hoping that Grace and the kids can get that taken care of today. I couldn’t do any more yesterday; I can’t spend four hours recording and producing the podcast *and* clean up the kitchen *and* get enough sleep to be ready to go to work on Monday.

We missed Mass.

I have read some mixed reviews of the Amazon series, *Electric Dreams*. It’s an anthology of adaptations of some of Philip K. Dick’s short stories. A web search had suggested that it was available on the iTunes store. But when I tried to purchase an episode, I discovered that it is really only available on the Canadian iTunes store. I can search the Canadian store, but apparently I’m not allowed to buy anything from it. I guess the only other way to watch is to sign up for Amazon Prime. I guess that means I’m not interested. I would buy a DVD set, if one was available; I’d give them my money in that way. But I’m not going to attach another leech (or “eel” as John Roderick calls them, in his *Roderick on*

the Line podcast conversations with Merlin Mann) to our bank account just to watch one or two episodes of a likely-mediocre TV show.

Monday

Elanor actually slept with the boys last night and she seemed to sleep quite well, so I got almost a full night's sleep, from about 1:45 to about 7:45. That's a better night's sleep than I've had in days. It's still a little less than I need, but I feel almost healthy and almost energetic today! This morning I continued reading a book I picked up on Memorial Day at the Barnes and Noble in Livonia, *Butcher Bird* by Richard Kadrey. I had a breakfast BLT and coffee at Harvest Moon Café.

When I got home, it looked like the igniter-sparking problem was gone, so I'm assuming the igniter was shorted out because our housemate spilled some liquid on the stove and a little bit of moisture, not even visible, got into the igniter. I can't even blame her — it's a terrible design and would never be found in a commercial kitchen. With the number of people we're trying to feed, we put a lot of wear and tear on our appliances and are honestly just barely getting by with consumer-grade devices.

***Butcher Bird* by Richard Kadrey**

Butcher Bird is an early novel in the genre of "urban fantasy." It was published in 2007. It reads like an early and influential piece of the history of the urban fantasy sub-genre. If I didn't know that it came after them, I would say that it must have influenced *Greywalker* by Kat Richardson, the first of the Nightside books by Simon R. Green, and Jim Butcher's first few Dresden Files novels. But in fact it appeared after those work, so perhaps the influence went the other way? Or perhaps they had common influences?

In any case, *Butcher Bird* is a bit rougher and more explicit than Richardson, Green, and Butcher. Not in matters of blood and guts, but in more graphic depictions of tattoos, piercings, and raw sexual encounters. It's definitely a product of the San Francisco Bay Area scene that also brought the world RE/Search Publications such as *Modern Primitives*. (In fact, the author even makes literal reference to "modern primitives," and one of the characters is called "Count Non." "NON" is the name used by musician Boyd Rice for some of his music. He's mentioned in the RE/Search publication *Industrial Culture Handbook*. I have his CD, *Easy Listening for Iron Youth*, although I wouldn't call it any good; it's something I bought decades ago out of curiosity. NON seems to be very sympathetic to history's mass murderers and fascists; for example, the album is dedicated like so:

This recording is respectfully dedicated to history's men of steel:
Gabriele D'Annunzio, Vlad the Impaler, Hassan Sabbah, Nero, Anton
Szandor LaVey, Roi D'Ys, Jack the Ripper, Marquis de Sade, the

hero of Green River, Ghengis Khan, Diocletian, Charles Manson & Ayahtolla Khomeini. May their spirit live forever.

In my twenties I was more likely to find that sort of thing more entertaining than I do now. I used to collect a lot of banned and controversial books and music, “just because” — because I was interested in understanding the whole range of human behavior represented in said books and music. I feel that I’ve pretty much done that, and don’t really need to keep doing it. And since having kids, I have gotten rid of my more explicitly “transgressive” art. (Will I get rid of *Butcher Bird* for that same reason? No, I’ll get rid of it because it isn’t worth re-reading.)

Anyway, all the references to more transgressive works aside, *Butcher Bird* is a pretty quick read, and fun. It’s not the best-structured book; a lot of things aren’t well set up in advance. For example, the characters learn that the gates of hell are only revealed during full moons (shades of *The Hobbit*), and complain loudly about the fact that they didn’t learn this before they got there. This seems to inadvertently “lampshade” the fact that it wasn’t well set up in the story, and the author apparently didn’t feel the need to go back and introduce at least a hint of this fact earlier in the text. But the dialogue is snappy, at least, and the writing flows well. The blurring of the magic and mundane worlds is a staple in urban fantasy, but it feels pretty fresh and lively here. The titular character, nicknamed “Butcher Bird” (and “Blind Shrike”) is not the main point-of-view character, and I find that interesting; I haven’t entirely figured out yet how that affects the overall book. I’m not going to claim that it has serious redeeming literary value, at least not until I finish it, but I’m also not going to apologize for enjoying a work of genre fiction, even one that doesn’t stand out for quality or depth.

Tuesday

Lunch yesterday was a Reuben sandwich (a Thousand Island dressing version) at Uptown Coney Island on Jackson Road. I had no fries, but two glasses of root beer. The sugar meant meant, unfortunately, that I was sleepy by 3:30 or so. This is why I don’t normally drink soda any more. But it was so hot, I really was craving a root beer.

I’m happy to report that I got a full night’s sleep last night. Elanor slept through most of the night in the boys’ room. It seems like maybe she’s sick of sleeping in mom and dad’s room and is looking for a change of pace. She woke up briefly before dawn and cried out a bit. I think she was getting cold. So I brought her back to our room and she fell pretty easily back to sleep, and was still snoring softly when I left this morning.

The Strange Case of the Boot on Top of the Mailbox

It was still a bit of a strange evening. Monday night is trash night. When I got home, the kids had not rolled the trash and recycling bins down to the street

yet. There was also a shoe, an adult-sized hiking boot or work boot, sitting on top of our mailbox for some reason.

The mystery of the shoe on top of the mailbox took most of the rest of the evening to puzzle out. Grace and I had to pretty much tag-team the kids in ones and twos and finally consult with our housemate. I told the kids, “I am curious about this, but honestly, I really don’t think the explanation I’m going to get is going to make it worth the effort.” Mostly, I told them, I did not really want this to become a topic of discussion on our local **nextdoor.com** group. I did not want to have to try to come up with some kind of sensible explanation for our neighbors, nor did I want to have to tell them something like “eh, my kids do random strange things, what are you gonna do?”

I’m still not sure I have it right, but the story somehow involved our housemate’s boyfriend, who somehow left his boots in the driveway (I think he was cleaning out his car, maybe, and forgot about them?) And then the kids didn’t want them to get lost, so two different kids decided to put one on top of Grace’s car, and somehow decided to put the other on top of the mailbox so he’d be sure to notice it the next time he drove into the driveway. Although he doesn’t get our mail, so it doesn’t seem all that likely to me that he’d be looking at our mailbox. And call me crazy, but I didn’t see the logic of separating the pair. I guess they thought that if they left shoes in two different places, he’d be more likely to spot one of them. Or something. It makes my head hurt to try to re-run the brain programs my kids come up with routinely. I think I would have left the pair by the front door, or on the little table in the entrance where we leave bags and purses and things like that, things we take with us when we leave or set down when we come in. Or — and here’s a crazy idea — given them to our housemate to give to him. But maybe that’s just me, and my solutions seem baffling to other people.

No one was up for cooking last night, at all. I was happy to see that Grace and the kids had gotten the kitchen mostly cleaned up, doing some of the cleanup I was not able to finish Sunday night, but no one wanted to heat up the kitchen or make more dishes. So Grace ordered a couple of items from Happy’s pizza, and then ran out to deliver some food to her friend. We got a meat pizza, a cheese pizza, a box of rib tips, and a box of fried fish nuggets. At my special request — I was craving a milkshake — while she was running her errand, Grace got a small frozen custard from Culver’s for me. When she got back and gave it to me, the kids immediately started begging me to share it with them. I want them to learn to share, and I want to set a good example, but despite all that, I told each of them “no.” It was, after all, a *small* custard, and there are a lot of them. And I eaten less of our pizza dinner, so that I would be able to eat my specially-requested mostly-melted (but still satisfying) quasi-milkshake.

I’m a bit torn about dietary things recently. I discovered this weekend, when I had a big bowl of instant udon noodles from Costco, that this kind of instant starch does wonders for my reflux. My stomach and esophagus (constantly burning) felt wonderful for the rest of the day after eating that. Potatoes also

help. But these starchy foods are allegedly nemeses in other ways, along with sugar. If I have starches or sugars, especially at lunchtime, I inevitably become immensely sleepy about 3:00 or 4:00. And I have been having symptoms or arthritis in my hands, something that seems to get worse in the summer. So it seems like if I want my heartburn to go away, I can eat starches like udon, and yogurt, and ice cream, but then the sugar aggravates inflammation, so I have to deal with the joint pain, blood sugar crashes, and dairy allergy that goes with them (although the Flonase seems to be helping a lot with the dairy reaction, eliminating it almost entirely).

Speaking of sugar, I stopped at Joe and Rosie Creamery this morning and got an almond milk mocha. (They don't actually make it all that sweet there, but really I should probably get the latte version that doesn't have sweetened chocolate syrup added.)

I have to get through one more work day and then I get a day off. I'm both looking forward to it, and dreading it. July 4th is on a Wednesday, which makes it a little orphan holiday in the middle of the week. It means we won't be driving up to Saginaw to see their fireworks display, because I just can't manage driving *back* and arriving home past 1:00 a.m. and then trying to get to work on time Thursday morning.

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

Last night's story was a few more chapters from *Down and Out in Paris and London*. We've reached chapter 14, almost the midpoint of the book. I think soon he is going to leave Paris and head for... wait for it... London. So the scenery is going to change.

Last night we read Orwell's descriptions of working in the *cafeterie* (meaning pantry or storeroom, not café or cafeteria) of the hotel. He describes a bank of five "service elevators." It's necessary to clarify these terms a little bit, I think. If I understand the story correctly, his main job in the *cafeterie* was taking care of room service. The "service elevators" were a bank of what I think we would now call "dumbwaiters," small lifts used for hoisting and lowering orders and food between floors. So in the *cafeterie* Orwell wasn't working a "front of house" restaurant job, nor was he truly working in the kitchens. He was doing a complex in-between job handling all the room service orders, which ranged from things he could assemble quickly himself, coffee and tea through toast and pastries, but also could include full meals from the kitchen. It is confusing because he also refers to himself as a *plongeur*, and describes some shifts in which he mostly washes dishes, but it seems for most of his shifts he was doing this more complex and challenging *cafeterie* service job.

It becomes a little more clear when he describes the caste system of the whole hotel and talks about how much each person was paid.

The Truth About Restaurant Work

One thing I'm trying to convey to the kids, by reading this to them, is that restaurant work is *difficult*. It's become commonplace, and a shibboleth, to attack restaurant workers as not *worth* a \$15-per-hour wage. And it is true that chain restaurant fast food work is often very segmented, assembly-line style, dumbed-down, standardized, and made rote, so as to require less skill, and also to try to ensure very little variation between franchise locations. I've done that kind of work, a little, and despite this "de-skilling," it was still challenging. But ignoring the fact that anyone working full time simply needs and deserves enough money to ensure that he or she has access to food and housing, I'm trying to convey a further point that Orwell makes — this kind of restaurant labor is *intellectually* challenging, not just physically challenging. I know that I find it challenging just to cook breakfast for my own family, making a few different things at once — for example, coffee, bacon, pancakes, oatmeal, and scrambled eggs. It is hard to make all this and have everything done at roughly the same time, without burning anything.

Scale this up for a busy restaurant and you'll get some slight sense of the challenges facing a short order cook, or Orwell working in the *cafeteria*. Orwell describes one of the other men working in the *cafeteria*, Mario, who has been doing this job for fourteen years and is a whiz at it. Mario gets paid twice what the other workers in the *cafeteria* are paid. He's worth it and management knows it. McDonald's might try to eliminate the need for Marios, but non-chain restaurants that have to be able to produce anything on their menus at a moment's notice can't be run with an assembly line of narrow jobs; they need people like Mario who can do lots of things as needed to meet the ebb and flow of demand.

Fortunately, with modern gas ovens and HVAC systems, restaurant work may not be quite as *sweaty* as it was in Orwell's day, but it is still challenging. I would not be embarrassed or ashamed in the slightest if one of my children managed to get work as a waiter, or a short-order cook, although I would really prefer that they have the opportunity to work at a place that isn't a chain restaurant, and makes local specialties not dictated by a corporate head office. It's good for people to learn to do lots of things as needed. I would be worried, though, that these jobs wouldn't pay them enough, and also worried that they would internalize the widespread view that this work isn't worth much. I don't think this work should be held in such low esteem. Reading Orwell (and Bourdain) can give one a little sense of what's really involved.

LabVIEW: the Pain Intensifies

I've continued to work with our intern on LabVIEW code. It turns out that the trying to use LabVIEW code with version control systems fails in even more unpredictable and arbitrary ways than I thought. After the fiasco that resulted from changing data type definitions, I got his changes e-mailed to me

and integrated it all on my machine, committed, and pushed up to GitHub. We reverted everything in his sandbox and did a pull. Then we made some changes to code on his machine, finishing some features. These changes did *not* include changes to data type definitions. And yet it still seemed as if LabVIEW “dirtied” more files than it needed to; it didn’t “dirty” *all* of them, but a few extras.

We got all the changes made on his computer committed and pushed, and then I pulled, and tried to run the code. And I found that apparently the paths to various installed LabVIEW device support VIs on our respective computers were encoded in the VI files themselves. LabVIEW wouldn’t open the VIs on my machine without forcing me to hunt for these VIs, to satisfy the broken dependencies. So when I tried to open an updated file that I’ve opened dozens of times on my computer, I had to manually look for **IVIDCPwr Close.vi** and other files, because on both our computers we use a support library for controlling voltmeters.

The kicker is that these libraries are in the same places on both our computers — the file paths *are the same*. So LabVIEW is using some method other than filename and file path to reference these VI files.

Then, even after I thought I was done, apparently a VI was broken, until I tracked down a VI with a similar name and replaced the broken VI with the slightly different version. Is LabVIEW using *fuzzy logic* or *soundex* matching or some such, to satisfy dependencies? I don’t know, but something broke, despite my attempt to find the exact file names. And some **.llb** files wouldn’t open even when LabVIEW was apparently looking for exactly that file, giving incomprehensible errors.

This is absolutely intolerable, and makes it a ridiculously painful exercise to share LabVIEW VIs using **git**. We’re doing it, but I think we will probably wind up resorting to e-mailing individual VIs back and forth and trying to commit as few changes as possible. Wow. What a mess, also known as “how to waste over an hour of time you were hoping to spend with your family on the evening before your day off, trying to load the code that was running perfectly on your computer, then running perfectly on your intern’s computer, but now apparently somehow can’t be re-loaded on your own computer again, not because of changes you deliberately made, but because of changes LabVIEW made behind your back.”

I made explicit code changes to *two* VI files. None of them were type definitions, or changes to the *interfaces* (the “terminals”) of these VI files. But LabVIEW dirtied *nine* of them, just by loading the project.

So much for “software ICs.” Seriously. This is more like a throwback to the days when all computers were custom-made and programs written for one giant vacuum-tube computer couldn’t be run on a different one because the hardware was different.

Have I ever told you about an amazing invention called “referring to files and

libraries by name,” rather than including hard-coded, machine- or user-specific full paths in code? There’s even something called “file paths” in which you configure the development environment, rather than the source files, to tell it where to find the files it needs. I hear it’s the future of software development!

And don’t get me started on the crashes. I thought it was mostly just me and my flakey computer, but our intern’s computer, which wasn’t flakey at all before installing the latest LabVIEW, is now crashing constantly.

But at least this software is proprietary and expensive!

I did not really bring it up, although I’ve been thinking about it, of course; but my co-workers have started to ask me about possible options for migrating this code base to a platform other than LabVIEW, to write code for this kind of instrument control and data collection in a saner and more sustainable way. I think it might be worth spending a week or two attempting to build a proof-of-concept in either Python or (deep sigh) C#, if only to figure out if either of these options have device support libraries available that are even slightly comparable to the ones we are using in LabVIEW. If I can find someone’s work to build on, even partially, it would go a long way towards convincing me to jump ship, because the tooling for *any* text-based language would make it *far* easier to collaborate.

At least I have a day off to think about other things. I really need one.

Wednesday

My day off!

Last night I read the kids several more chapters from *Down and Out in Paris and London*. They are really enjoying this book. We get a lot more details of the Parisian hotel where Orwell works, including his descriptions of the enormous contrasts between the aspects of the hotel the paying customers see (the immaculate dining room, for example) and the roach-infested filth of the kitchens. *Down and Out* really was a sort of early *Kitchen Confidential*. It is also peppered with funny stories, like the story of the waiter who had to go for several days without food and wound up praying to a portrait of a woman whom he thought was a saint. With the setup, I guessed how the story would turn out. But it was still bawdy and hilarious. There are many good reasons to read this book so many years after it was written.

Grace and I slept pretty late. I dragged myself out of bed to make coffee, English muffins, scrambled eggs, reheated salmon, and a big frying pan of Shishito peppers. First I had to clean the stove. Again. Then more cleanup. I was hoping we would finish the salmon, but we didn’t, so the rest went back into the refrigerator. I want to get that eaten tonight if I can. We’re going to do some very basic grilling on the back deck. I think we’re waiting until the day cools off a little bit. It’s in the nineties today, heat index over 100, incredibly humid. I’m

not going out there. We are planning to go see fireworks in Saline this evening, since we weren't willing to go see Saginaw's display on a work night.

***Butcher Bird* by Richard Kadrey, Concluded**

I took a little time after our late breakfast and finished reading *Butcher Bird*. It's a fun book but I don't think I'm going to keep it in my collection. It just doesn't build up much drama because pretty much anything can happen, and our protagonist can sprout arbitrary, hitherto unsuspected powers as needed. So the reader kind of rides through the scenery and action on rails without much real sense of menace or character development.

I noticed more references. The author refers to more of the RE/Search books including, I think, the machines of Survival Research Laboratories and the people described in *Freaks: We Who Are Not As Others* by Daniel P. Mannix, a book reprinted under the RE/Search imprint. I'm pretty sure the author was also explicitly referencing two creations of Michael Moorcock: the sword Stormbringer and his character Jerry Cornelius. The references are fun to notice, and I'm sure I missed some more, but they can't really substitute for good storytelling.

A few years ago, I tried and failed to enjoy the Jerry Cornelius novels. I mentioned them in my first post of 2015. I think I finished about one and a half of them. I was hoping to enjoy them and collect them all, but ultimately decided I just don't need them in my collection.

***Elric of Melniboné* by Michael Moorcock**

I think I forgot to mention that a month or two ago I started reading *Elric of Melniboné*. I'm pretty sure I tried to start reading the Elric books before, maybe back in my late teens, or maybe one summer in college. The details are hazy. I'm not quite sure why I couldn't get engaged in them. Reading the first one in 2018, I find much to like about it: it's very stylish, and the setup is interesting:

By magic potions and the chanting of runes, by rare herbs had her son been nurtured, his strength sustained artificially by every art known to the Sorcerer Kings of Melniboné. And he had lived — still lives — thanks to sorcery alone, for he is naturally lassitudinous and, without his drugs, would barely be able to raise his hand from his side through most of a normal day.

There's snappy dialogue, and beautiful action, and imaginative locations. So I like those things about it. But what I find to dislike most about it, at least so far, is the protagonist's casual attitude to killing and torture:

He was bored rather than disgusted by the rituals attendant upon the gathering of information and the discordant screams, the clash of the chains, the thin whisperings of Doctor Jest, all served to ruin the feeling of well-being he had retained even as he reached the chamber.

It's a bit of a conundrum; I tend to get turned off when I'm asked to identify and be sympathetic to a protagonist who seems like a psychopath. If the protagonist kills with no remorse or never struggles with the ethics of killing, at some point I get disgusted with the book, and sometimes, by association, disgusted with the author. And in those cases I'll generally stop reading.

I'm not far enough in the story to decide if Elric winds up with any redeeming moral qualities. Maybe he does. But right now he seems very indifferent towards watching prisoners get tortured to death, and it's hard to keep going. I might try to go along with him a little longer. I like to believe that there must be *some* of Moorcock's many novels I can enjoy. Since I love books for their look and feel, as well as their text, I'd like to find an edition that looks good and feels good, but all I've got at the moment is a creased and mildewed old mass-market paperback of the first Elric book.

Heroes and Antiheroes

It gets complicated sometimes when I am reading a story with a real "antihero." For example, Thomas Covenant in Stephen R. Donaldson's *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* trilogy (and the *Second Chronicles* and *Last Chronicles*) is an anti-heroic hero, who commits terrible acts of both commission and omission. But he's struggling with it, and redeems himself in the books. Severian in Gene Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* books including *The Urth of the New Sun* is a torturer, and was raised by torturers, and makes a living in the books as an executioner and torturer. He spends a lot of words in the book reciting the justifications for his behavior that he learned growing up in his guild, but ultimately his *actions* show his dissent. It's done with some subtlety; we do develop sympathy for him, but also come to understand that he is a strange, broken construct of a man whose actions sometimes seem to surprise no one more than himself.

Hmmm... I just read the Wikipedia article on Elric, the character, and it suggests that the character is portrayed with more moral depth as the stories continue, placing him in the "doomed hero" category. It also sounds like I should read the Finnish story of Kullervo to better understand Elric; Tolkien's translation is actually on my shelf, patiently waiting for me to read it. And it also sounds like there are some nice recent reprint editions of Moorcock's works.

Editions of the Elric Books

There are Gollancz editions: some are straight-up reprints of the separate original novels, which are quite short. But there are collections, too; there are volumes called *Elric of Melniboné and Other Stories*, *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*, *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress*, *Elric: The Revenge of the Rose*, and *Elric: Stormbringer!* They include the novels and stories in their in-universe chronology. Maybe I'll try the first collection.

There's also *Elric: The Fortress of the Pearl*, which Wikipedia doesn't mention,

and 3 novels comprising *Elric: The Moonbeam Roads*, which seems to exist both as an omnibus edition and as 3 separate volumes. And there are other recent reprints in the series of other Moorcock books like *The Dancers and the End of Time*. He was quite prolific, and I don't really have a good sense of his whole body of work. And I have no idea how much of that work has really held up, and how much now seems weak and dated like the Cornelius chronicles. So I'll have to try to figure all that out. If you've got advice on how to climb Mt. Moorcock, leave a comment.

Books on Order

Meanwhile, I've ordered some books. I've ordered some non-fiction by people who we'd like to have on the podcast. I'll mention those when we record the shows. I've also ordered *The Book of Jhereg*, by Stephen Brust, an omnibus edition of the first three of his Vlad Taltos novels. That series now contains 15 novels, and I feel doubtful that I will eat them like candy the way I ate Jim Butcher's Dresden Files novels, but who knows?

I also ordered a nice edition of *Frankenstein*, which I'm hoping to read to the kids.

And, finally, I ordered a collection of stories by Arthur Machen, from Centipede Press. Here's an article mentioning Machen and another small publisher, Tartarus Press; I have some of their books of William Hope Hodgson's work. I don't think I've read any Machen, so I'm looking forward to it.

From that article I learned that Edith Wharton wrote horror stories, and that H. G. Wells wrote supernatural stories, too. I had no idea. There so much to track down! And so much already waiting on the pile! It's a bit hard, because a lot of the stuff I most want to read is also the hardest to find; it is reprinted in limited, collectible editions, and often sold at collector prices. I like paying for well-constructed, beautiful books. But I don't like paying an enormous premium for "collectible" books. Call me crazy, but I think books should be read!

Arduino, Etc.

Sam asked me a few days ago if I could teach him about little development boards. I forget the exact context. I've tried this before, and not had great success; he gets frustrated quickly. So this time I basically just gave him a demo of the Arduino Uno: how to use the IDE, how to make the built-in LED flash, and how to get it to send messages to the virtual serial port. Then I showed him my blog post on SPI communication. We drew some diagrams and I explained how clocking, chip select, and the data lines work in SPI. Then, I showed him my code to implement a little virtual machine inspired the Human Resource Machine game, and we talked about FIFO and LIFO queues, with a little paper model I improvised.

I don't know if Sam is going to be our programmer and follow in my footsteps,

but this went better than the last time. I suggested that we get together again sometime and try implementing one of the algorithms his book on algorithms describes. So we'll see if he shows further interest. It gets tricky because I've found it very hard to just allow the kids to actually have free access to laptops and other hardware. Their wide range of ages make it very difficult. They've destroyed so much hardware. But I keep trying to find a way.

Our July 4th Dinner

Grace and our houseguest did some heavy lifting to get a nice summer dinner together. Joshua and our houseguest's boyfriend started the grill, but didn't really get the coals going properly, so I had to get everything restarted and some of the hamburger patties were pretty hopeless. That slowed things down as it took most of an hour before the coals were really ready to grill. We were using pre-made frozen hamburger patties. The idea is that you keep them frozen, then throw them on the grill, and get a nice browning on the outside while the inside remains more on the rare side. It was so hot out that the patties sitting out in the bag were partly thawed, though, and tended to release a lot of liquid when we threw them on the grill. But they were OK. I ate one of the way-too-well-done patties too, with some mayo, and I have to say that I sort of liked it because it was very heavy on the grilled meat flavor. I'm used to actually shaping the patties myself and putting them over the coals, so I didn't know quite how to cope with the thin frozen patties, but most of them were edible and some were even pretty tasty.

Grace made a cake for our housemate's boyfriend's birthday, a cake from scratch with caramel icing. It was really good. She also made an enormous pot of greens. She chopped up the leftover Shisito peppers from our late breakfast and they added a nice mild heat to the greens.

We were planning to go to see fireworks at Saline, but by the time we had the table completely cleared and the food put away, it was almost 10 p.m., the start time. I expressed a disinterest in going, noting that we still had a lot of kitchen cleanup to do and I had work in the morning. Joshua was tearful, though, and two of the younger kids were also upset at the prospect of missing fireworks, so Grace took the four youngest kids while Veronica, Sam, and I continued to do some cleanup. When I got partway through the cleanup, Veronica jumped in at my request and finished the hand washing.

I started watching the first episode of *The Orville*, which I had downloaded from the iTunes store, with Veronica and Sam. However, just about two minutes into it, Grace came back. The fireworks display had been really short, and traffic had been very heavy, so they missed all of it. *The Orville* is a show for older kids or adults, so I put it away and we watched the second episode of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, season 1, called "Rising Malevolence." It was pretty good. I find myself more than a little bit impressed with this animated series, which we never watched back when it was new.

And now to bed, my day off done!

Thursday

I got up at 7:30. It was a pretty good night, with only a couple of interruptions.

Our friends, another large homeschooling family, are down at the University of Michigan Medical Center today for appointments. So they dropped off a number of kids about 7:30 this morning. Grace was up before me; she must have gotten a call or text. I don't think we were expecting them this early. Or, at least, if we were, Grace thought it best not to tell me.

Thirteen or Fourteen Kids

I'm not even sure how many kids. Five? Six? So we have thirteen or fourteen kids running around the house this morning, getting in pillow fights, and arguing. I think we were encouraging them not to go play outside until at least 9:00 a.m., for the sake of our neighbors, but at least a couple were walking outside when I left about 8:30.

I had some coffee with coconut milk at home, and a couple of bagels. Maybe on my lunch break I'll go pick up more lunch food at Meijer on Jackson Road.

I was going to read more of *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* this morning, but that didn't really work out.

Friday

A long night last night, and long day today. Dinner did not work out well last night, so we wound up eating quite late, and eating mainly an assortment of leftovers. By the time we got dinner cleaned up it was too late to do anything else, and several kids were melting down. Pippin confessed to scratching my car, although this is confusing because Merry already confessed. But this morning on my way out I discovered recent scratches on our housemate's boyfriend's car, which is infuriating, so maybe he was confessing to that. I don't really know yet, or what we're going to do about it, as I believe this is the fourth round of car-scratching.

This morning I was quite tired and quite stressed. Grace was going to make me a coffee while I got ready, but she fell back asleep. I got out quite late, and was quite late to work. I've been burning the introvert candle at both ends, since I've been spending much of my work day with our intern and it's a lot of social interaction. It's hard to also do my best debugging work, so I've been staying late after our intern leaves at 4:30, and getting some of the trickier LabVIEW code problems solved in that quiet time when everyone, or almost everyone, has left.

Shattered, Crazyed, Broken, Burned, and Spoiled

Tonight dinner was salmon from Costco, with a broccoli salad, and for dessert we had a box of their macarons (the meringue-like multi-colored, multi-flavored French cookies, not the chewy shredded-coconut cookies, which are also delicious, nor the president of France). When I arrived home Joshua dropped a very nice bottle of wine in the driveway while unloading the car, a bottle of the 2016 Chateau Grand Traverse Late Harvest Riesling. I'm shattered. (See what I did there?) While getting dinner on the table Sam dropped our green plastic water pitcher and it cracked. I also found out that for some reason the kids were pouring water on the driveway with a mason jar and dropped it. So that's three things broken today. After we pre-heated the oven to 400 degrees and opened it up to put in the salmon, I found that the kids had apparently left a glass container of leftover hamburgers in there. So four cooked hamburger patties were ruined. They had also left a little remaining salmon from last week sitting out on the counter for a number of hours, and so it's garbage now.

If anyone needs some food wasted or breakable objects destroyed, call me up. You can hire my kids. Hell, they'll probably do it for free.

Old House Update

Grace went up to Saginaw late this afternoon and got back just as we were finishing up dinner. She had a chance to inspect the repair work in progress at the old house, so we've got some information on what's been going on. Some of the contractors have apparently been doing some pretty poor work and leaving a huge mess as they do it.

I did get a little bit of reading done today, but just a little. I am continuing on with *Elric of Melniboné*. Things picked up a bit after the main character drowned. (Of course, he didn't actually drown.) When reading Moorcock I'm constantly reminded of other fantasy novels and movies, in part because Moorcock used some old, old tropes in creating his stories, but also in large part because the Elric stories were so very influential on so much other work.

Saturday

***Lego Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu* Season 1, Episode 8: "Once Bitten, Twice Shy" and *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* Season 1, Episode 3: "Shadow of Malevolence"**

After dinner last night, and clean-up, there was enough time to take the kids down into the basement, and suffer through another episode of *Lego Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu* Season 1, called "Once Bitten, Twice Shy." The kids love these but I just don't get much enjoyment from them. Then we watched episode 3 of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* season 1, called "Shadow of Malevolence". The show remains pretty dark; characters are killed in space battles, just plain blown up and killed in battle, and it isn't sugar-coated. In episode 3, a whole

medical ship filled with injured clones is under threat from General Grievous, who orders his battle droids to open fire on the non-combatant transport ships evacuating the wounded. That's pretty intense for a children's show, but it remains impressive.

I was quite tired last night but because it cooled down so nicely — into the fifties — after so many hot days, I wanted to stay up late with the sliding door into our bedroom wide open, and enjoy the cool air. Meanwhile the rest of the United States (and the world) seems to be setting all-time heat records. I'm also following the news about the cave rescue in Thailand. It's a perfect news story: dramatic, with constant updates, and also the perfect kind of story to induce anxiety, because there is absolutely nothing that most of us can do to influence anything happening there.

Elon Musk is apparently offering assistance and considering technological solutions to extracting the kids, like giant inflatable hoses. I am no longer enough of a techno-utopian to have the slightest faith that something like this will work. Such a solution might be physically possible, but I just don't think it can be done practically. And as for the option of training the boys to dive — a number of them apparently don't even know how to swim.

***Elric of Melniboné* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

This morning I finished Book 2 of *Elric of Melniboné* (the middle part of the 1972 novel). Elric and his army have ridden the Ship Which Sails Over Land and Sea to track down the traitorous Yrkoon. This is a terrific passage. Elric has brought a contingent of blind soldiers who are immune to the effects of a magic mirror which steals memories, although when Yrkoon orders the mirror smashed, many die, as it releases a flood containing thousands of years of stolen memories.

I have a feeling I've seen this part of the story somewhere before, maybe in animated form, but I can't recall for sure. Maybe I'm remembering another story that was inspired by the memory-stealing mirror.

Car Scratch Fever

I received a piece of intelligence which explains the recent scratches on our housemate's boyfriend's car. Our kids didn't do it. I'll spare you the details. Three of our kids are still apparently responsible for 3 different car-scratching incidents, which is maddening. My reflux had been doing a bit better up until Thursday morning when I discovered the latest round of scratches. I've absolutely got to get my stress level down as it is harming me physically. The fighting and destructive behavior of my own kids has gotten so old.

For breakfast I made bacon and scrambled eggs and the kids warmed up 3 small loaves of banana bread that our neighbor in Saginaw, Joyce, made for us, and gave to Grace yesterday. Grace drove to The Mother Loaf Breads in Milan and

managed to snag the last loaf of sourdough they had available (the last time we tried to go there, they were already closed, and then last weekend they had some kind of equipment failure and so weren't baking bread). Their sourdough is good but nothing tastes right to me today. I keep asking Grace "does this taste sour? Does this taste metallic?" Because everything I eat tastes like acid.

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.

- *Butcher Bird* by Richard Kadrey
- *Elric of Melniboné* by Michael Moorcock
- *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell
- *Lego Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu* Season 1, Episode 8: "Once Bitten, Twice Shy"
- *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* Season 1, Episode 3: "Shadow of Malevolence"

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, July 7th, 2018

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