

2018 Week 33: The Week Ending Saturday, August 18th



Figure 1: Word Cloud

Sunday

Yesterday afternoon some friends dropped by with deliveries from our friend Joy, including an old but perfectly functional dehumidifier! So I did not have to buy another one at the moment. I've got this vintage unit set up in the basement, along with three fans running to circulate the air, and the humidity is coming down. I'm relieved. I've been concerned about the fate of all the books and photographs and documents and electronics and guitars and other moisture-sensitive things we have down there, and I've been gritting my teeth and trying to convince myself to go ahead and buy a new high-capacity (and expensive) dehumidifier rather than a cheap one. It looks like I can put that off for at least the immediate future and avoid piling yet more expenses on the credit cards. Our old dehumidifier never worked again after the power outage, so the basement hasn't had a working dehumidifier for a couple of weeks now. I think we're getting the humidity down in time to avoid any major mold or mildew development, but I'll have to open some sealed boxes and make some spot checks. I know some metal items like the terminals on 9V batteries will actually start to rust after only a short time in excessively humid air.

The Affogato

After we got some things put away, Grace and I left to run some errands. First we went to Milan, to The Mother Loaf Breads. As it was getting to be pretty late in the day, we were not sure if they would have any bread left, but they did have a few loaves. We bought two loaves of their very delicious rye. I think it is one of the best rye breads I've ever tasted. We also went to the Milan Coffee Works next door. There, we bought a bag of roasted Ethiopian light roast, and had it ground for use in our press pot. Grace had an Earl Grey tea, and I tried an affogato, made with brown butter ice cream. My. God. Words can barely express what that combination did to my brain and taste buds. The bitter espresso and sweet and salty ice cream together with the considerable hit of milkfat, not to mention the caffeine... wow. The heavens opened up. A beam of light came down to touch my pineal gland. Every hair on my body stood on end. A choir of angels sang in my ears. This is why God gave us coffee — as a light when all other lights have gone out.

Grace's New Phone

Grace's old phone would still not charge a battery or display a sensible battery level, and we had tried two replacement batteries, leaving the phone shut off and charging overnight multiple times. It didn't seem to help, so we had to conclude it was probably the phone that was the problem. So we went to the T-Mobile store and somewhat unwillingly bought her a new LG K30 phone. It seemed like a reasonable choice because it was on sale, reviews were reasonably good, and I've been pretty satisfied with my LG K7. I discovered after we had bought it and gotten her contacts transferred over that this model doesn't even have a user-replaceable battery at all. Vendors like LG are just following Apple's lead, but I have this ongoing anger that these devices are now considered disposable.

After we finished up at the T-Mobile store we took the battery I bought last weekend back to the Batteries Plus Bulbs store at Packard and Platt. I was somewhat surprised that they took it back and gave me a refund without an argument. I've come to expect arguments when I try to return things. The second replacement battery I got for \$10 from a seller on Newegg. I paid \$10 shipping to get it in a couple of days and it doesn't seem like it would be worthwhile for me to spend another \$10 to ship it back to the seller and try to get the \$10 purchase price back. So that one will probably just go in a box to go eventually to the drop-off station at Recycle Ann Arbor.

We drove around for a while looking to see if any of the small bookstores in downtown Ypsilanti were open after 6:00 on a Saturday, but sadly, none were. So we went back home. We putzed around for a while. I soaked my rear end in the tub. We eventually got some sandwiches and salad together for dinner, including some cold reuben-like sandwiches with corned beef and sauerkraut on the Mother Loaf rye. Then I read Grace the introduction and part of Chapter 1 and part of chapter 5 from Mark Bray's book *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*.

We bought this book last year to discuss on the podcast, but had not actually read it yet. I haven't finished much of it but I'm going to highlight some parts to quote and discuss on the show tonight. So now I'm trying to put together notes and articles to discuss. I'm hoping that we can get the show finished and uploaded before midnight. But usually what happens, when we get to record a bit earlier than usual, is we just make a longer show!

Monday

Recording the Pottscast

There's not all that much to tell about the rest of Sunday. I spent some time trying to outline the things I wanted to talk about in the podcast. That included getting Grace to expand on some ideas we had talked about earlier while out running errands. It turned out to be a long list, incorporating a number of articles and Mark Bray's book. We recorded for about two and a half hours. The edit took much longer than usual, because I incorporated a number of audio clips. Parts of the show then involved mixing and not just editing, since I mixed in music clips to play in the background underneath our conversation rather than cutting in and out of the conversation. I think that segment worked out pretty well, but I would value feedback. Anyway, the production took hours, and it was about 12:30 by the time I was done. And I couldn't leave well enough alone: I had to fix an error in last week's show in which I accidentally swapped the panning on Grace's voice and my voice, so that she was on the left and I was on the right. So I quietly replaced the MP3 file and the YouTube video. That video had twenty plays. It's not a lot, but we *are* getting clicks. I don't have a great way to track MP3 file downloads but I know we have some listeners.

I meant to include a segment at the end where we mentioned that since we had been producing shows weekly (with a few missed shows, but only a few) for a year, we felt like it was time to check in with listeners and ask them what they would like to hear in year two. Maybe we will lead with that next time.

Pottscast Plans

We've also been feeling like at some point we want to set up a Patreon and/or actually put a few dollars into promoting the show. I don't know if we are there yet. The show is a lot of work, but we make it because we want to make it.

I'm concerned that if we start collecting money, even a small amount of money, it will start to seem like something we have to do because folks have paid us to do it, rather than something we want to do. And I'm also afraid that asking for money will feel to us like a referendum on whether people actually like the show — that if we only get a handful of patrons, that will be demoralizing. So I'm really not sure how best to proceed. I think we may want to put off any big changes a little longer, at least until we have resolved the situation with the old house and our finances have settled into a more sustainable pattern.

We're also going to have a new baby around Christmas, and I suspect that's going to slap us pretty hard. Neither Grace nor I are still young by any stretch of the imagination. We may wind up just plain overloaded, and unable to get shows out for a while. I'm also considering whether we might be able to improve our shows by taking some deliberate, planned sabbaticals from the show, during which we might be able to do some writing, or at least outlining. And then there's my idea to improve the show by producing episodes more often. I keep thinking that would really help us get our ideas out without always feeling rushed. But I'm feeling exhausted just thinking about it.

The Beef Stew Experiment

Anyway, when I finally shut everything down and came upstairs, I was very pleased to find that Grace had successfully herded the kids into giving us a lot of help getting dinner made and cleaning up the kitchen. With their help, she had actually done a kind of experimental dinner-making: she made three different pots of beef stew using the same ingredient. One was in the Instant Pot, one was in an "air core" pot from our friend Joy, and one was in a dutch oven. Having tasted all three, I think the one from the Instant Pot was actually the best, because the pressure had helped break down the relatively chewy cut of meat that we used, and rendered more flavor into the broth. Probably with longer cooking times the other methods might have been as flavorful, but this might have produced mushy carrots and potatoes, so to get the same effect it might be necessary to use a more complicated procedure where we slow-cook the meat for much longer, then added the herbs and vegetables and cook it a little bit longer.

In any case, the stew was delicious and I can't tell you what a relief it was to come upstairs after hours of bleary-eyed editing in front of the computer to a kitchen and family room and bedroom that weren't a terrible mess. It's so demoralizing to work on the podcast for hours and then realize that my work on that means that since I couldn't do work on the kitchen, we're starting out the week with a trashed kitchen. The kids were quite helpful this week, several times, and I'm very grateful. We'll have to do something to show our appreciation that they really seem to be getting into the *habit* of doing chores when asked. We don't have much spare money but as soon as we do, they need to get a special allowance or a treat or something like that.

This morning I had breakfast at Harvest Moon Café: coffee and their breakfast BLT sandwich. They were quick this morning. I sat at the bar and caught up on my Twitter feed. A number of journalists who were present at the alt-right rallies this weekend reported in. The consensus seems to be that the actual number of white supremacists rallying was much smaller than last year. And I heard no reports of violent confrontations.

Antifa

That seems encouraging. A CNN reporter complained that an Antifa counter-protester didn't want to be filmed, and knocked down his camera yelling, about how he was a snitch, or something like that. This is apparently supposed to illustrate that Antifa are bad, perhaps just as bad as fascists, because there is violence and damage to property on both sides.

It's funny how I've heard this argument from both the liberal side and the conservative side in chorus after the 2016 election and protests at 45's inauguration.

Don't buy it. Several other journalists in the crowd shoulder-to-shoulder with Antifa report that they had no trouble with them at all, but Antifa members did ask that they not be filmed directly, because white supremacist groups will work hard to identify them, doxx them, and threaten them and their families. That seems reasonable to me. I'm not a big fan of doxxing.

I am sympathetic with Antifa, but as I mentioned in the podcast, I don't find it realistic to imagine that this fifty-year-old father of seven will be showing up masked at alt-right rallies to stand up to fascists. Especially, I don't think I'm going to be traveling to counter-protest. But if they show up in my town (whatever that is, since I don't actually live in a town now — I guess it would be downtown Ypsilanti?) Well, we'll see. I may be middle-aged, but I'm not dead. I can imagine showing up with a recorder, not a camera, as a sort of citizen-journalist.

Tuesday

Sichuan Pepper

Last night wasn't too exciting. There was one especially bright spot. Grace brought me a serving of hot-and-sour soup from Park Asia restaurant in Saginaw. It has been ages since I had their hot-and-sour soup. They use real Sichuan pepper. ("Sichuan" is the anglicization that Wikipedia uses; you also often see "Szechwan" or "Szechuan.") It's a regional cuisine of China. Just as there really is not one monolithic Italian cuisine, or Indian cuisine, there is not one Chinese cuisine. According to Wikipedia, Sichuan pepper is not actually a pepper in either of the ways that Americans usually think of the word "pepper." It is not a chili pepper (genus *Capsicum*), or a peppercorn (genus *Piper*). It is of the genus *Zanthoxylum* which makes it related to citrus fruits. How does it taste?

Sichuan pepper's unique aroma and flavour is not hot or pungent like black, white, or chili peppers. Instead, it has slight lemony overtones and creates a tingly numbness in the mouth (caused by its 3% of hydroxy alpha sanshool) that sets the stage for hot spices.

If you've eaten it, you will recognize this description of "tingly numbness." It's also been described as "buzzing," or like electric current. If you don't think you've ever tasted it, I'm not that surprised; import of Sichuan peppercorns

was banned for many years because of a concern about a disease called citrus canker. It isn't banned any more, but in my experience most American Chinese restaurants don't use it. Park Asia, to their credit, does, and it's why their hot-and-sour soup is my favorite, why I always used to order it when we went there, and why I was very happy to taste it again.

After eating my soup — and no, I did not share it — I replaced the XML file entries for last week's podcast (the one with El-Sayed's campaign rally audio). That was the podcast I felt the need to replace because of a minor production glitch: I had swapped two tracks in the Logic project, and as a result, Grace was panned slightly left and I was panned slightly right. This is the opposite of all our other shows and what can I say — I like consistency.

For dinner, we had roasted chicken with carrots and Brussels sprouts. This didn't come out great. It was supposed to be a simple meal to assemble, but after 45 minutes the Brussels sprouts were roasted nicely, the carrots were still quite hard, and the chicken was undercooked (examining the drumsticks, we decided it was safe to eat, but just not very appealing, because it wasn't browned much and hadn't developed much flavor). So we put half of it back in the oven. After more cooking the chicken was much better, and the carrots were done, but the Brussels sprouts were burned up. So if we try this combination again we'll have to do it differently. Maybe we could put the chicken legs and carrots in the Instant Pot for ten or fifteen minutes and then roast everything together?

We didn't have a story last night.

Water Softener Update

This morning the water from the softener still doesn't seem improved at all. I went downstairs and poked around some more. I took a look at the brine tank, because it did not appear that the softener had been using up any of the salt recently. I poked at the salt in the bottom of the tank with a baseball bat to see if there was a "salt bridge," or a crust of salt on top of a void, but no, it really seemed like the bottom of the tank was full of salt. But it also seemed to be dry. It's supposed to have water in the bottom, the brine, that the softener sucks out when it runs a cycle.

I started an extra regeneration cycle and the softener started making noise, and I could feel the hose attached to the brine tank vibrating, but it didn't appear to be pumping any water into the brine tank.

So, I have run out of ideas; I don't know how to fix this thing. I don't even have a user manual, much less a service manual. I asked Grace to call the company that installed it and see if they would come out and have a look. I am guessing that some motor or pump in the softener is burned out and this is still fallout from the power outage and possible voltage spikes. I am nervously hoping this does not require an expensive repair. My stress over money is ramping up and I feel that something has to give very soon.

Old House News

Grace was at the old house in Saginaw yesterday and got an HVAC guy out to look at the air conditioners. It seems that the main house air conditioning unit was not coming on because a switch on the furnace in the basement had been left off. The AC unit is apparently wired not to run if the furnace blower isn't running. We both feel dumb for wasting his time, but that's not a switch we ever had reason to use while we lived there. The folks doing duct cleaning must have left it off. Fortunately he only charged us a small fee for the house call. Grace also got to have an in-depth conversation with him about options to replace the furnaces. Replacing the main furnace would run about \$2,800. Replacing both furnaces including removing the old dead equipment from the crawlspace would run about \$6,500.

We've been asking if it would be possible to get rid of the second furnace under the family room, an awkward and hard-to-access horizontal unit in the unheated crawlspace. He told us that this would require getting into the range of furnaces made for commercial buildings, not houses, and would be much more expensive — ten to fifteen thousand dollars or so. He also told us that a single furnace in a house like this would probably cost a lot more to run, because they are designed to operate in much “tighter” buildings. So making such a furnace work efficiently in this house would require major upgrades to things like windows. I've got to believe that there *are* ways to improve the energy efficiency of the house, but it seems like upgrading to a single furnace is not one of them. If we were planning to keep the house and continue to live there, which we're not, and I could actually put money into it, which I can't, I'd try to consult with some of the green building specialists from the Ann Arbor area and get some more ideas on what could be done.

***Elric: Stormbringer!* by Michael Moorcock, Concluded**

This morning I finished the hot pink Elric book, *Elric: Stormbringer!*, in which Elric's timeline is wound up. The events of this book couldn't be any more apocalyptic; we literally see the end of the world and its remaking. It is remarkable in its grim beauty. Karin L. Kross on Tor's web site notes:

The audacity of *Stormbringer* lies not in the plotting, which is straightforward plot-coupon collection, nor in the writing, nor simply in the final death of its anti-hero. This is a book where the “victory” means the complete annihilation of the protagonist and everything he holds dear.

It's not really *quite* that simple, as Elric realizes at the end that his soul will not truly be at rest, because he will always be part of that “Eternal Champion” thing, or as I've been calling it, “multiverse nonsense.”

The ending wasn't a surprise, as I had peeked. There's a lot going on here, but it's interesting to me to see how Moorcock gradually takes all the pieces off the

gameboard until it's only Elric, Stormbringer, and the Horn of Fate, in a place where everything else has dissolved into chaos. It strikes me again how influential this book has been. Many other contemporary fantasy writers, especially urban fantasy writers, often will use this technique, putting one or two characters in an abstract place, perhaps a realm of thought, perhaps the realm of faerie, or perhaps inside a dream, where they can have a critical confrontation, free of the distractions of the city or the battlefield. There's a good example in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* where Harry meets the deceased Dumbledore in an abstracted King's Cross train station.

I'm really left with only one important question. In the midst of the battles at the end of the world, where the hell does Elric keep finding cool new outfits to wear, as Moorcock describes them in scene after scene?

Kross also writes about the difficulties in reading the Elric material in the "in-universe" chronological order:

This is actually the first time I've read these stories in Elric's chronological order since I first picked up those Ace paperbacks in my teens. Mind you, I've reread all the Elric stories more recently than that — I read each of the Del Rey *Chronicles of the Last Emperor of Melniboné* volumes cover-to-cover as they were published starting in 2008. But that meant reading the stories in the original publication order. Now that I've gone back through them all in the Elric order, I do wonder if publication order might not be the better way after all.

Because when you read the stories in Elric order, you've had time to lose patience with the Elric-by-numbers stories like those in *The Sleeping Sorceress*. As well, certain ideas that might otherwise be tantalizingly numinous in *Stormbringer* have already been visited. For instance, that Elric is but one manifestation of the archetype known as the Eternal Champion, doomed to fight for Law or for Chaos in battle after battle across the Multiverse, has been spelled out in *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* and *The Sleeping Sorceress*. The Cosmic Balance for which Elric unknowingly fights, and of which he sees a vision as he dies, is spoken of much in *The Revenge of the Rose* and other novels. I wouldn't go so far as to call *Stormbringer* anticlimactic — but some of the strangeness seems, well, less strange than it might have been, in light of the seven books that have gone before. But it is, nevertheless, still a solidly-crafted fantasy adventure, and the bleakness of it is still capable of taking your breath away.

I also recommend reading *Stormbringer* in publication order, right after the first six stories ("The Dreaming City" through "To Rescue Tanelorn..."), because its strangeness and darkness and simplicity really is startling when read after those first six stories; it seems like a premature end to Elric, and thus shocking; but of course Moorcock would write much more Elric; in fact, by word count, he wrote

far more Elric material after Elric's death than before! And he may not be done with Elric.

Shifting Gears: Reading Elric in Publication Order

I've set aside *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* for the moment and I'm going to continue reading the Elric stories in publication order. I'm following the table of contents of *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*, which presents stories in publication order, but reading them from the Gollancz volumes. (Note: the short story title is "To Rescue Tanelorn..." but the collection title does not include the ellipsis.)

The publication order presented in *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn* disagrees with Wikipedia slightly. The book's table of contents places "External Champion" before "To Rescue Tanelorn..." It probably doesn't matter, but I'm just noting it in passing, as I've been trying to come up with the definitive reading order. And honestly, short of getting my hands on copies of the earliest pulp magazines and paperbacks, it's hard to fully reproduce the experience of reading the original *versions* of these stories, in the order they originally appeared in print. This is because Moorcock has heavily revised, separated, and recombined the stories over the years. Moorcock's constant revisions must make it *quite* difficult for any Moorcock completist who might want to read every version of every story! But this is a puzzle for biographers and bibliographers to solve, not me.

My Revised Reading List

- The novella "The Eternal Champion"
 - This is in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*
- I've already read "To Rescue Tanelorn..." and "The Last Enchantment"
- The novella "The Greater Conqueror"
 - This is in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*
- I've already read the story "Master of Chaos," also known as "Earl Aubec" and "The Dream of Earl Aubec"
 - This story is not to be confused with "Earl Aubec of Malador," a short proposal outlining four novels. It was written later, but appears right after "The Greater Conqueror" in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*, as the events in these unwritten novels would have happened after the events of "Master of Chaos."
- "Phase 1"
 - Confusingly, "Phase 1" originally appeared in a *very* limited edition, an edition of only three copies(!), *The Very Best of Michael Moorcock*. This collection became the basis for *The Best of Michael Moorcock*, but "Phase 1" and a number of other stories were excluded. This means that a book entitled *The Best of Michael Moorcock* contains

fewer stories than a book entitled *The Very Best of Michael Moorcock*, which (one might think) would more exclusive rather than more. This is giving me a headache. In any case, it is not in any of the Gollancz volumes I have, so I can't read it for now, but it was reprinted in the 2008 Del Rey collection *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*.

- “The Singing Citadel” and “The Jade Man’s Eyes”
 - These are in the Gollancz volumes *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*, more or less; the Del Rey volume has the original text of “The Jade Man’s Eyes,” while the Gollancz volume has the revised text that was incorporated into the fix-up novel *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*.
- “The Stone Thing: A Tale of Strange Parts”
 - This is in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*
- “Elric at the End of Time”
 - This is not in any of the Gollancz Elric volumes; it’s in *Tales from the End of Time* (Gollancz, 2014), presumably because it goes along with Multiverse material that doesn’t really put Elric front-and-center.
- “The Black Blade’s Song” also known as “The White Wolf’s Song” and “Black Blade’s Summoning”
 - This story doesn’t seem to be in any of the Gollancz volumes, although it is in *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*.
- “Crimson Eyes”
 - This is a story from *The Metatemporal Detective*, which features the old character Zenith the Albino, who was Moorcock’s inspiration for Elric, but who appears in this story as “Count Ulrich von Bek.” So... is this an Elric story? I’m gonna go with “no,” at least not one that I need to read now. It’s not in any of my Gollancz volumes, although it is in *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*.
- “Sir Milk-and-Blood”
 - This is another Zenith story from *The Metatemporal Detective*, and it’s in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*. I’m going to take this to mean that Moorcock thought that this Zenith story was better than the others, and assume I won’t be missing out on anything breathtaking if I don’t read the other two this year.
- “The Roaming Forest”
 - This is in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*.

That accounts for everything included in the Del Rey collection *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*. So, my plan is to read the works I actually have on hand for now.

If I feel the need to go back and read “Phase 1,” “Elric at the End of Time,” “The Black Blade’s Song,” and “Crimson Eyes,” I’ll consider picking up a copy of *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*.

Next in publication order come the following stories (but I’ve already read a number of them):

- The novel *The Sleeping Sorceress*
- The prequel novel *Elric of Melniboné*
- The novel *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*
- “Duke Elric,” the graphic novel script
- “The Flaneur des Arcades de l’Opera”
- *The Fortress of the Pearl*
- *Elric: the Making of a Sorcerer* (the script of the graphic novel, not the graphic novel itself)
- “A Portrait in Ivory”
- “Earl Aubec of Malador”
- *The Revenge of the Rose*
- “Black Petals”

Next in line are the *Moonbeam Roads* novels:

- *The Dreamthief’s Daughter* also known as *The Daughter of Dreams*
- *The Skrayling Tree* also known as *Destiny’s Brother*
- *The White Wolf’s Son* also known as *Son of the Wolf* (seriously? what was the point of... *sigh*, never mind...)

So, my plan is to read the works I actually have on hand for now. If I feel the need to go back and read “Phase 1,” “Elric at the End of Time,” “The Black Blade’s Song,” and “Crimson Eyes,” I’ll consider picking up a copy of *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*.

Wednesday

After work I ran to Costco and picked up blueberries, bananas, nectarines, asparagus, coconut oil, Polish sausages, and a chicken pot pie. The pot pie takes ninety minutes to bake so we ate dinner quite late. 10:30 is late even for us.

Grace and I got a chance to have a conversation about what to do with the kids who have been asking to go to school. Our conclusion is that with so many things in flux and chaos, and I’m not even going to enumerate them all here, we are just not ready to make big changes in our schedule and our commitments and our expenses. It would mean canceling their current extra-curricular activities

including their piano lessons — because their teacher’s schedule is booked quite full, and she is able to teach them now only because she sees them *during* the regular school day; most of her other students want after-school time slots.

We’ll reconsider in the winter.

“The Eternal Champion” by Michael Moorcock

Last night I took a little time to read the Elric novella “The Eternal Champion,” as found in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*.

Actually, it’s not *quite* an Elric story, but I’ll get to that in a moment.

In publication order, Moorcock had come to the end of Elric’s timeline, and killed him, and destroyed the world in the process. He could have just gone back and recounted another story from Elric’s life, but he didn’t. Instead we have this story introducing a character called “John Daker,” who is also referred to as “Erekosë.” This story is told as a first-person narrative, and the narrator seems to be a being who might have previously been Elric, or at least a being with experiences like Elric; he is not quite human, just as Elric is not quite human. He is also supposedly immortal, or becomes immortal at the end of this novella, at least in the sense that he won’t die of old age. But he doesn’t remember being Elric as we know him; he remembers a slightly different existence, with a different sword: not Stormbringer, but a dangerous sword, unnamed in the novella, that can kill people by poisoning them, even if they receive only the slightest wound from the blade.

John Daker, or Erekosë, seems to either be a character from the world’s past, or from its future; Moorcock takes pains to keep this ambiguous. The novella itself is more suggestive than definitive, and I have to admit that at this point I really don’t understand the exact relationship between the narrator, Daker, and Erekosë. Daker seems to have been a person from our world and our time, who has partly changed into, or been merged with, Erekosë, and who remembers, at least vaguely, having been the Eternal Champion before. In fact the narrator suggests that time may be cyclic, and so his existence in the distant past may really be the same as his existence in the distant future. That was a big idea for 1962, and it’s still intriguing today, especially as the older concepts of the big bang and the big crunch are accompanied by newer and even more fascinating ideas like conformal cyclic cosmology.

I don’t want to go down a Roger Penrose rabbit hole right now; I have a copy of *Cycles of Time*, but I haven’t even finished *The Road to Reality*. (Has anyone?) But ignoring for now the questions of cosmology, this is a *very* engaging Elric story, even if it isn’t quite an Elric story! The deadpan narration is very effective, and the moral ambiguity surrounding the hero’s actions is fascinating. It’s also about, as much as these stories are ever about real things from our own world, the cold war, and nuclear weapons, and the moral repercussions of the “overkill” they represent. And it’s about loyalty: loyalty to an ideal or calling, as opposed

to an individual. In fact, I'd go so far as to say this is one of the best pieces of philosophical short fiction I've ever read.

The Eternal Revision

Moorcock later expanded it into *The Eternal Champion*, the novel. This novel was not included in the Gollancz Elric books, perhaps because the more-developed narrator character is *less* Elric-like, but is included in a different Gollancz book, also called *The Eternal Champion*, which also contains the novels *Phoenix in Obsidian* (also known as *The Silver Warriors*) and *The Dragon in the Sword*. *Phoenix in Obsidian* picks up the story of the still-living narrator of the earlier novel, 100 years later. I might track down the Gollancz omnibus *The Eternal Champion*. If the novels in it are as good as the novella, they are impressive novels, but in my experience, novelizations of great short works are rarely as great as the short work.

As seems to be the general rule when talking about Moorcock, the names of things get even more confusing, because in addition to “The Eternal Champion,” the novella, and *The Eternal Champion*, the novel, and several omnibus volumes called *The Eternal Champion*, there is also a set of *fourteen* omnibus volumes that together comprise the set called The Tale of the Eternal Champion. Many of these have been revised from the originals. They contain stories featuring a number of characters — Hawkmoon, Corum, Von Bek, Earl Aubec, Count Brass, etc. — who are in some sense all aspects of one character. “Eternal Champion” also seems to be an umbrella term that Moorcock applied to many of his novels, sometimes retroactively. And often, it seems, he revised old stories to be part of the Eternal Champion cycle.

I find this interesting, even though I don't really feel like reading stories of generic, interchangeable characters *ought* to be interesting. I really don't want to get dragged down the rabbit hole of trying to track all of Moorcock's stories' mergers and acquisitions; this version of *The Eternal Champion* omnibus volume is not to be confused with at least two other omnibus editions, which include different content. And there have been, of course, many revisions over the years, as Moorcock merged stories into novels and renamed them and swapped characters in and out like pieces on a game board. Aaaargh! These are also stories of *Erekosë*, more or less, although *The Dragon in the Sword* seems to have become a Von Bek novel at some point, published under the same title. (Aaaargh, again!)

Unstable Narratives

One apparently has to be very cautious when reading a Moorcock novel. There's a good chance the protagonist might mutate into a different person while you are still reading it, or the title might change, or it might fracture into a series of short stories, or the supporting characters might pack up their tents and leave for another novel. Like unstable isotopes, Moorcock novels seem to have short

half-lives. Maybe all his stories and novels should get a time and date stamp, down to the millisecond. Maybe when you want to read one, you should sign in to GitHub and pull the latest revision. We could even enable live-patching.

Moorcock, it seems to me, has done several different strange things in his writing career that are, I think, really aspects of a singular iconoclasm. He's attacked and, if not shattered, at least fractured, the idea of a *singular story*, the idea that a story or even a novel comprises, or should comprise, a single completed work, frozen in amber. He's done this by constantly revising his old material, and re-organizing it. He's also cracked the idea of a *singular character*, the idea that a character has a set of more-or-less predictable characteristics, motivations, Freudian drives, habits, idioms, etc., and broken the confines of the story, allowing his characters to move between stories and inhabit each other's narratives.

Collaborating with the Reader

In a sense, I think Moorcock did this organically, in the process of exposing his audience to the sausage-making process. He has freely discussed the mechanics of writing novels in just a few days. In doing so he's broken the taboo against denigrating one's own works, essentially admitting that they are hack work. He's not the only author to do that, of course. Philip K. Dick comes to mind. And like some of Philip K. Dick's works, the rushed work can sometimes manage to transcend the circumstances of its creation.

In showing us how we, too could write an Elric story, or a Corum story, or a whomever-story, Moorcock in a sense betrayed his "priesthood." He knocked the writer off his or her pedestal, and invited us to participate in this act of creation, just as he knocked his own stories and novels off *their* pedestals and let us see him swapping out the parts, as if he were rewiring a circuit. He doesn't even try to hide it, like the Wizard of Oz; there's no threatening specter bellowing "pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!"

This *ethos* I really like, even if I haven't been able to apply it. I've never actually managed to participate in NaNoWriMo. I don't have any doubts that I can physically write that much in a month. I don't have any doubts that, given an outline, I could generate scenes and dialogue. The problem is that working full time, with six kids, it's impossible to imagine that I could get in more than, say, an hour a day of writing time. And even to get that, I'd have to take a time-out from other projects I hold dear at the moment, like our weekly podcast and this journal project.

Another Water Softener Update

Today the company that installed our water softener is supposed to send someone out, so I'm on tenterhooks waiting to find out what kind of expense we're going to be looking at. I just made payments on two credit cards, paying as much as I could, which wasn't a lot. We're trying to make it through until my next

paycheck. I'm still hoping we will soon receive another payment from Liberty Mutual, so that we can pay the rest of the bill for the plaster and paint work.

An update: Grace tells me that the water softener guy has come and gone, and that the only real issue was that the softener lost its settings and had to be reprogrammed due to the long power outage. It has a backup battery, but with an outage of over 48 hours, apparently the battery didn't keep the settings. I have since replaced it, but I'm not clear on whether any battery would manage to keep the settings during a long outage. And this is truly stupid. EEPROM chips are incredibly cheap. Microcontrollers with EEPROM in them are incredibly cheap. We should have an instruction sheet showing us how to reprogram the thing if this happens again. Do newer models have this problem?

Nice Things About LabVIEW

I'm going to do something I haven't done before in this journal: I'm going to say unambiguously nice things about LabVIEW. A while back, I had to find a way to integrate a pre-existing **.DLL**, supplied with a C header file, into a LabVIEW project. This turned out to be surprisingly easy. LabVIEW in fact has a wizard that will read the header file and create VIs to call each function.

I had to figure out how to take the stub VI it generated, which mapped return codes into errors, and flesh that out, but it wasn't hard.

And I'm impressed that the VIs it created just worked. The C APIs involve parameters going into and coming out of the function calls; LabVIEW seems to have properly wrapped them all up with sane default behavior, and handled APIs that receive a string buffer and fill it seamlessly.

I'm actually impressed, and I am not often impressed by programming tools these days.

All I Want to Be is El Chapo

I enjoy listening to the Chapo Trap House podcast and I admire their leftist takes on current events and media, and especially their critiques of centrist Democrats and modern liberalism. But my initial impressions of this book are not all that positive.

***The Chapo Guide to Revolution: A Manifesto Against Logic, Facts, and Reason* by Chapo Trap House**

Last night I received a publisher's uncorrected proof of *The Chapo Guide to Revolution*. This is not the final book: some images are missing. But it's enough to give me a sense of the finished product. The official publication date is still a week in the future.

It reminds me of the first few books published by John Hodgman, starting with *The Areas of My Expertise*. These are essentially books about nothing, containing

brief funny definitions and short parody essays on a variety of topics, and lists. It seems to have become a sort of cynical strategy for writers trying to establish a writing career: “first, publish a book about nothing, then, over time, figure out what you want to write about.”

I think a book that transcribed some of the best takes, reviews, and arguments from the podcast could have been much more fun.

However, this is just my first impression, having only skimmed the book. I’ll probably have more to say about it later, and hopefully what I have to say will be more positive.

Evening

It’s about 9:50 p.m. and the kids are watching *Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu* episodes via my little ThinkPad. The episodes are from the iTunes store, purchased with iTunes gift cards sent from my credit card company as rewards for racking up a lot of debt. From the laptop via HDMI the video is going to our old and damaged flat-panel TV. From the TV, the analog audio output is going into my old Yamaha STAGEPAS 300 PA system. The combination isn’t great but it works fine and everyone can hear, even when they are making noise.

The reason the kids are watching TV shows this evening is because they did an unusually good job at helping us get ready for the evening. They made dinner — sausage gravy, biscuits, and steamed asparagus. Never mind that the sausage gravy was accidentally made with corn starch instead of flour, the biscuits were under-baked, and the asparagus was mushy. They did some work for the family, and also helped clean up. And it’s not yet 10:00! So they get to watch some TV.

Although now they are debating about what to watch since apparently Veronica watched some episodes without her brothers and now they are angry that she is ahead of them.

I don’t ever need to see any more *Ninjago* episodes, but I’m glad the kids enjoy them.

I got some help with some technical issues with the Amulet GUI today, from the developers. And so with some advice and a lot of tedious trial-and-error coding and testing, it’s getting better.

Our summer intern’s last day is Friday. That went fast! I know he got to work on a number of different things including software testing. I hope he had a good time and it was useful experience.

Thursday

The water softener is doing its job again. The kids are complaining that the water doesn’t taste good now, when in fact it tastes much better than it has been tasting for the last few weeks. They seem to get used to however it tastes

very quickly, and dislike any change. But it is clearer, not greenish-yellow any longer, and tastes much more neutral, with the slight saltiness that always seems to be there when the softener is working well. However, the softener display is still incomprehensible; it still has an LED lit under the “service” label, even though it was just serviced. I’d really like to replace this unit with something more more usable, when finances allow.

***The Chapo Guide to Revolution* by Chapo Trap House, Continued**

Last night I read Grace most of Chapter 2 of *The Chapo Guide to Revolution*. This is the chapter called “Libs,” which makes a damning case against liberalism from the 1960s forward, clearly identifying its moral and intellectual bankruptcy.

I’m finding this fascinating. In my own lifetime, in the nineties, at the start of the Clinton administration, I think I would have given you a blank look if you had tried to make distinctions between “liberals,” “Democrats,” “progressives,” and “leftists.” Over all the subsequent Democratic administrations, the cracks between these groups have become undeniable and they have grown into chasms. And the fascinating part, fascinating in the sense that performing surgery on yourself without anesthetic is fascinating, is that from the perspective of the Democrat, they haven’t jettisoned any moral legitimacy or, really, shifted. From the perspective of the leftist, or really anyone with experience with poverty or those in poverty, or in solidarity with them, the Democratic party really has fled to a place that by global historical standards is quite far right. And anyone attempting “centrism” — triangulation and compromise — is achieving nothing whatsoever except self-aggrandizement.

Debating Politics with Uncles

I’m in a debate with my Uncle on Facebook (and I’ve pretty much pledged to stop debating politics on Facebook, but here I am) about how we define liberalism. A few years ago — I’m not really sure how many, maybe 20 — I think I would have agreed with him that liberals were anti-racist. But Matthew 7:16: “by their fruits you will know them.” And the verdict is in: fifty years of liberalism and, increasingly, bipartisan neoliberalism, has not improved the lots of people of color (or most Americans, really, but as a leftist my praxis is not to sniff disdainfully “all lives matter,” but to align myself with the most vulnerable).

By 2005 or so I was calling myself a “left-wing conservative,” to emphasize my interest in preserving culture, community, and tradition. In my case that didn’t have a lot to do with any church; it had a lot to do with liberal arts, and values and practices that were thought of as things hippies or homesteaders were concerned with: raising your own food, supporting small community institutions, *local* industry, *local* economies, and withdrawing support from the giant corporations and the governments they run.

Then we got into the topic of my vote in the 2016 election: how could I “justify”

casting a “protest” vote in a swing state? Did I know Michigan was going to be so close?

My answer was in several parts: first, my vote is my own and I am not required to “justify” it to anyone. I don’t believe that voting is, fundamentally, entirely a rational act, especially in the presidential elections. I don’t think anyone really fills a whiteboard with “pro” and “con” points about the candidates, adds them up, and then does the math to decide which one to vote for. They may think they are doing it, but it is inevitable that we employ “motivated reasoning” for our tribalisms. And in fact we are encouraged *not* to actually look too closely at a candidate’s statements, policy proposals, and voting record. If we do that, we’re told that we can’t insist on “purity.” We’re told that we have to be “pragmatic.” We’re told “this is the most important election in our lifetime,” every election. We’re told that there will be plenty of opportunities down the road to vote our conscience, but in this current crisis we all have to band together and stop the opponent.

In My Tribe

My own tribalisms, such as they are, were formed by observing my mother live her values. She grew up in the postwar New Deal era and came of age roughly in the Great Society era. And her career, from working in a tuberculosis sanatorium to decades in a community mental health center, was centered around the concepts of community support for the mentally ill, and the efficacy of government programs to help the vulnerable. Her sense of community centered around our church; I’ve never found much to love about any church, but it was her social hub and the place where she formed and maintained what friendships and support she had. She received support from, and supported, her parents, who lived nearby, but because of the capitalism-driven scattering of our family when my grandfather was repeatedly moved for his job, and the divorce-driven scattering of my family when my father left us when I was a toddler, “family” never amounted to all that much in my later life.

Sanders in Michigan

I would like to point out at this point that Sanders won the Michigan primary by a narrow margin — and, significantly, this result was surprising, given the polling. Per Wikipedia. “Bernie Sanders’ narrow win in the primary is widely considered to be a major upset, with polling before the primary showing him training Hillary Clinton by an average of 21.4 points.”

Please keep that in mind about Michigan: *the state was ready and eager to support Sanders.*

Trump in Michigan

I did not know that Michigan was going to be so close that the final vote count took days to finalize. Michigan had gone blue since 1988. The polling was

predicting a modest Clinton win. But I was very concerned about the national election — I thought there was a very good chance that Trump would win. And in fact I had not seen any Trump campaign ads on TV (or Clinton ads, for that matter) until the weekend before the election. I had already voted (absentee), because I was working in Ann Arbor but registered to vote in Saginaw. We were at a restaurant with our realtor after looking at houses, and saw a Trump TV ad. It was very impressive — there was nothing in it I could possibly agree with, politically, but I could tell immediately that its message was *compelling*, filled with crypto-fascist signaling (it wasn't even all subtle, just barely retaining plausible deniability). And Clinton was not getting any kind of compelling message out at all — she had no *policy proposals* for rust belt residents, at least not any that they heard about.

Clinton in Michigan

Politico summarized Clinton's strategy in Michigan, which was, ultimately, to take us all for granted. And I've written extensively, and spoken on my podcast extensively, about the corruption of the Democratic party and how this led to them snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, but there's a great new video documentary here that lays it all out. More and more evidence has emerged since the election; it's all on the record for those who choose to examine it. The Democratic party is, in 2018, busy doubling-down on their failed strategies; they just reversed a decision to no longer take donations from the fossil fuel industry. This has to change if the Democrats expect to win again someday. At this point I think it's pretty much inevitable that Trump will win a second term.

A Protest Vote

Thinking that Trump would probably lose Michigan but win the presidency, I voted for Stein in despair, not so much as a protest vote *per se* but as an attempt to vote *for* something — anything — rather than *against* something. I voted for Stein's platform, specifically *for* what I believe to be the biggest issue, ultimately the *only* issue that matters, getting a handle on anthropogenic global warming. The very first of Stein's platform points are about the "Green New Deal." And most of the rest have to do with "energy democracy," fossil fuels, fracking, climate treaties, "regenerative agriculture," etc. You can read about it here.

I don't think about it in religious terms *per se*, but I could not bring myself to vote for Clinton, because I care about my children, and about the state of my soul. You go ahead and make all the moral compromises you feel comfortable with and work to achieve the ends that you hope for. I'll do the same. And while you're at it, shit in one hand and vote with the other, and see which one gets you something.

Who Lost the Election?

Trump won Michigan by 2,279,805 votes to Clinton's 2,268,193, a difference of 11,612. The ranking third-party candidate, Gary Johnson, got 173,057 votes.

Seven percent of Johnson's votes for Clinton would have changed the outcome, but I find it interesting that I only ever heard hatred towards Stein, and Stein voters, for spoiling things; Stein got 50,700 votes. I haven't ever heard anyone complain about Darrell Castle, who got 16,926 votes — more than Clinton's margin of loss.

Seventy-five thousand ballots in Michigan were scanned and resulted in no choice recorded for president. Per Harper's:

...these ballots were never manually inspected to decipher the voters' intentions. People sometimes purposefully leave portions of their ballot blank, but machines also sometimes fail to count ballots that have been marked. In addition, Detroit officials claimed that eighty-seven of the city's optical scanners had broken down during voting, and there was a discrepancy in many Detroit-area precincts between the number of paper ballots on hand and the number of people who were recorded to have voted. All this, in a state where Trump's victory came down to 11,000 votes. Yet a Michigan law prevented recounts in precincts with such discrepancies, which meant that a record number of precincts in this Democratic stronghold were excluded from the process. In the end, though, neither the Republicans' ground-level sabotage nor the bizarre regulation mattered; an obliging judge called off the recount after three days.

It's *much* easier to throw an election using "shenanigans" if it's a close race. And it was a close race in Michigan because *Clinton was not popular here, and took the state for granted.*

None of the Above: The Ultimate Spoiler

The biggest spoiler was actually "none of the above." 7,514,055 voters were registered in Michigan, but only 4,874,619 voted. Turnout as a percent of voting-age population was lower than in 2008 and 2004 and roughly even with 2012, at 63%. So spare me the lecture about how Stein was the spoiler, when the Clinton campaign couldn't move the needle on turnout. It's reminiscent of 2000; folks are still bitter about Nader supposedly spoiling the whole election by taking a small number of votes that they believe Gore was entitled to, but this reasoning ignores the fact that Gore lost *eleven* states that Bill Clinton had previously won, including his home state of Tennessee.

Third party votes, by the way, denied Trump a popular-vote victory. And Clinton supporters seem to find that to be important, even calling her "the popular-vote president." And if you voted for Clinton, you have something in common with me — we both voted for losers.

Anyway, the upshot of all this is that, even knowing then what I know now about how it all played out, I would cast the same vote. And before you criticize me for that — ask yourself if any evidence would possibly have convinced you to change *your* vote.

But I was talking about the Chapo book.

***The Chapo Guide to Revolution* by Chapo Trap House, Continued**

It's very, very funny in parts; Grace and I were gasping for breath in parts. The "Libs" chapter has quite a decent analysis for the last fifty years of American politics from a genuinely leftist perspective, and *we almost never see this*. The book draws a clear line between actual leftist ideology and praxis and contemporary liberalism and neoliberalism. It's pretty damning. One great point that they come back to several times is that liberalism is *bereft* of its own ideology; the issues liberalism pitches, occasionally successfully, are all borrowed from the actual left. They steal valor from the left. They claim credit for leftist reforms but these reforms are cherry-picked and watered down. Nowhere is this as clear as in their cynical abuse of identity politics.

The text is snarky and funny and I'm going to read some passages on the podcast. But it does have a general flaw that crops up everywhere. Noam Chomsky's writing is often hard to understand and confusing to anyone coming fresh to his arguments because of his use of sarcasm; if you don't already understand his perspective in depth, it can be very difficult to discern just when Chomsky is signaling that he's being sarcastic, and when the things he writes are in earnest. This is one of the reasons why it is generally much easier to understand Chomsky by watching him speak, or reading a transcription of a speech, or an interview. In these contexts his tendency to speak sarcastically is clearer, and does not interfere with the effectiveness of his arguments.

I assert that, perhaps because the Chapo writers came of age steeped in Chomsky himself, and perhaps because they've spent too much time among ideological friends and comrades and not enough time in the flyover, the Chapo book constantly risks falling into the same trap. As a leftist I don't think I have trouble discerning when they are actually being sarcastic. When they refer to Obama as "Barack Hussein Ahmadinejad bin Laden Obama," I laugh, because they are taking a page from the right-wing playbook to smear Obama, but actually doing it from the left. But were I a Democrat who still speaks glowingly about how wonderful life was under "no-drama Obama," I don't think I'd be able to enjoy, or even parse, this sarcasm. I'd just see this as a *parroted* right-wing talking point, not a *parodied* one. And so I think this book is very unlikely to change any minds and move anyone to the left who isn't already there.

***The Greater Conqueror* by Michael Moorcock**

This morning I read most of the novella "The Greater Conqueror." This is set in the time of the rise of Alexander the Great and I'm not quite sure why it

is in the Elric collection. The protagonist is a guy named Simon and he seems to have a sword made from meteoric iron, but it doesn't seem to me like he is very Elric-like or explicitly an aspect of Moorcock's Eternal Champion. I've read five chapters. There is one left. I don't think I'll decide after reading the last chapter that this is a great story; it seems like a fairly pedestrian one. It may have been more influential than respected.

What's Left of Elric

I think the next story I can read, in publication order, is "The Singing Citadel," found in *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*. After that, it gets confusing. The Multiverse Wiki says that the novella "The Jade Man's Eyes" is found in its revised form as the third book of the fix-up novel *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*. This was published later. I don't have the text of the original novella, as found in *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*, so I'll read the revised version when I get to *Sailor* in publication order.

- Then comes "The Stone Thing: a Tale of Strange Parts," also found in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*. At that point, I will have just about finished reading everything in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*, with only the story "The Flaneur des Arcades de l'Opera" and the closing fourth part of the "Aspects of Fantasy" essay remaining.
- In publication order, next up are "Elric at the End of Time," "The Black Blade's Song," and "Crimson Eyes," but I don't have any of these. I do have "Sir Milk-and-Blood" and "The Roaming Forest," so I'll read those. Then come the novels *The Sleeping Sorceress* and *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*.

I'm looking forward to *The Sleeping Sorceress*. It does have a very complicated history, though. According to the Multiverse wiki it is "a novel expanded from the novella of the same name plus one unpublished story and the middle third of *The King of the Swords*."

It's always got to be complicated, with Moorcock, with stories and novels winding up with the same title, stories changing titles, and books whose content has not changed at all re-appearing under different titles. I'm looking forward to reading *The Sleeping Sorceress*, the novel, although Karin L. Kross's comment that it is "Elric-by-numbers" does not give me high hopes for it; in a different post she writes:

...it seems to combine some of the more frustrating excesses of the Elric saga with what are, by comparison to the rest of the series, fairly conventional fantasy plots.

But Kross also gives me hope for the later Elric material when she writes:

I'd argue that in the novels written from *The Fortress of the Pearl* onward, Elric is more appealing sort of guy...

So, I'm not giving up yet, although I reserve the right to stop, or jump around, or set aside all this Moorcock and come back to it later. Or never come back to it. (I can stop any time I want... really.)

Today it is raining lightly — very lightly — an unusual fine mist, which I think might be due to the fine smoke particles in the air from the West Coast wildfires. Weather Underground says we'll get 3/4ths of an inch by tonight and we could really, really use it. All summer, we've had these rainfall forecasts which have failed to materialize. I really hope this predicted rain actually shows up, but I'm nervous that it won't.

There's not much news on the house. We're waiting to see completed offers. According to our realtor, at least one is in progress. We've also heard that at least one buyer is interested in a land contract. I don't know much about how those work, but we are open to any workable arrangement.

I've been feeling tired and feeling like I'm gaining weight. I have also been trying to eat extra fiber to clear up hemorrhoids, but I took the lazy way out and I've been eating raisin bran and fiber bars each day. I think the extra sugar is making me sluggish. I need to try a less carb-heavy solution, I guess.

Friday

I got home relatively early last night and read Grace a bit more of *The Chapo Guide to Revolution*, the introduction. We kept getting interrupted, though, so I had to give up on that project. No one seemed to be terribly hungry since the kids had been snacking. So for dinner I just toasted some of the leftover second loaf of rye bread from Mother Loaf and steamed some eggs in the Instant Pot. Veronica assembled one of the Costco salad kits. So we improvised on this theme. I had an open-face roast beef and egg sandwich, and some of the remaining loaded potato salad. I was going to use the rolls from last Friday, but they were moldy (it's been very humid). So we have to have a rule on those rolls: they have to be used up in the first half of the week.

“The Greater Conqueror” by Michael Moorcock, Concluded

All the kids seemed to be off doing their own things and never came for a bedtime story so we didn't have one. Before bed I read my own bedtime stories. I finished the novella “The Greater Conqueror.” My opinion didn't really change. It's decent enough, a creepy story about a possessed Alexander the Great, but I still don't really see why it belongs in an Elric collection.

“Earl Aubec of Malador” by Michael Moorcock

Since it hadn't taken me very long to finish the last chapter of “The Greater Conqueror,” I went ahead and read “Earl Aubec of Malador,” which appears next in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*, out of publication order. This is a brief proposal for a series of four novels featuring the protagonist of

“Master of Chaos.” It sketches out the character and gives a detailed summary of the first novel. It’s not really Elric material *per se*, but the summary tells an interesting story and I have to say, if Moorcock ever fleshed it out, I’d probably read it.

“The Stone Thing: A Tale of Strange Parts” by Michael Moorcock

Then I read “The Stone Thing: A Tale of Strange Parts.” This isn’t really an Elric story, but it is a very funny, very short story in which Moorcock freely and unabashedly parodies himself. It starts gradually, and you might not realize for the first few sentences that he is in fact mocking his own style, and not just his own style but many of his tropes as well. I approve entirely.

It looks like I was supposed to read the novella “The Singing Citadel” in *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* next, but since I didn’t have my list covered with circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back of each one explaining what each one was, I forgot about it and read “Sir Milk-and-Blood,” and “The Roaming Forest.”

“Sir Milk-and-Blood” by Michael Moorcock

“Sir Milk-and-Blood” is a short, strange, and creepy story set in our world. It involves a train bombing and, surprisingly, the Holy Grail. At the end a strange character arrives, carrying a guitar case. The character is called Zenith the Albino, who is the character that inspired Moorcock to create Elric, but when he opens his electric guitar case to reveal Stormbringer, we learn that he is actually be the real Elric. (Ummm, “real Elric?” I may be getting in too deep, dear reader!) Never mind that Stormbringer is much too long to fit into an electric guitar case or even an electric bass case (it’s a huge sword, at least five feet long, although Elric seems to be able to wield it with one hand because of the unnatural strength it gives him). It’s magical, after all; maybe the case is bigger on the inside. The story is disturbing, and startling, and just long enough.

“The Roaming Forest” by Michael Moorcock

The story “The Roaming Forest” is broken into chapters, although it’s quite short; it certainly wouldn’t qualify as a “novella” by word count, despite having a novel’s superficial structure, and I have decided not to use the word “novelette,” which means I’ll just call it a story. It’s about Rackhir of Phum, another Eternal Champion character, who speaks language of Melniboné. This is a sort of crossover story and features a character whose body is in Melniboné, dreaming, and trapped far from home. It may be first appearance of the “Moonbeam Roads” concept which apparently also has something to do with the Holy Grail. (This is all getting a little too “Da Vinci Code” for my taste.) Eventually I will have to decide if I’m going to attempt to read the three novels in my omnibus volume *Elric: The Moonbeam Roads*.

I should go back and read “The Singing Citadel” next, and then the novel *The Sleeping Sorceress*.

Elanor was restless last night, so I didn’t get a great night’s sleep and woke up tired. I didn’t have time to run out for breakfast and the kids were already up messing around in the kitchen, so I didn’t make coffee at home. I had a cup of strong tea when I got to work and a couple of those wretched fiber bars. We are having pizza and ice cream at work to say goodbye to our intern. I will have to restrain myself. I still have a little beef stew in the refrigerator, and I brought some of the toasted rye bread to dunk. So I should go light on the pizza and eat the stew later.

Tonight I’ll go to Costco and again try to restrain myself, although there’s no getting around the fact that feeding and taking care of our household is expensive. We need baby wipes. I don’t think we really need that much else. Maybe more buns or rolls to use up the sandwich meat, a package of eggs and and package of butter. I’ll probably get salmon for dinner tonight and another package of asparagus. Maybe I’ll get some more bananas, although there is still quite a bit of fruit in the refrigerator.

There’s no news on the old house. I didn’t even sign on to Facebook last night to see what was going on with my various conversations. I’m considering Mastodon, although their federated, but isolated, server model confuses me; the whole point of a service like Twitter, to me, is that it is unified, even international. Grace tells me I should look at “MeWe” but I just not sure I can bring myself to use a service with such a dumb name. The name evokes the sound a kitten makes while urinating.

Weather Underground is predicting thunderstorms this evening, but also predicting only 0.01 inches of rain, which won’t really do anything for us. It remains unusually dry in Michigan. The forecast says we could get half an inch of rain on Monday, but again, I’m not holding my breath. Ann Arbor averages 3.6 inches of rain in July. It looks like we got under 1.4 inches this year.

I got an e-mail message informing me that The Mother Loaf’s oven has broken down again and so they aren’t going to have bread for sale on Saturday. That’s disappointing. This happened just a few weeks ago. I really hope they can get their oven working reliably.

Saturday

After work I went to Costco and spent exactly \$256.00, or two to the eighth power. For posterity, I bought:

- A package of applesauce containers
- A big box of baby wipes
- A package of butter
- A box of sliced cheddar for our friend
- A package of ready-to-bake salmon

- A package of ready-to-bake macaroni
- A package of “Aussie Bites” (little high-fiber cakes)
- A package of two dozen eggs
- A package of chicken drumsticks
- A package of steaks (not a typical item, but Grace has been asking for red meat)
- Two boxes of granola
- A package of floss picks
- A double package of Dave’s Killer Bread for our friend
- A bag of broccoli
- A package of 96 pencils (our “back-to-school” shopping)
- A package of D batteries
- Another LED lantern for power outages (I bought one last week and plan to get a couple more later if they still have them)
- A bag of kale salad
- A bag of pretzel rolls
- Two bags of clementines (mandarin oranges)
- Two bunches of bananas

That should hold us until into next week, except we might need some bread, since we can’t get bread at The Mother Loaf Breads today.

When I got home I found that Veronica had made a pot of brown rice. So we put the macaroni and cheese (which needs 50 minutes in the oven) in, and set the timer for 25 minutes. Then when the timer went off, we put in the salmon (which needs 25 minutes at the same temperature). We ate those things with some leftover kale salad. I was planning on having the Aussie bites for dessert but no one seemed interested in dessert.

Last night I read the Elric novella “The Singing Citadel,” collected in *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*, and also the remaining non-fiction essays at the end of that book, means only the titular novel remains for me to read, when I come back to it in publication order.

“The Singing Citadel” by Michael Moorcock

It turns out “The Singing Citadel” is one of the better Elric novellas, quite imaginative. In fact I would rank it as one of the best. There’s a lot going on in this story. It leans a little more towards science fiction than fantasy, with some science fiction-y elements like a breach between dimensions, an antagonist who is giant-sized, and characters who have been shrunk to the point where they fit in his hand. These are tropes that were not uncommon in postwar science fiction and they made their way into television as well, for example in *The Twilight Zone* episode 150, “Stopover in a Quiet Town.” In this episode, a couple wakes up after a party to discover they are in a strange empty town, until they look up and encounter a giant girl who scoops them up to use as toys.

It’s funny how many of these stories seem a bit derivative of other fantasy

I've read. But then you realize when the stories were published, and like a figure/ground optical illusion reversing itself, you realize that sometimes it goes the other way: these stories were hugely influential, even if they now seem slightly obscure. In this case it's not obvious if there was direct influence at work between the Twilight Zone episode, from 1964, and "The Singing Citadel," first published in 1964. Maybe they both had an influence in common?

It's disconcerting to realize how these works have faded in presence, and how often they go out of print, although they are often reprinted. Because of this, only occasionally do I see Moorcock in bookstores at all, and I've certainly never seen a bookstore shelf that holds anything even close to his whole body of work. This is true even of used bookstores, where fans in the know no doubt tend to cherry-pick his works.

Grace and I had another mediocre night's sleep as Elanor was again very restless.

This morning I made bacon, blueberry pancakes, and coffee for breakfast. I asked the kids to get the kitchen ready for me to cook today, but things weren't really ready. The big cast iron pan had sat with the residue of Veronica's sausage gravy in it, the sausage gravy she accidentally made with corn starch. It turns out that it's quite hard to remove dried up corn starch from a pan like that. I had to soak and scrub, soak and scrub. It's not the best thing for the cast iron's coating. The bacon I cooked in it next should help keep it from rusting, but it needs some attention. When I went to make coffee, I discovered that the coffee scoop was missing from the drawer next to the stove and no one could find it. When I went to flip the bacon, I discovered that the tongs were missing and no one could find them. So we had slightly burnt bacon and weak coffee. Joshua apparently stayed up all night playing games on the Kano, and so it is just after 4:00 and he is still asleep. Maybe he'll wake up in time for dinner.

The Garbage Disposal, Again

It looks like a piece of glass in the disposal, not from today but from a previous broken-glass-in-the-sink incident, shifted or moved, and now the mechanism is completely stuck. I worked at it with a flashlight and pliers and various tools trying to pull a piece of broken glass that is jammed in it, preventing it from turning. I couldn't get it out. I thought that somewhere I had a nice long pair of needle-nosed pliers, but today I could not find it. This is, I think, at least the third time this year that I've had to struggle to get broken glass or plastic out of the disposal and get it working again. That's getting old. As it is all rusty in there, it is probably time to replace the disposal, although if I can find the right tool I will give it one more try.

Grace and I tried to come up with something low-cost to do, so we could get out of the house and have a little change of scenery. We are really a little burned out and I'm sick of feeling like we're just helplessly waiting for news on the house. I think the kids have a tendency to get stir-crazy as well. But I'm also nervously watching the checking account. And I'm not really excited about trying to drag

Joshua out of bed, and then having him be a drag on any sort of outing. We were thinking maybe we'd go for a hike. But today is an August day like a lot of the days this summer, uncomfortably warm. Grace is not up for it at all. I could do it, but it is unpleasantly muggy. So it looks like we're stuck inside today. I was thinking of going with Grace to the DSA meeting, because we wanted to hear an update on the Rust Belt DSA conference. But we just didn't get our act together; we would have been quite late.

***The Sleeping Sorceress* by Michael Moorcock**

Today I read the first part of *The Sleeping Sorceress*, the first “book” of the relatively short novel. It's been fun to read these novels of modest length that focus more on story and less on digressions. For many years it seems that the trend in science fiction and fantasy has been towards enormous word counts, so this is refreshing, and recommends itself to me as a technique to try if I ever wind up writing genre fiction.

The Sleeping Sorceress, at least the first part, partakes of some of the very imaginative storytelling that makes “The Singing Citadel” a fun read. So far it's better than I expected, given that Karin L. Kross described it as “Elric-by-numbers.” I will agree with her on this, though: the predictable way in which Elric always winds up getting the raven-tressed female — eldritch priestess, warrior-queen, heiress, succubus, or whatever — into the boudoir, seemingly effortlessly, via his indifference to them, is getting a bit repetitive. It reminds me of the scene in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* when McCoy asks Kirk “What *is* it with you, anyway?”

I think for dinner tonight we'll have steaks and roasted asparagus and potatoes, then maybe a movie night in the basement, if we can get the meal cleaned up at a reasonable hour.

Joshua's awake — it's ten minutes to five — and of course now he wants food.

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.

- *Elric: Stormbringer!* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- “The Eternal Champion,” “The Greater Conqueror,” “Earl Aubec of Malador,” “The Stone Thing: A Tale of Strange Parts,” “Sir Milk-and-Blood,” “The Roaming Forest,” and *The Sleeping Sorceress* by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- “The Singing Citadel” by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)

- *The Chapo Guide to Revolution: A Manifesto Against Logic, Facts, and Reason*

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, August 18th, 2018

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