

# Joy and Monsters

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17 Nov 2019

## **Joy and Monsters (November 17th, 2019)**

### **Monday: the Veteran's Day Blizzard**

We woke up to several inches of snow on the ground this morning and it has continued to snow all morning. I've lived in Michigan for a long time now and I'm pretty well accustomed to winter driving, but I'm not accustomed to having to do it before Thanksgiving. This is a record-breaking weather situation. The meteorologist that writes for [mlive.com](http://mlive.com), Mark Torregrossa, wrote:

So what I was calling a general three to five inch snow yesterday for southern Michigan is now looking like a solid four to seven inch snow. There could even be an isolated area in southern Michigan that tallies eight inches, and that's away from the lake effect snowbelts.

I was sliding all over the road this morning because apparently the local road crews weren't quite prepared for this situation. It might have to do with the fact that it is a Federal holiday.

### **Tuesday**

It snowed well into the evening yesterday, and it was still snowing when I left work after 7:00, although it was tapering off. I decided to avoid the unknown conditions on the freeway and drive on surface streets around downtown Ann Arbor, taking Jackson, Stadium, and Packard to Carpenter. I figured if I had an accident, at least it would be a low-speed accident. The roads were in terrible shape but the plan worked, although it took me an hour to get home instead of the usual twenty minutes.

This morning I got to experience the upside of a major snowstorm — the sky is clear and blue, and because the ground everywhere is covered with fresh snow, it is actually bright out, bright enough to coax a few precious microliters of much-needed serotonin and dopamine out of my brain. I found myself in a good mood driving to work this morning. Of course, it's also very cold, and my office building's heat hasn't caught up yet, so I'm wearing my coat while sitting at my desk, but you can't have everything.

After dinner last night, the kids managed to complete the cleanup by 10:30, so we got to watch. . .

***Godzilla* (1954 Film, 2019 Criterion Blu-ray, Japanese with English Subtitles)**

It was not the greatest idea to start a 96-minute movie at 10:30 in the evening, but I was eager to watch it and so were some of the kids. Sam and Pippin fell asleep, although Joshua and Benjamin made it through.

It is bit difficult to watch this 1954 monster movie in 2019 and see it clearly, with fresh eyes. My formative years involved a lot of laughing at cheesy special effects and silly science-fictional premises. And so my first impulse when watching *Godzilla* is to be a heckler, throwing out snarky comments like Joel and the robots of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

But something happened while watching this film, the progenitor of so many more films. The extreme *earnestness* of the director's approach actually started to win me over, and I found myself starting to appreciate the movie as a serious piece of social commentary, dystopian science fiction, and even horror. It also reminded me of some of my favorite old films, *noir* dramas like *He Walked By Night* from 1948. I'm not going to claim that the cinematography of the indoor dramatic scenes is as captivating as John Alton's amazing work, but some of it is genuinely beautiful and partakes of a similar mood.

The later *Godzilla* films have conditioned me to want to laugh when *Godzilla* appears on the screen, because in those later films he is so often played for laughs, and designed to entertain children. But I think it is worth remembering that at the outset, *Godzilla* was intended to be *deadly serious*. Aside from his initial, partial reveal during daylight, for the remainder of the film we see him mostly at night, coming ashore with his giant body mostly hidden in darkness, occasionally shrouded in smoke and mist and flame, and often we only see a giant clawed foot, or a jaw. The director knew that a man in a rubber suit was going to have a tendency to look dumb, and so he used some of the same techniques used so effectively in later movies like *Alien* and in TV shows like *The X Files* to keep the monster only dimly visible. He knew, as did the later directors, that the monster he could build up in the viewer's imagination would be far scarier than a brightly-lit rubber suit.

**Scary Monsters** And so the 1954 *Godzilla* is *scary*. Not in the way that jump scare-filled modern horror movies are scary, but in the way that a bear outside your tent in the dark woods is scary. The destruction *Godzilla* leaves in his wake has real emotional weight to it, reinforced by the shots of the aftermath — children crying as their mother's dead body carried away, a mother clutching her children and telling them that they will soon be going to where their (dead) father is, and children being measured with Geiger counters for radiation. We see reporters falling to their deaths from collapsing towers, and acres of burning

city, with flames shooting high into the night sky.

It's a reminder that in 1954, the horrors inflicted on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were only nine years distant, and still very much in the audience's consciousness, and the atomic tests in the Pacific were even more recent. The destruction of fishing boats at the beginning of the film were an echo of an event from the year the film was released. America's Castle Bravo thermonuclear bomb test on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands poisoned the crew of the Japanese fishing boat Lucky Dragon 5 in March, creating an international incident:

... the outcry in Japan reached such a level that diplomatic relations became strained and the incident was even dubbed by some as a "second Hiroshima." Nevertheless, the Japanese and US governments quickly reached a political settlement, with the transfer to Japan of \$15.3 million as compensation, with the surviving victims receiving about ¥2 million each (\$5,550 in 1954, or about \$51,800 in 2019).

And so some of the more tedious scenes in the film, of scientific lectures and examination of the sites at which Godzilla has wreaked havoc, make more sense when we remember that the American government initially refused to take Japan's claims of radiation exposure seriously, until measurements proved that the bomb blast was much more powerful, and the extent of the radioactive fallout much greater, than it was originally willing to admit. In fact, it was such measurement that allowed one scientist, Joseph Rotblat, to deduce the actual design of the bomb, interpreting its isotopic "fingerprints."

In this context, the director Ishirō Honda's decision to use so much of the film's running time showing scientists methodically studying Godzilla's footprints, taking radiation measurements, and developing defenses makes perfect sense; in the real world, science was Japan's defense against politically-motivated lies, while in the fictional world, it offered valuable information about how the island could defend itself against a threat like Godzilla.

**A Double-Edged Sword** But at the same time, no one understood as well as the Japanese that scientific research that can lead to new weapon designs is a double-edged sword, and so it isn't sufficient, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to portray a scientist as simply heroic. The scientist Serizawa has created an invention which will help win the war against Godzilla, but the film, intriguingly, does not allow that achievement to signal his virtue. Serizawa must demonstrate his understanding of the *moral* dimensions of his invention.

Incidentally, I just read a report *yesterday* that climate change is damaging the "tomb" containing radioactive waste from those same thermonuclear bomb tests:

Between 1946 and 1958, the United States detonated 67 nuclear bombs on, in and above the Marshall Islands — vaporizing whole islands, carving craters into its shallow lagoons and exiling hundreds of people from their homes.

U.S. authorities later cleaned up contaminated soil on Enewetak Atoll, where the United States not only detonated the bulk of its weapons tests but, as *The Times* has learned, also conducted a dozen biological weapons tests and dumped 130 tons of soil from an irradiated Nevada testing site. It then deposited the atoll's most lethal debris and soil into the dome.

Now the concrete coffin, which locals call "the Tomb," is at risk of collapsing from rising seas and other effects of climate change. Tides are creeping up its sides, advancing higher every year as distant glaciers melt and ocean waters rise.

Officials in the Marshall Islands have lobbied the U.S. government for help, but American officials have declined, saying the dome is on Marshallese land and therefore the responsibility of the Marshallese government.

How does Faulkner's line go? "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

The movie feels a bit long. There is occasional use of stock footage. Parts of the film stock don't seem to be in great condition, although I'm sure the Criterion folks did the best job they could with the film elements available. Some of the effects scenes can't help but be a bit cheesy; sometimes the film resorts to a practical model, like a crashing truck that is very *obviously* a model; the missiles fired at *Godzilla* look like Fourth of July sparklers. But much of the film remains both gorgeous and frightening, and it has a seriousness to it that caught me off-guard and got inside my cynical shell.

**Weapons of Mass Destruction** It is easy to joke about the sexist portrayals, and the complicated sub-plot involving a love triangle, and the laughable pseudo-scientific gobbledygook. But I found my usual snark and cynicism slowly fading as I watched the film. One can't so easily write off the actual arguments the film is making, about scientific progress and how it is inextricably tied to the development of new weapons of war. I was startled to read the phrase "weapon of mass destruction" in the subtitles.

It's not even past.

And so while it may be a little hard to downshift your perceptions to the world of 65 years ago — still within many human lifetimes — one can't help but be convinced that even in 2019, *Godzilla* remains highly relevant, and even impressive. If we take war seriously, we are obliged to take *Godzilla*, a heartfelt bellow of rage against war that transmutes suffering into art, seriously as well.

## A Few Quick Notes

A reader kindly pointed out to me that I shouldn't apologize for writing less than I'd like to, and that my newsletter was a "gift" to my readers. That honestly made my day, because I usually tend to imagine people groaning when another

issue lands in their inboxen. (If the plural of “ox” is “oxen,” then the plural of “inbox” is “inboxen,” right?) It makes more sense if I think of it in the context of an anarchist gift economy. That context has been coming up more and more in our lives recently. But it also reminds me that I should probably choose a formal license for this work, probably a Creative Commons license similar to the one I’ve used on all my podcasts and music.

### **Feedback**

My wonderful wife Grace wrote to inform me that our bedroom didn’t become one big heap of laundry until shortly before Malachi’s birth, not shortly after Elanor’s birth. She has a much better memory for these kind of thing than I do, as well as superior navigation skills.

Speaking of navigation skills, a reader reminded me that GPS was a thing that I could use. If things go well at the end of the year, maybe I’ll get a new phone and a data plan, despite my desire not to share any more personal information with Google. I keep eyeing the Librem 5, although it is currently back-ordered and *also* much more expensive than the Android phones I’ve been using. And it doesn’t appear that it will have a usable app for GPS navigation, at least not anytime soon. Which reminds me of the time that Grace asked a Millennial for an address, got out out a paper map, found the destination on the map, and then knew exactly where to go, to said Millennial’s utter bafflement; then, for her next trick, she wrote down the address using cursive handwriting, which the same Millennial was completely unable to read.

I’ve almost finished reading *A Colony In a Nation* by Chris Hayes. My opinion of the book is still pretty positive. I’ll review it in more detail when I’ve finished it.

It took a long time, but I’m fully caught up with the Metamor City Podcast. Unfortunately, I now have to wait to hear the end of Chris Lester’s novel *The Lost and the Least!* I suppose I could buy a paper copy, but switching to paper to find out how the story comes out would seem weird — kind of like when a movie switches to a voiceover, or displays a newspaper clipping, to tell you what happened to the characters.

### **Miller Time**

Family friend Susannah Black wrote some inspiring words, about, of all things, Steven Miller’s e-mails:

Miller’s vision is the vision of the post-Christian right — worse than paganism because it is less innocent; it is hardened against universalism, against humanism. And there is no good version of a love of the particular, of a delight in one’s own, that does not include universalism and a recognition of and delight in humans in general;

indeed, the delight in the particular can't be divorced, finally, from a delight in being itself.

And:

The politics that we need is a politics that knows that man as such is by nature a political animal, and that it is possible and good for men and women of different races to be in a polity with each other. The rejection of this idea in favor of the notion that polity can only be shared by those of the same ethnicity is a rejection of the basic principles of Christian political philosophy. It's also a betrayal of the country as it is: the populace that we actually have, those actually to be governed.

I guess "a delight in being" is obsolete. Now, it's true that I wrestle with depression, and so many days I find it *hard* or even impossible to feel "in polity" with anyone, including myself, and "delight in being" is an aspiration at best. But at least it's still an aspiration.

## Thursday

It looks like sliding around on the ice and snow on Monday resulted in some damage to the front end of my car. The tires seem fine, but it is shimmying a lot when I get it up to highway speed. So I drove home on surface streets last night and asked Grace to give me a ride to the office this morning. I am hoping that maybe there is just some ice build-up somewhere that I can't easily see or clean out, and maybe after it gets warm enough to melt the ice the problem will go away. But I fear that it will need some expensive work to make it safe to drive, and that really is not what we needed, what with expenses piling up as we reach the end of the year, and expenses looming at the start of next year, including big bills for the children's choir and Joshua's braces.

## Work Notes

After our sunny Tuesday, the weather turned gray and grim again, and I've been struggling a bit to stay focused at work. Today I managed to finish a new version of the firmware I'm working on, and send it to the China office. They will look at it during the night and I expect to have comments in the morning.

I sent them a device prototype that has a bootloader, which means that they should be able to open it up, hold down a button on the little printed circuit board that I designed, which is mounted inside, and turn the power on. The little board running my bootloader should go into a mode where it waits for a firmware update, and cycles a little green LED that I soldered onto the board from dim to bright and back again. Then they should be able to run the firmware update that utility I wrote, and send my updated firmware to the board. It should install the firmware and reset itself automatically, and start running the new firmware.

There's a lot of me in there: "circuit board that I designed," "my bootloader," "firmware update utility that I wrote," "my updated firmware." I did not write it that way to brag about all the stuff that I made. I wrote it that way because I'm *nervous*. Since I designed the board, wrote the bootloader on the board, wrote the firmware update utility, and created the updated firmware, this is not really a team effort; there is no one else to blame if it doesn't work — it's all on me. I tested the process as well as I could before sending it, but there are no guarantees.

The whole process of using a team in China to write an application to control this new device depends on our ability to send them updates to our work in progress and get the updates running on the instrument, so that their prototype instrument works just like the one that I've got on my desk. If it doesn't work, we'll have to have them send back the prototype instrument and wait for us to update it and send it back, which will be slow and expensive, and my failure will be very visible in front of a lot of people who are CC'ed on the steady stream of e-mail messages describing this process.

## Friday

It turns out the firmware update utility didn't work. I didn't test the version I sent them thoroughly enough. It worked fine when running a debug version in the build environment, but does not work right when running as a standalone compiled application. I should have tested that, but I'm only one person!

So I need to fix that. But fortunately this is something I can send the team in China via file sharing, and doesn't necessarily mean the process won't work eventually. I should be able to get them a working firmware update utility by the end of the day. I think they are in GMT+8 and I'm in GMT-5. I think that means they have finished for the week, assuming they don't go into the office on Saturdays, and they will have their Monday work day while I'm asleep during my Sunday night/Monday morning and so I should see any e-mail replies they sent during their Monday when I start my Monday while they are asleep on their Monday night/Tuesday morning... *head explodes*...

## Vacation Plans

I have tentatively scheduled my days off for the remainder of the year. If I take six days off, I can be out of the office for twelve contiguous days from December 21st through January 1st. That assumes I don't need to take more than one sick day before then, since I have only seven days left. The online system at work says I took one day off in January, one and a half days off in February, three days off in March (only two of them contiguous), two and a half days off in July (one of them was to make a four-day weekend out of Independence Day), one day off in mid-September, and one day off in late October. That's ten days during 2019 to date.

The online system shows requests for seven and a half of those ten days, and

shows that I added notes reading “sick day” to the time off requests for five of those days, while I marked the requested half-day in July as “urgent personal business.” I don’t actually remember what that urgent business was; it may have involved taking a kid to urgent care. I don’t know for sure what I did with the remaining four and a half days that I didn’t annotate. One of those days involved driving to Saginaw and signing paperwork to sell our old house.

I realize that I’m a lot better off than an awful lot of folks, but I’d really like to see all of us get a lot more guaranteed paid time off work.

I’ll get more days at the start of 2020 than I did at the start of 2019, because June 15th, 2020 will mark my 5-year anniversary. So it’s possible I might be able to take some sort of vacation next summer, even if it winds up being a “staycation.” That would be so nice. Just think — at this rate, in 2025 I might have as many paid vacation days that all employees in Afghanistan are entitled to by law! Although I won’t have the other benefits that workers there are guaranteed, such as fifteen public holidays. We’re tied with Afghanistan, though, for the number of days of guaranteed paid paternity leave — zero!

A number of sick days scattered across the year doesn’t really amount to a vacation, and I’m feeling just a bit burned out. OK, more than “just a bit.” Not visible in the online system are all the extra unpaid overtime hours I’ve worked, including hours spent at home working on schematics and circuit board layout, assembling prototypes, reading data sheets, reading code, and looking for bugs and design problems.

## Sunday

I knew it was risky to write about sick days and my hope that I’d be able to avoid taking any more of them this year. When I got home on Friday, Grace was feeling sick with a stuffed-up head and a scratchy throat, and so were a couple of the kids. So some of my low energy during the week might have been due to a virus. We immediately went on the counter-attack: we started taking extra zinc, vitamin A, vitamin C, home-made elderberry tincture, and Jewish Penicillin (chicken soup from Costco).

We then spent most of Saturday in bed. We canceled plans to go to an anarchist gift exchange in Highland Park, but our friend Joy took some things for us, including the old PC that I wasn’t able to turn into a useful desktop computer. Grace put about a dozen pounds of pig fat, from our friends in Grass Lake, into an electric oven, and we rendered it down into lard. We tried this last year and it smelled pretty terrible; I think it wasn’t as fresh. This year’s batch actually smelled good.

I kept trying to take naps, but the kids kept piling into the bedroom, sometimes sitting on the bed and talking over me while I tried to sleep, and sometimes even sitting on me, because they’re just that unobservant. I drank tea and ate crackers. Later in the day I watched some movies with the kids. We watched

*Son of Godzilla* (1967).

Joy made a big pot of cabbage soup with onions and garlic, flavored with thyme and bay and cayenne pepper, and served with horseradish. We ate it with sliced sweet potatoes and Brussels sprouts tossed in the freshly rendered lard and roasted under the broiler, and very sour clementines. It was all delicious and I have to believe that this will *definitely* make those viruses want to flee our bodies as quickly as possible.

I may as well review *Son of Godzilla*!

### ***Son of Godzilla* (1967 film)**

*Son of Godzilla* is a much less serious Godzilla film than the original, although the screenwriters still make a strong effort to frame the monster battles with a story about a research project to grow crops on a hot tropical island. The island is inhabited with giant preying mantis-like creatures, and when an experiment goes wrong, raising the temperature of the island, the giant creatures get even larger. They dig up a buried egg, and smash it open. Inside the egg is a baby version of Godzilla, named Minilla. As Minilla emerges from the egg, the giant mantis creatures continue to attack him with their claws. Godzilla arrives on the island in response to the infant's cries, which create radio interference.

We don't learn how the egg got on the island or who the mother is, and it isn't really established that the young creature is Godzilla's son at all. Godzilla may have showed up at the island simply because he picked up the distress call of a young member of his species.

There really isn't a great deal of overall plot. The fight scenes are padded out by too many long scenes of people running around the island or chasing after the implausible young woman living on the island. A reporter arrives to investigate. Godzilla and Minilla fight the mantises. There's also a giant spider. The giant insect puppets are actually pretty good, while Minilla's expressionless rubber face is really not; he really can only convey emotion by hopping around. The kids enjoyed the interactions between Godzilla and Minilla, though. Godzilla tries to teach Minilla how to shoot his atomic fire breath, but at first the young *kaiju* can only blow comical smoke rings.

Eventually the scientists manage to get their cooling invention working, and the island is covered by a snowstorm. Godzilla and Minilla snuggle together go into hibernation; we're told they will wake up when the island warms up.

To me, this film was interesting because it *looks* like many television shows that I grew up with. Those shows were no doubt strongly influenced by these Godzilla movies. For example, the cave system in *Land of the Lost* looks very much like the caves under the island in *Son of Godzilla*. The interactions between the humans and the young Minilla, with Godzilla looking on over the trees and bellowing, look *very* much like scenes in *Land of the Lost* where the humans interact with the young dinosaur called Dopey. Full, shameful disclosure: I wrote

early drafts of many of the articles on the *Land of the Lost* wiki, because I loved that show, and still love many things about it. The plot and the interactions between characters also reminds me strongly of the old show *Gilligan's Island*.

So I did enjoy the movie for its fight scenes, and for indirect nostalgia for the shows that it influenced. But most adults will likely find this one pretty tedious and overly long, even though it has only an 86-minute running time. I think *All Monsters Attack* is more appealing to both children and adults; if you like the cheesy science-fiction aspects of these movies, you'd probably enjoy *Destroy All Monsters* more. One nice thing: the kids found that there is an option to watch this one with a dubbed voice track instead of subtitles, which was easier on the younger children.

### **And the Rest Are Here on Monster Isle**

Wikizilla breaks the Showa-era Godzilla films into three sets: the first two, called the Original Duology, made up of *Godzilla* (1954) and the immediate sequel *Godzilla Raids Again* (1955). We haven't watched *Godzilla Raids Again* yet.

The second run of seven films they call the Revival, starting with *King Kong vs. Godzilla* in 1962 and winding up with *Son of Godzilla* in 1967 and *Destroy All Monsters* in 1968. We've seen only the last two of this set. There are five more that show how

... Godzilla gradually began to transition from a villainous destructive monster to a more sympathetic and heroic character.

Then the third set, called the Champion Series, in which Godzilla is portrayed as a sort of monster superhero, starts in 1969 with *All Monsters Attack* and includes six films, ending with two Mechagodzilla films in 1974 and 1975. Four of these are "Godzilla versus" films. Of these, we've seen only *All Monsters Attack*. Well, that's not quite true; I saw *Godzilla vs. Megalon* about forty years ago.

So we've got eleven more to watch. Most of them probably aren't going to be different enough, and either good enough or bad enough, to justify detailed reviews. But this boxed set is turning out to be quite a lot of entertainment!

### **Three More Things**

We decided to skip the rest of our planned activities for Sunday; we probably shouldn't go to Mass at all, if we are likely to spread viruses. Veronica shouldn't go to her youth group and make *those* folks sick. So we're still here. Unless my cold gets much worse, I will go into work tomorrow. I usually don't get close enough to my co-workers to risk passing on a virus, and despite the sore throat and joint aches, I'm not sneezing or coughing.

I'm going to share notes about two things I read online this week, and then mention one brief bit of news, and then sign off for the week.

## The Cheryl's Birthday Puzzle

This is not new by any means, but it is back in the news at the Potts House because Sam took a shot at cracking it. If you aren't familiar with the puzzle, read the first part of the article here. It's a logic puzzle that was used in Mathematical Olympiads. I solved it, working out the answer on paper, although it took me a while. I'm quick with a pun or a sarcastic quip, but *not* quick at this kind of thing. I think it took me several hours. So it's a good thing I wasn't on an Olympiad team — I probably wouldn't have finished it until everyone had gone home and the janitor had swept up the room and turned out the lights.

I find this puzzle interesting because although it was assigned to math students, it doesn't actually require algebra, trigonometry, or calculus to figure out. It requires exacting attention to what is said by the two characters, Albert and Bernard, in the puzzle.

**Inside the Puzzle** In a game like Battleship, where you have a chart and your opponent has a chart, and you exchange guesses. The information you have consists of your opponents guesses, and your own chart. You give your opponent information (“hit” or “miss”) and your opponent does the same. So there's a symmetry to Battleship.

In this puzzle, there's also a sort of symmetry, in that there are two players, but interestingly, you aren't one of them. Albert knows the month (row), and Bernard knows the date (column). You observe these two players exchange information, but it's not initially obvious that they are even doing this. Then you have to figure out what they both have figured out. To figure it out, you have to understand exactly *how* they figured it out. You must be able to model in your mind (or on paper) exactly what it is that the two characters knows, and more importantly, exactly what each of those characters can logically deduce and *cannot* logically deduce at each step. So it requires very careful attention to your “theories of mind” about Albert and Bernard.

**Do You Like to be Puzzled?** I have used this puzzle with students who were interested in going into Computer Science or Computer Engineering as a sort of screener problem; I wanted them to give it their best shot. I didn't necessarily expect the students to solve the puzzle, but I was interested in hearing their reaction to it. If they found it uninteresting or impossible, that to me is a warning flag that the student won't actually *enjoy* the kind of work that programmers and computer scientists do.

Of course it isn't a real-world problem, but an awful lot of the debugging I do, pretty much daily, requires forms of reasoning similar to the forms of reasoning necessary to solve this puzzle. I come up with hypotheses about what is going wrong (the root cause of a bug) and how to fix it. The only difference is that I often have to weigh several hypotheses according to their probabilities. And occasionally the low-probability hypothesis (this is a compiler bug, or another

case where the toolchain doesn't work like it is supposed to, or a hardware bug) is actually true.

If you are feeling bold after solving the first one, try the sequels!

### **Why We Are All Losing Sleep**

I read an article from New Statesman called "Why we are all losing sleep" by Dan Hancox. (Why are some headlines now written out without capitalization, as if they were sentences instead of headlines? I don't get it, but it seems to be a thing in some publications.)

The argument put forth in the article is not new to me, but it's a good summation of the many reasons that in 2019, we Americans are chronically sleep-deprived.

Most estimates now place an average night's sleep for an adult in the West at six and a half hours or fewer. Only a generation ago, it was eight hours, and in the early 20th century, ten. It is hard to overstate how momentous these changes are to the everyday life of the human animal, after millennia of stability.

I calculate that in recent months I've been getting about seven hours, typically with one or two brief interruptions. This time of year, when the days are short, ten seems like it would feel normal. In the summer I naturally sleep less. I think that's normal and okay, but getting to sleep so late most nights is not.

For one thing, these changes are having deleterious consequences for our mental and physical health – not just insomnia but depression, anxiety, heart disease and cancer are all rising, in part because of sleep deprivation.

I recommend the article. Don't stay up late reading it on your phone, though.

### **John M. Ford**

Slate featured an article recently by Isaac Butler about the writer John M. Ford, whose work has been out of print for a long time. Because it is so hard to find, I can't recall reading any of his work at all. But it sounds impressive:

*The Dragon Waiting* provokes that rare thrill that one gets from the work of Gene Wolfe, or John Crowley, or Ursula Le Guin. A dazzling intellect ensorcells the reader, entertaining with one hand, opening new doors with another.

If this is not just hyperbole, then his work must be very good indeed.

Ford's story is a very American story, in that he had to choose between more reliable, better-paying work and his health. Per Wikipedia:

Ford suffered from complications related to diabetes since childhood and also had renal dysfunction which required dialysis and, in 2000,

a kidney transplant, which improved his quality of life considerably.

Per the Slate article, he was also deeply impoverished and the two were tightly connected. He did get a kidney transplant, but likely, *didn't* get the early interventions and regular, consistent care that might have helped him live a longer life. He died at the age of 49.

I'm just spitballing here, but what if we didn't force people to make that kind of tradeoff?

There is great news in the article; Tor will print new editions of his work, starting in fall of 2020. I'm really looking forward to it.

Finally,

## **Joy**

I've mentioned our friend Joy in these newsletters from time to time. I'm pleased to announce that our friend Joy has officially changed her address and is finishing up the process of moving from Grand Rapids to Pittsfield Township. She will join our household and community as a family member — not family by birth or marriage, but by choice. We're excited to have her here full-time as part of our village, and helping with our goals — gardens, schooling, community organizing, child-raising, and hospitality.

That's it for now. We're going to heat up some soup and watch another Godzilla movie, then get ourselves off to bed and try to start one more week as best we can. Have a good week!