

2018 Week 35: The Week Ending Saturday,
September 1st



Figure 1: Word Cloud

Sunday

I've been a little bit berserk on Twitter, retweeting critics of John McCain.

An Appeal to Civility

On Facebook today I posted this:

A brief request, please — an appeal to civility.

I know that a lot of you may be tempted, today, to share laudatory, supportive, or complimentary things about John McCain, or condolences to his family.

But please, have some consideration for the feelings of the millions of people around the world and here in the United States who he worked tirelessly to harm: the people defrauded in the Savings and Loan scandal, the taxpayers who had to pay for his corruption; the people killed in the wars of aggression he supported over and over again; the people he struggled to deny health care; the Vietnamese people he insisted on calling “gooks” in public for 27 years, until

deciding to run for president; and the poor and people of color that he attacked relentlessly, either directly, by proxies like Sarah Palin, or through the policies he promoted.

Common decency would dictate that you remain silent for at least a few days before rubbing salt in their wounds.

Thank you.

In response to some push-back, I added:

The death of a public figure seems, in fact, to be the only time when there is any time to move the needle on public opinion. The mainstream media, who lauds McCain because he was really good at giving the press controversies to help them sell eyeballs, will immediately begin the work of bricking up dissenting voices. Soon McCain's reputation will be as fossilized as Reagan's, a completely falsified monument.

Already, and I can barely believe this is true, McCain has a much higher approval rating among Democrats than among Republicans. Mostly, they seem to be coming to his defense *because* of Trump's dumb attacks. This shows you just how few principles they actually possess. Liberals only have ideas they borrow from the left, but then blunt and corrupt them, and partisanship and in-group thinking has become their highest priority. It's all "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" now.

McCain will be completely rehabilitated and lionized and that will be the history, if we don't use this opportunity to demand that people question the outpouring of ahistorical, hagiographic bullshit.

By the time we get to the "THEN" you are proposing, no one will be listening.

And later,

First, "asking [me] to wait an indeterminate period of time before expressing [my] opinions... unless they perfectly align with [yours]" is *exactly* what all the liberal gatekeepers of civility are asking of me, and everyone else who has a beef with McCain. It's all over social media. In fact it's the standard media line promoted everywhere. Anyone who raises their head to criticize him is attacked for violating these unwritten rules. We're even told "think of the feelings of his family." (Funny, though, his family members don't follow me on social media).

And funny how, when liberals lionize neoconservative war hawks and racists and other enemies of the vulnerable, they never take into

account the sensibilities of people who actually care about war and peace, and life and death. Because they care more about maintaining the idea that there's a legitimate position between "war criminal" and "opposed to war criminal" and they want to live in that place. It's as if the opposition to Hitler was suggesting "hey – be reasonable! why don't we just kill *half* the Jews?" Sometimes there's no moral middle ground.

To liberals, it's all some kind of a bloodless game of wits where everyone has a pipe, a smoking jacket, and a snifter of brandy, and we're just debating different philosophies of government and the winner is the one who scores the most debating points. The people who actually suffer and die aren't in the room and don't have seats at the table.

I'm trying to point out how these philosophies and parties and platforms and policies have real life-or-death consequences and we should treat them as such when we might feel a burst of patriotism or both-siderism coming on. I mean, sometimes I feel a bowel movement coming on, too, but I don't share it with you all.

Anyway. There's not much going on today. Grace took Joshua out to visit his aunt and do a thing — I think his aunt wanted him to appear in a commercial for her thrift shop business. But it's taken longer than we expected and she's not home yet. So I'm not sure what will happen this evening. For breakfast I made a few scrambled eggs, and Veronica made a few more, and some vegetarian sausage patties. But I'm not feeling very ambitious about diving into working in the kitchen.

Today it's gotten hot again, with very high humidity. Weather Underground says it's 84, but "feels like 93." It's supposed to be in the nineties tomorrow and Tuesday. I think I may need to lie down, just thinking about it.

Monday

Grace's thing with Joshua turned out to take almost eight hours. That was far, far longer than expected.

Recording the Pottscast

I was about ready to throw in the towel and skip the podcast last night. We've often been in the opposite position where Grace was ready to skip a show, but I pushed her to do it with me. Last night things went the opposite way, and Grace was the one pushing to get it done. So we did. We started very late, since we had dinner very late; we weren't actually recording until after 11 p.m. Because it was so late we didn't have much trouble keeping it relatively short. The show turned out to be only an hour and eight minutes long, which is short for us.

I haven't listened back, but my recollection is that we weren't good at keeping the audience oriented to what we were talking about. There's a principle I heard long ago that is usually applied to writing or public speaking. It goes something like "tell the audience what you're going to say, say it, then tell them what you've said." Of course, many essays and talks don't follow that structure literally, but good ones do tend to frame the argument in some memorable and coherent way. We sort of jumped into the middle of the essay, so I think yesterday we didn't do a great job of introducing and summarizing our argument. But I am glad we got a show out.

Low on Coffee, Low on Sleep

I wound up not consuming any caffeine at all yesterday. I just didn't feel like I wanted any. But this morning I definitely needed, and indulged in, a good-sized coffee hit. Sam made a pot before I left and I took a mason jar of coffee and coconut milk with me in the car. I slept pretty well, but not long enough. I've got that dull headache and slight feeling of nausea and eyestrain that afflicts me whenever I don't get quite enough sleep. It seems to be the price of those Sundays when we aren't able to get the podcast done until it is very late. I hold out hope that eventually we can settle into a routine that won't require me to stay up quite so late on Sundays. Ideally our bedtimes would be at about the same time every night of the week.

Our budget is very tight this week. We're hoping to hear good news about the old house, while at the same time not getting our hopes up too high.

Apparently flags all over Washington, DC are at half-mast in memoriam of John McCain, while the flag on the White House remains stubbornly at the top of its pole. This bizarre period in our history is going to be a real challenge to future authors of history textbooks. I'm reminded of a line from Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn*: "She will remember your heart when men are fairy tales in books written by rabbits."

Tuesday

When I got home last night I walked into quite the mess: rooms trashed, dirty dishes piled up, and a lot of food left out on counters. I was tired and had a headache. It wasn't good. The kids were picking fights with each other and doing a lot of screaming.

The Offer Vanishes

I got a text message from our realtor telling me that the buyer who made the \$75,000 offer had backed out. For reasons I'm not going to go into at the moment, it appears that the "backup" \$70,000 offer is also no longer on the table. So we are not very happy about the state of our efforts to sell the old house.

Eventually, and painfully slowly, we got the evening beaten into some kind of shape; our housemate cleaned up some dishes, I lay down briefly while she did that. We wrangled the kids to do some more cleanup. I wanted them all out of the kitchen before I would even go in there, because I was just too over-stimulated. Once we got them out, I went in. At my suggestion, Grace looked online for something to do with 3 pounds of flank steak and an Instant Pot. She found a recipe for “Mongolian Beef” and we had leftover rice. So we made that. That used half the flank steak. Grace did most of the prep. I steamed some broccoli. I was impatient, and I hate mushy broccoli, so I didn’t steam it long enough. It was nearly raw, but I kind of like it that way. The kids ate it without actual complaint (they eat raw broccoli all the time), although they kept asking why it was crunchy.

The recipe made a very Americanized dish, extremely sweet and syrupy. But the flank steak cooked down very nicely after a few minutes on the “sauté” setting, eight minutes on high pressure, and a ten-minute cool-down. It had a nice beef flavor. The sauté setting really won’t crank out enough heat to get a good sear, so if we make this again I will try searing the meat in a cast-iron pan first. We will also cut down on the sugar.

I’ve made dishes like this before in both an electric wok (not great but it can be done) and a gas-fired wok (great). This dish would normally be made by stir-frying the meat. Had we done it that way, we could have also stir-fried the broccoli. Last night we were just not up for the drama and splattering oil and extra fans to keep the smoke detector from going off, but maybe I will try making the dish in the wok again sometime soon.

Then I did another round of emptying the dishwasher, and another round of loading the dishwasher, and a round of hand-washing. I got through most of the dishes, but my energy was flagging. So there was still a small pile of knives and other small items to hand-wash, next to the sink.

***The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

I tried to read for a little while before bed. I read a few more pages in *The Revenge of the Rose*. I was pretty tired, though, and couldn’t even finish a whole chapter. However, I’m enjoying the book. I’m increasingly convinced that it really is an homage to *Inverted World*. It also seems to be a pretty blatant socialist political parable, which I’m finding quite curious; most of this seems to be driven by the poet character, Wheldrake. Wheldrake seems to have a Dickensian attitude towards the poverty and squalor he sees around him, and tries to actually do something about it.

From Karin L. Cross:

Wheldrake is a “little cockscomb” of a man: short, red-haired, birdlike, wearing a coat that he can’t button because of all the books he has crammed in his pockets. He’s inspired by Algernon Swinburne, a

Victorian poet much admired by Moorcock, and his name is derived from a pseudonym that Swinburne used to write bad reviews of his own work. Wheldrake spins a poem at the drop of a hat and his capacious memory contains a verse for every occasion, invariably one of his own. He leads what another famous time traveler would call a “wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey” existence; the Rose is familiar with poems he hasn’t written yet, and he has already written verse based on stories of Elric’s as-yet-unfinished life. There’s an advantage in this temporal peculiarity: his poetry is at once a chronicle and an oracle of Elric’s adventures with the Rose, and more than once a fragment of his verse clarifies another twist in their quest.

Cross has largely positive comments about this novel, although she does “teach the controversy:”

That Moorcock is a clever comic writer is well known in particular to readers of the *Dancers at the End of Time* series, and it’s fun to see him deploying those skills in an Elric book. Well, for me it is, at any rate. When published, *The Revenge of the Rose* was somewhat controversial amongst Moorcock’s fans; some disliked his departure from the established formula of the books, and others thought it was the best Elric book in years.

But not everyone appreciates the politics and philosophy:

So far, so heavy-handed: we have a fairly obvious metaphor with a zesty Marxist flavour about class conflict and the illusion of progress. Let’s set aside the fact that Moorcock lifts the “town that is eternally mobile for the sake of some vaguely-formed idea of progress” idea from Christopher Priest’s *The Inverted World* and address the even worse problem with this segment of the book: to wit, that after he carefully sets up this metaphor in such a heavy-handed manner that no reader could possibly fail to grasp what he’s getting at, he then devotes page after tedious page to having Elric, Wheldrake, the Rose and the Phatts sitting around talking and talking and talking and talking about the metaphor and picking it apart atom by atom.

I understand the reviewer’s annoyance at the blatant politics of the story, but I don’t think Arthur B’s description of the text is accurate or fair. I’ve just met the Phatts, and we did spend a few pages with them, but the topic of conversation was, mostly, their family’s peculiar talents for navigating the multiverse. That section is about eight pages, but not very much of it is dialogue. And before we’ve even gotten through one night with all the characters under the same roof, the story is off and running again, with Elric chasing after the Rose, and whipping out Stormbringer, and leaving a trail of corpses in his wake. Maybe the part with “Elric, Wheldrake, the Rose and the Phatts sitting around talking and talking and talking and talking about the metaphor and picking it apart atom by atom” comes later?

Or maybe — and this is just a wild guess here — that part exists mostly in Arthur B’s angry memories? Wheldrake and the Phatts do *talk* about their love of philosophy, but they don’t actually demonstrate that they can walk the walk, and I’m actually a bit disappointed, because here the text seems like it is slipping into too much “telling” and not enough “showing.” I’d like to read a few of those pages and pages of ideas! But then, I like philosophical science fiction and fantasy, and always have; maybe I just have a higher tolerance for the *ideas* in genres that, it seems to me, have always been vehicles for ideas.

I will agree with him that Moorcock’s tendency to switch to the present tense is odd, although I didn’t find that it derailed my reading experience.

Dragon Venom

One should remember to be cautious of reviews one discovers online. (Including this one). For example, on Goodreads, one reviewer claims:

Elric does not use Stormbringer to give him strength throughout the entire story. He does not use typical herb-like drugs to give him strength either but rather uses dragon venom once, which sustains him during the entire duration of the novel.

I haven’t finished the book, but so far Moorcock has mentioned Elric using dragon venom to restore his fading strength several times. For example:

Next morning, before the others wake, Elric creeps down to the kitchen and finds the water-tub, crumbling a little dragon’s venom into a tankard, and muffling his own shrieks as the stuff punishes each corpuscle, each cell and atom of his being, and then his strength and arrogance return.

And Elric also leaves the moving city in dramatic fashion, and as he slays his way out, Stormbringer does indeed recharge him:

Elric knew only that the Rose was in certain danger. At last his patience had deserted him and it was almost with relief that he let the hellsword take its toll of blood and souls, while he felt a huge, thrilling vitality fill him and he cried out the impossible names of unlikely gods!

If this was Twitter, I’d include an image meme of Luke Skywalker saying “every word of what you just said was wrong.” Readers aren’t always close readers, I guess.

A close reader might also wonder why Elric, who knows dragon venom is a legendary stimulant, and who is from an island with a plentiful and renewable supply of dragon venom, has never before tried using it to help him overcome his “deficient blood,” an anemia-like condition which, untreated, will slowly kill him. Moorcock rationalizes this: apparently dragon venom is dangerously stimulating.

He describes Elric using just a tiny crumb of dried venom, dissolved in water, and still risking a fatal overdose.

Apparently dragon venom is to Elric's usual drugs as fentanyl is to heroin, so maybe he wouldn't want to risk using it on a regular basis. But Elric has developed a habit of finding himself stranded far from his usual supply of life-sustaining drugs. Wouldn't he have also made it a habit, by now, to carry an emergency backup supply of dragon venom, maybe cut with something safer, like meth?

Imagine Sleepy Dragons

Moorcock early on created his dragons with serious limits, so that he wouldn't introduce a weapon capable of defeating any enemy. So each of Melniboné's dragons can only fly against the nation's enemies for one day, and then must sleep for a hundred years, to recharge. Therefore, the dragons are a weapon that must almost always be kept in reserve. And I guess Moorcock didn't want his dragons to be the usual clichéd fire-breathers, so they don't breathe fire; instead, they squirt napalm, or white phosphorous, or something like a combination of the two. The dragons' venom makes anything it touches burst into flames. I think Moorcock was probably thinking of white phosphorous and napalm when he designed his dragons — they were a terror weapon. The warriors of Melniboné who used them were not nice folks.

Come to think of it, it doesn't actually make much sense that an extremely volatile, reactive substance like dragon venom would also work as a stimulant drug. I guess it's not really fair to ask that stories involving dragons should also be scientifically plausible. But a little more internal consistency would help me suspend disbelief, which makes a fantasy far more enjoyable. To me at least. Your mileage may differ.

A Departure for Elric

Anyway. This book is quite a departure, stylistically, from the earlier Elric books. It is structured in the three-novellas format of the older fix-ups, but the more discursive and digressive writing, at least in the first part, makes it read much more like a traditional novel, where the author feels free to take the time to show you around, and where digression isn't a dirty word. Elric himself fades into the background quite a bit in this story. He's not driving events, but going along with them and reacting to them. That feels strange, and the result is that I don't think this even really needed to be an Elric story at all. Of course, Elric had name recognition and could sell books.

My opinion of this book is not fully formed yet, and definitely subject to revision; at this stage, I haven't even completed the first of three parts.

Looking at a few reviews today, I noticed that several bloggers have given very complimentary reviews to a Moorcock story which isn't in my Gollancz omnibus

editions, called “Black Petals.” It’s in the 2010 Del Rey collection called *Elric: Swords and Roses*, though. So it seems like I might eventually want to get a copy of that volume, along with *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*. I don’t think there’s much else in the Del Rey omnibus series that I don’t already have in the Gollancz volumes.

Note added in 2023: I eventually got all seven volumes of the Del Rey Chronicles of the Last Emperor of Melniboné paperback series. Swords and Roses, the last volume, is especially scarce. I finally found a battered and creased copy on eBay, but it took years, as my saved search only occasionally found copies for sale, and most of them cost far more than I was willing to pay.

Today for breakfast I had tea and butter-flavored instant grits.

Today for lunch I ate my last two frozen burritos from the office freezer. One of them appeared to be filled with the vomit of someone who recently ate rice and chicken, and the other, something that looked like shredded pitbull.

Then I had some antacids.

Wednesday

Last night wasn’t great. Grace wound up, unexpectedly, at a meeting, and she was out until late. She left some soup in the Instant Pot for dinner. But when I got home, things were a mess, and again I couldn’t wrangle the kids into doing anything; when I’d ask them to do a chore, they’d immediately start arguing with each other about who should do the chore, and not even answer me. After the third round of this, I decided to give up until Grace got home. I just wasn’t up to any more ridiculous arguments. So I just wasted time on my phone until Grace got home.

After she got home, she wrangled kids for a while, and we ate the soup. I’d like to say it was worth waiting for, but it wasn’t actually great. It was a combination of some kind of split pea mix, with chicken added. The result wasn’t delicious. It seems like maybe the split peas and beans in the mix were stale, or something like that. It edible, but just wasn’t very good.

More kitchen cleanup, more kid-wrangling, then bed. This week has been a slog. We got a pretty good night’s sleep, though.

I was supposed to take the leftover soup for lunch but I forgot it. I indulged myself with breakfast out at Joe and Rosie Creamery. I had a lox and cream cheese sandwich with capers and a coffee. It was supposed to be served on a bagel, but they were out of bagels so I had them make it with a toasted ciabatta roll. And even though I was running late, I decided it was worth it to eat it there. It was very satisfying. Almost satisfying enough to make me not regret putting it on my credit card. Sorry/not sorry.

There was one last yogurt left in the office fridge and I ate that for lunch. That doesn’t seem like enough, though. And now I’m staring at a box of packets of

instant grits and one lonely can of sardines with nothing to put them on. Can I combine the grits and sardines, so that I've got some carbohydrate and fat and protein?

Ummm, maybe I'm not that hungry.

***The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

There were only a few pages to go in the first part of *The Revenge of the Rose*, so I finished it this morning. It looks like the pieces have been moved not just elsewhere on the game board, but to a new board. That seems unsatisfying. Moorcock spent some time setting up the conditions for conflict and perhaps insurgency and revolution in the traveling cities — is he really just leaving all that behind now? If so, I'm likely going to be revising my opinion of this novel downward quite a bit. I will say this — it overturned my expectations. But not in a good way. Moorcock had just gotten me interested in the caravan world.

The way the first part ends reminds me of another book. I'm fairly certain that the train of walking cathedrals in *Absolution Gap* by Alastair Reynolds was likely inspired by the moving city in *The Revenge of the Rose*.

Buggy Tools

Last night and today I've been wrestling with what should have been a simple change to the display code for our device GUI. I changed a string that we use to display laser wavelength, to hold one more digit. For example, when the laser is tuned to channel one, it held "1565.49." I changed it so it would instead hold "1565.495." I changed the width of the StringField object that draws this string so that it had room for the extra digit.

When the page first comes up, the field looks fine. But when something changes elsewhere on the page and it is redrawn, then suddenly the string field loses the rightmost digit.

I messed with this a long time last night, trying to figure out if there was some kind of a bug in the redrawing code where it needed a little more width. In discussion with the Amulet folks today, they had the same thought, and suggested I try to widen the field by five or ten pixels. I tried widening it by 30 pixels. Nope.

It turns out, though, if I make the field left-justified rather than right-justified, the digit doesn't disappear. This doesn't actually fix the problem, because instead of a digit disappearing, we have a digit that is partially drawn, even though there is room in the string field for the whole digit.

There's a saying that goes something like "it's a poor craftsman who blames his tools for shoddy work." But many times in software engineering we *do* have tools with problems, and they are often unpredictable problems. I've gotten

confirmation from Amulet that there are bugs in the string field drawing code that can cause this issue. And it turns out they are pretty severe.

I don't think the Amulet tools we are using on this project are bad *per se*. We started this project while they were fairly early in their development cycle, though, and there were serious, show-stopper bugs, initially. Those are gone, fortunately. Even without the serious bugs, we have still had to work around a lot of minor issues.

There is a newer version. No doubt it is less buggy. But sometimes the bugs you know are better than the bugs you don't know. I'm nervous of the time cost of getting all our old code working properly on the newer version. Justifying that kind of time commitment is especially hard when a software engineering department is a department of one. Let's say the port takes three person-weeks to get everything working right (and that might be overly optimistic). That would be three full weeks of the entire department's time.

But it might be time to do that, or at least to verify whether this drawing bug still exists in the new version.

I was feeling bad enough that I actually went on a junk food binge, which is something I very rarely do. Or, rather, my idea of a junk food binge is that every couple of weeks I might pick up a bag of gummi candies when I get gas, eat a few of them, and give the rest to the kids. But a few times a year I seem to require something more extreme, like a bag of Chex Mix and a bag of Haribo peach gummis.

House Offer Update

We got an old offer forwarded from our real estate agent: a lowball offer at \$60,000, from the same people who offered \$75,000 and retracted that offer. I asked her to look into whether the folks who offered \$70,000 might still be interested. We can't make a \$60,000 offer work. We *might* be able to make a \$70,000 offer work.

The Amulet engineers have reproduced the problem that I'm seeing, and I've been testing workarounds they suggest, but so far the workarounds don't work. However, it looks like I might have discovered my own workaround in the process.

Thursday

Hey, it's Thursday!

We still have \$168.71 in our checking account, and I get paid tonight, so the odds are that we'll make it through this week without overdrawing the account. That's always nice.

I'm still scrambling to figure out how we are going to pay the paint and plaster guys another \$2,500 when the insurance company owes us \$1,700 and they haven't reimbursed us yet.

No house news.

The programming workaround I discovered yesterday is holding up, and seems like it works under testing. I haven't yet been able to test all configurations, but it's looking very promising.

Last night for dinner we had little lamb steaks, the rest of the sweet corn, and steamed broccoli. I had been slightly grossed out last time we cooked these because Grace made them "blue rare." In general I'm more of a "medium rare" guy; I like my steak to have several textures and flavors, with a nice crispy sear on the outside, a lightly cooked zone, and a red center. I do have to say, though, that the rare lamb was absolutely delicious, despite looking a little off-putting.

So this time Grace cooked them longer, and they were unfortunately cooked all the way to well done, or nearly so.

They're really not very good that way. Lamb, I think, starts to taste bad when cooked brown, even more so than beef. I'm hoping next time maybe we can try for "rare." It's hard to figure out how long to broil these. I think the bone conducts heat to the center, so the parts next to the bone tend to get cooked faster than we expect. It's also hard to concentrate on the food when there are crises popping up all around us while we are cooking. I think a sudden urgent diaper change might have been the reason these lamb steaks were well done.

Roll for Damage

Every evening this week I've found things in our home damaged. One night, I found the door of the dishwasher was badly bent in one corner. It looks like maybe there was something on the floor, like a can, and someone tried to open it all the way, and forced it down onto the can. I don't think it was just because one of the little kids sat on the door while it was standing open. That wouldn't have put this big bend in the bottom edge of the door right at one spot. It had to have been forced down on something hard, using the hinge as a lever. It's hard to bend the metal cover of the dishwasher. I was completely unable to bend it back with my hands.

No one knows anything. No one saw anything.

The hinge on that side is a bit loose now. I'm reminded of that time the kids broke the hinges of our oven. It was a great old oven, probably from the 1980s, built far better than any modern one. We got an appliance repair company out to look at it. They couldn't do anything because it was impossible to get parts.

It looks like the kids are probably going to break this dishwasher too, and it will happen when we're not looking, and no one will admit blame, and no one will have seen anything.

The next night I found deep gouges in the plaster on one of the walls in the kitchen. It looked like someone gouged it with the end of a broom we have, which is missing any kind of protective tip over the metal tubing. So it looks

like we need to get rid of that broom. And of course no one will admit blame, and no one saw anything.

And the next night I found that on one wall, down low, there were chips knocked off the plaster, exposing a metal edge on the wall. This is just the sort of thing that Benjamin will no doubt now start picking at whenever no one is watching him. He did this again and again in the old house, literally tearing holes in our walls, bit by bit. And of course no one will admit blame, and no one saw anything.

If things were going well, financially, it wouldn't be a big deal to get the walls repaired. It wouldn't be a big deal to get a dishwasher replaced. But at present, there's no money available to repair these things. Is it any wonder why I sit at my desk with heartburn, hoping that I don't come home to find yet more damage to our home?

***The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

I've read a few more chapters of *The Revenge of the Rose* — the first few chapters of the second part. Moorcock does some imaginative world-building here, with the "heavy sea" and a bizarre giant frog. But the inconsistencies in style at the sentence and paragraph levels are off-putting. Some paragraphs switch to present tense. That seems like a reasonable stylistic choice, to switch to an omniscient present tense occasionally, in order to give the reader a sense that things are going on as we watch. But the text is inconsistent within in these paragraphs. Some *sentences* within the present-tense paragraphs switch back to past tense. And some of these paragraphs are presented in italic type, and some aren't, for no reason that I can discern.

I find that I am unable to give Moorcock the benefit of the doubt, and believe that he was following an intentional plan to use tense and italics to achieve specific effects in specific paragraphs. It really just seems like he didn't settle on a technique, and didn't bother to go back over the text to rationalize things. I think it's even possible that the italicized passages were intended as notes to himself, meaning "write this part out properly later." The text is distracting in its inconsistency. These stories were all supposedly given a thorough edit for the Gollancz omnibus editions. I find it very hard to believe that the text of this novel was re-edited at all.

Friday

Well, we made it to the next paycheck. Our low-water mark last night was \$8.71. And after moving money out to our Team One account to cover fixed expenses, and putting small amount into savings to help cover a credit card payment due in a couple of weeks, there's not a lot left. Things are going to be tight this week. And today I need to buy a big jug of our laundry detergent, and do a Costco run.

So in my spreadsheet I'm trying to plot things out: how many times will we need to fill up my car? (Probably one, tonight, only about \$20.00.) How many times will we need to fill up Grace's car? (Maybe one, and that can be \$60.00.) Are we traveling this coming week? (A round trip to Saginaw in the truck with the kids costs a tank of gas plus snacks and/or a meal out.) How much am I going to spend at Costco tonight, and what am I going to buy?

On Fridays we usually buy one or two containers of their ready-to-bake salmon. We used to get two, but our houseguests have not been joining us for Friday dinners recently, so I've been getting just one. They are pretty expensive, though, about \$20.00. A cheaper alternative is a large cheese pizza, about \$10.00. But not everyone can eat cheese, and Grace and I don't really want to pack on simple carbs like that. So I'll be scratching my head. I will probably get another large bag of the Lundgren short-grain brown rice, which is really tasty. Maybe I'll get another large container of oatmeal. I didn't really plan for a vegetarian dinner like chana masala. We could throw something together. However, tomatoes are bothering Grace, and bothering me too. So are onions. It's possible to cook vegetarian dishes that don't involve tomatoes or onions. It sounds about as appealing as living on Soylent.

So I'll get more butter, eggs, bacon, rice, oatmeal, red meat of some kind, maybe some kind of fish for this evening such as frozen fish, and bagged salad. Costco will probably be crowded since this is Labor Day weekend. It will be nice to have a day off. I should probably pick up something to grill, but I don't want the extra expense this week. Honestly I don't even want to buy wood for our firepit. Maybe I should send the kids into the woods to scrounge dead wood.

***The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

Last night I finished the second part of *The Revenge of the Rose*. I'm pleased to report that the style of the book settles down a little bit and Moorcock doesn't keep wandering into present-tense or italicized paragraphs. There's an interesting bit about the character called Esbern Snare, who is the navigator on Prince Gaynor's ship. Wheldrake vanishes. Elric, Snare, and Gaynor witness a strange confrontation between two Chaos Lords, Arioeh and Mashabak. There are some pretty cool, but long-winded, speeches. Moorcock seems to be pretty openly proclaiming his world view through Elric. But the events feel a bit too much like the events in the first part of *The Sleeping Sorceress*, and Elric's other confrontations with Arioeh, such as the one in the third part of *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*. Then it's all blown up into chaos again, the game board cleared for the next part — before the reader gets to develop much interest in what is happening.

I'm in too deep to not complete this novel; after all, I'm reading it as my project to read all (or nearly all) of the Elric material, in an attempt to fill in some gaps in my education. And I'm curious how it ends. But I'm sure tempted to bail out at this point.

My Elric Recommendations

At this point I think I would highly recommend the following Elric stories to new readers:

- “The Dreaming City”
- “While the Gods Laugh”
- “The Stealer of Souls”
- “Kings in Darkness”
- “The Caravan of Forgotten Dreams” (titled “The Flame Bringers” in some collections)
- *Stormbringer*
- “The Singing Citadel”
- “The Eternal Champion”
- *Elric of Melniboné*

It’s not really an Elric story, but I’d also recommend the short story “The Stone Thing,” in which Moorcock makes fun of his own style.

Consider just stopping there. In fact, I’d consider buying just the first two volumes of the Del Rey *Chronicles of the Last Emperor of Melniboné* series, entitled *Elric: The Stealer of Souls* (2008), and *Elric: To Rescue Tanelorn*. This will give you everything on that short list except for *Elric of Melniboné*, the novel. For that either pick up a cheap used paperback, or buy the third book in the Del Rey series, *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress* (not to be confused with the book of the same title from Gollancz), which also contains the novel *Elric of Melniboné*.

If you want to continue after reading everything on that list, maybe try *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate*. I can’t really recommend either *The Fortress of the Pearl* or *The Revenge of the Rose*, though. And I can’t speak to a lot of the other Moorcock stuff, although I am hoping to read a little more of it eventually.

Other Books on the Pile

I’ve got some interesting non-fiction waiting, including some that has been waiting a long time. I think it’s time to read *The Conquest of Bread* by Peter Kropotkin. Maybe I’ll get through all the Elric stories in my Gollancz editions with the exception of the three Moonbeam Roads novels, and take a non-fiction break from all this fiction.

We got a brief update from our realtor; she’s been talking to other agents. But there’s no real news to report.

Today I ran out on my lunch break to pick up a gallon jug of Allen’s Naturally laundry detergent (“Washes 512 Loads!”), a container of Dr. Bronner Sal-Suds, and a bar of Dr. Bronner’s bath soap. All three of these things are examples of our “expensive frugality.” The detergent is \$50 a bottle but it really does wash a lot of loads because it is highly concentrated. (I don’t know if it is 512, but

it's a lot). The bottle of Sal-Suds was about \$12.00, but I will dilute it to refill our dishwashing soap bottle at least eight times. We have put some effort into choosing these “expensive up front but frugal in the long run” products, but it does hurt when we have to refill them.

A Text Messaging Bug in Android Phones

A while back — maybe a month or five weeks ago, I can't remember for sure — I was at Costco and exchanging text messages with Grace. We had talked out earlier what I was going to buy. But then she sent a text message that mentioned a bunch of those things we had agreed we didn't need.

It didn't quite make sense. It also seemed like a sentence didn't end and there was some kind of strange typo. As old people we generally write text messages that are complete sentences and fix our typos.

I was annoyed because it seemed like she had forgotten what we talked about. She had no idea why I was annoyed. I started quoting her text message back to her. She had no idea what I was talking about.

When I got home I asked to see her phone so I could compare the text message she sent to the text message I received. It turns out the one I got was very different than the one her phone showed that she had sent. The message I received was about twice as long as the one she sent, with the old list appended.

Apparently she had, earlier, drafted a list, but before sending it, deleted about half of it. I'm not quite sure of the details. I think she might have drafted the list using a notepad app. Then later in the day she copied that message into a text message, and sent it.

Somehow when I got her text message, that old deleted text had been appended to it.

Unfortunately shortly after this happened Grace's old phone died, and that led to that whole saga of me buying two different replacement batteries from two different sources, then giving up and finally buying her a brand new phone. But I've meant, since then, to get her phone powered up and take pictures of the message she sent, and the message I received, side by side to illustrate what happened. Today I got her old phone powered up and it still has her outgoing text, but unfortunately my phone's Messaging app, which had the corrupted message, has apparently not kept texts that old, and I don't think there's any way to get them back.

If the year was 1995 I would write this up and submit it to the Usenet group **comp.risks** as an example of a potentially dangerous bug. Instead I was going to write up an article on my old programming blog, Geek Like Me Too. But without screen shots or the exact text in question it's not going to be very compelling.

I'm not sure at exactly which stage the bug had its effect. However it happened, the text Grace sent looked the way she expected it to. The extra text was somehow appended invisibly. I don't really have any idea exactly how it happened. A bug in the notepad app, Messaging app, the Java runtime, or the Java string library? It sounds just a bit like the "Heartbleed" bug, in that the wrong number of characters were sent. Maybe the code that copied characters to send kept going, and ran into an old string in memory, which contained the deleted text from the notepad app? It seems plausible, but I can't prove just what happened.

This seems like a particularly bad bug, but I'm not shocked it is there. The lesson to me is that we should be considering carefully how much we rely on these tools. This was just confusion over a shopping list, but I know people discussing much more serious things use text messages all the time. And there's really no assurance that the text messages your interlocutor receives are the messages that you think you sent. That should give us pause, I think.

Saturday

Last night I made a run to Costco. I tried to get some cheaper things, but it didn't really help that much. It's just expensive to buy decent food for a large family. I got three bags of water softener salt, a case of LaCroix fizzy water, a big bag of brown rice, two bags of hamburger buns, a box of frozen cod fillets, bacon, a tray of ready-to-bake macaroni and cheese, two boxes of butter, two bags of kale salad, two bags of Brussels sprouts, a bag of apples, a package of beef round, a package of steaks, two trays of eggs, and two bags of bananas.

I got one more LED lantern; I've been buying one each time I go, and I plan to get one more, for a total of six, if they still have them next time. That will be a half-dozen lanterns to use during a power outage, which should be enough for people to use on all three floors of the house.

For dinner we had the battered cod, the tray of macaroni and cheese, steamed green beans made in the Instant Pot, and brown rice. After we got things cleaned up I took the kids down into the basement to watch a few episodes of Lego Ninjago.

The Wild Robot Escapes by Peter Brown

I realized today that I've forgotten to mention a book I've been reading to the kids at bedtime this week: *The Wild Robot Escapes* by Peter Brown. I bought this book a few months ago, and it's been sitting on the shelf forgotten for some time. It's the sequel to *The Wild Robot*, a book we enjoyed a couple of years ago. The earlier book was quite dramatic and worked by setting up this crazy juxtaposition of a very advanced robot with a remote wilderness setting. I thought it was one of the best children's books I've read in recent years.

This sequel I'm not so sure about; it seems to spend an awful lot of time referring back to the first book. There's a phrase I heard recently that I thought was

funny — a movie shouldn't spend a lot of effort to remind you of a better movie. This book seems to want to spend a lot of words to remind me of a better book. I'm not sure that's going to really pay off. But Joshua enjoyed it, and he wants to review it on the podcast. We've told him that if he wants to review a book, he has to write a one-page book report, then he can come on the show and talk about it. So he might be on the show on Saturday.

In fact several of the kids have been asking me if they can record their own podcast. At the moment my recording setup can only accommodate two speakers. But it's worth considering that in the future if I can create a setup with more microphones, maybe I should. It would also be possible to set up a table discussion and record it with a simple stereo recorder, although it may be harder to get everyone clearly recorded that way.

***The Conquest of Bread* Peter Kropotkin**

After we got the kids quieted down for the night, I started to read Peter Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* to Grace. Actually I only made it part-way through the introduction by David Priestland. This book represents another side of socialist, leftist thought that is not so widely known in mainstream America: the anarchist side. Americans often think of socialism as an authoritarian, statist, bureaucratic socialism. In Kropotkin's version, governance has devolved from a giant state to self-governance by small democratic groups. I think we are going to find a lot to appreciate in Kropotkin, as well as things to debate. We will probably talk about this book on the podcast soon, maybe as soon as this weekend. I'm also looking forward to investigating the works of some other anarchist thinkers.

***The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, Almost Concluded**

This morning I made it almost to the end of *The Revenge of the Rose*. Elric and Wheldrake are reunited and find the Rose and the three sisters. There's a magical sequence that is pretty nifty where the three sisters each get magical swords that match their wardrobes. There's a battle with the forces of Chaos (this is not terribly surprising). Again Elric saves the day by summoning an ancient ally that has never been mentioned in Moorcock's work before, and will never be mentioned again. This doesn't happen in every one of Elric's stories, but often enough to become predictable.

I'll finish the novel this afternoon. Then I think I have only one story to read — "The Flaneur des Arcades de l'Opera," found in *Elric: The Sleeping Sorceress and Other Stories*. I'll finish that today as well, and include some comments on that story in my notes for tomorrow. Then I will be done with all my Gollancz editions of Moorcock's Elric stories, with the exception of the big final volume, the one containing the Moonbeam Roads novels.

We heard from our realtor that there was another showing, but after seeing the house, the party in question had no interest at all in buying it.

Media Discussed This Week

This list does not include books, chapters of books, or other works that I only mentioned briefly in the text above.

- *The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, in *Elric: The Revenge of the Rose* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- *The Wild Robot Escapes* by Peter Brown
- *The Conquest of Bread* Peter Kropotkin

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, September 1st, 2018

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