

STICKY WICKET

Corona VII – here comes the sun?

Mole

Original artwork by Pete Jeffs - www.peterjeffsart.com

It's been a long, cold, lonely winter...It seems like years since it's been clear.

Welcome, my friends, to week seven (it may well be more than that by the time you get to read this but I'm working in real time), to the CoVOID. I'm safe and well, thank you, and I most sincerely hope that you and yours are as well. For those who are not or know someone who is not, my most sincere, heartfelt wishes for recovery, and *very* sincere condolences if you have lost someone. It needs to be said and, I guess, I said it (but words on a page cannot convey what we are feeling). While we all hope that *something* good will come of all of this, it is the opposite of something good.

On a completely different note, I need to clarify something, especially since my job, in part, is to lighten up. As you know, I am an insectivore but, when I say this, I am referring to Order *Insectivora* (Class *Mammalia*) and not that I exclusively eat insects. I don't have anything *against* insects, really (except that cricket legs get stuck in my teeth), but my neighbor, Vole, very kindly left me a big basket of insects on my front steps. For the record, I am very fond of cake, and 18-year-old, um, 'tea.' Just in case you were thinking of sending me something.

Oh, that sounded grumpy, didn't it? It was very kind of Vole, and it does seem that people are being rather nice these days. Most people, anyway. I see them when I go out, dutifully wearing masks in the supermarket (many of them), keeping social distance (many of them) and doing their best (most of them) to prevent the continuing spread

of this Terrible Pandemic, the TP. (Okay, they are still clearing the shelves of any shred of the *other* TP, but I understand that this is a commodity that is prized above all others, for some reason.)

As I say, *most of them*. When I physically go into work, the few people who are around wear masks and respect the rules for social distancing, line up for screening and stay away when they don't feel well. We understand that this is necessary. I'm sure you do as well. But there are just too many people *out there* who just don't get it. Yesterday, I reiterated to a local business-person (by telephone; I don't have real reality meetings) that the death rate in our country (my country, the one run by people in clown suits) is currently six percent. Tossing safe practice aside is akin to choosing to drink one of seventeen shot glasses of 'tea,' knowing that one of them contains plutonium. Actually, since critical disease is well above ten percent, make that one in ten, knowing that one contains weed killer. And they take one of these chances, for themselves, and everyone in their families *every time they go out*. I'm furious. *Breathe, Mole*. For the record, the local business-person I was talking to is not one of *those people*. Actually, he is doing his best to try to do something to help. As are many others, and I thank them very much.

But now, frighteningly, it seems that we have declared that it's all over, despite there being 25,000 *confirmed* new cases per day in my country (it is likely to be much more, since we are still not testing at a reasonable level). We are 're-opening.' Not just opening a few stores and restaurants, using extreme care to monitor and trace contacts, but throwing away our masks and gloves, and just *wishing*. Look, I

get it: Far too many folks have lost jobs, lost friends and family, lost hope. We seem to have given up. Mission accomplished. Time to move on, even if we are not even remotely ready.

I wish I could find something funny here. Sure, there is humor in watching a little man, spouting nonsense, sitting in front of a huge seated figure of a truly great human (I just saw this). Humorous in the same way that we watch a magician who doesn't know that the rabbit he is about to produce is poking his head out of the lapel of the performer's jacket. In our case, though, the rabbit is actually a poisonous viper. Sigh.

I know that some of you, reading this, are not in the same situation that I am. You live in countries that have reacted admirably to this crisis, and are doing everything they can to sustain successful containment. My friends in China tell me that things are going well, as do my friends in Austria and Germany. Yesterday I spoke with friends in Italy and Spain, and they are optimistic. Good for you, really, all of you. I very much hope it's true (and I don't have any reason to think it's not true). Please keep me posted.

Okay, Mole, back to science. As I write this, we are preparing to slowly re-open our labs. To get back to doing what we do,

this biomedical research thing. Unlike my country, my institution is doing this *very* slowly, with strict rules for social distancing and hygiene, and every one of us will be regularly tested for the virus. It's all in place. We have not squandered the time we have created by isolation. I'm really proud of my institution. And I so hope that, where you are, similar procedures are in place or will be.

If not, think about what you can do to make where you work the *safest* place to be. If rules are not in place, make some. Then think about making more. We are not just scientists, we are the *best people to understand the dangers and how to avoid them*. Please, please, please, ensure that you and those you work with (I know, *with whom you work*) avoid contracting and spreading this terrible thing. This is not a time to ignore practices that are unsafe, if you have the ability to at least make them safer. If you are working in a lab, talk to your mentor. If you run a lab, talk to your colleagues. If you run a department, talk to the leadership. We know what we need to do, and what we can do, to make our workplaces, if not completely safe, safer.

Here comes the sun. And I so hope, very much, that it's all right.