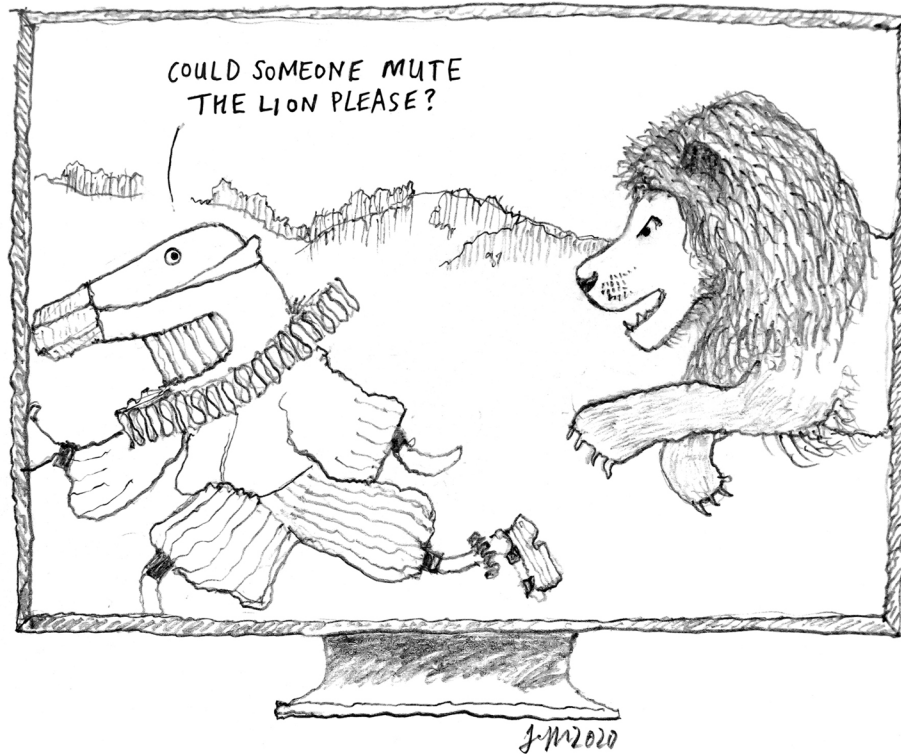


STICKY WICKET

Corona XVII – feeling puckish

Mole



Original artwork by Pete Jeffs - www.peterjeffsart.com

ACT I, Scene one

(Enter Theseus, an extremely fit ex-Molet; Hippolyta, newly wed to Theseus and also very fit; Hermia and Lysander, a Mole lab couple, although Hermia is an ex-Molet, located far away; Helena and Demetrius, another Mole lab couple, still in the lab. Online meeting, many are voice only, due to low bandwidth.)

Theseus: Hey everyone, what's happening? Sorry, I meant to say, our nuptial hour drew apace and we tied the knot. We had to hike around to find a good place to socially distance, but it was pretty nice. (*Ad lib chorus of congratulations, intermittent due to the online software.*) Yeah, thanks everyone. We'll probably honeymoon in the forest since we can't go to Europe, which pretty much sucks. Even Canada won't let us in. Hey, Hermia, good to see you. Except I can't see you. How's Demetrius?

Hermia: You mean Lysander? He's right here. I guess Demetrius is okay too, but I only see him in the lab.

Demetrius: I'm fine, Theseus. Congratulations to you and Hippolyta. Helena, how are you? Helena? I think you're muted.

Helena: Sorry, I was checking my email. I do entreat your grace to pardon me.

I know not by what power I am made bold. Nor how it may concern my modesty. What?

Demetrius: I just asked how you are. What do you think? Theseus and Hippolyta got married! I know that this isn't what we usually talk about, and it really has nothing to do with science, the CoVOID, or how we deal with all of this and what we might want to think about, but still.

Hermia: I think it's awesome. A bit of good news to share! That's all. By the way, how do you like my Athenian palace background?

ACT I, Scene two

(The lab, socially distanced. Enter Molets, wearing masks: Quince, Snug, Bottom, Flute, Snout, and Starveling, who will prepare for the next journal club.)

Quince: Is our journal club company here? Marry, our paper is, the most lamentable comedy, and most cruel paper by Pyramus and Thisby.

Bottom: A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your assignments, so that we may prepare for the next virtual journal club. Masters, spread yourselves so that we are properly socially distanced.

Snug: Rawr!

Flute: Snug, we're preparing a paper. There is no lion. I'll do the introduction, since I know the Thisby lab and what they do.

Snout: And I the figures, but I'll need some help with Fig. 4, since I don't really get it.

Snug: *Rawr!*

ACT II

(A forest. Mole sits at his computer. Enter Red Fox, Dolphin, and Quokka. Actually, they don't enter. They are meeting online, so 'enter' is 'Dolphin is signing in but cannot hear you yet,' etc. You know the drill. But Mole *is* using a forest background.)

Mole: How now, spirit! Whither wander you?

Quokka: G'day, mate. Over hill, over dale. Thorough bush, thorough brier. Over park, over pale. Thorough flood, thorough fire. I do wander everywhere.

Dolphin: Virtually, right?

Quokka: Of course virtually. I'm not going anywhere, except the kitchen.

Mole: And now we never meet in grove or green, by fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen. In a bar, or in a car. In a boat, or with a goat. On a train, or...

Red Fox: You've gone from Shakespeare to Dr. Seuss. Focus, Mole.

Mole: Now is the summer of our discontent.

Quokka: Except that it's winter. Which it is, where I am.

Red Fox: Right playwright, wrong play.

Mole: I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes. Actually, more like forty seconds, at least online. Better?

Red Fox: I guess. What's this all about? I thought we were having our weekly meeting to discuss progress on SARS-CoV2, but Mole is being all weird.

Mole: Feeling puckish, I guess. Last night I dreamed that we are re-opening schools during a raging pandemic, without a coordinated plan and without adequate testing in place. And then I dreamed that we were setting new records, daily, for infections, hospitalizations, and tragically, deaths. And our federal leadership was trying to put flower juice in everyone's eyes so that they would believe the misinformation and outright lies. Then my head was a donkey's head, and then I woke up.

Dolphin: Sorry, all of that is true. Except for the donkey head.

Red Fox: That might be true, too.

Mole: It's staggering to think that we simply cannot get this under control. Every time we make a recommendation, such as wearing masks, there is push back. We ask for more testing, more information, push back. Thirty percent of hospitalized patients are under forty, and still the bars are open. No wonder I want to be in fairyland.

Red Fox: Lord, what fools these mortals be.

Mole: That's my line.

ACT III

Mole: Act III is just a lot of running around in the forest, with many interactions that really have nothing to do with the CoVOID, except that living online does produce a lot of strangeness in our daily discourse. Good Gentles, I will spare you the details, but safe to say that everything works out and there is a lot of rejoicing and final preparations for the journal club. And mark:

I do hear the morning lark.

ACT IV

(Enter Quince, Snug, Bottom, Flute, Snout, and Starveling, socially distanced and at laptops. Theseus, Demetrius, Lysander, and Hermia are online.)

Flute: Welcome, friends! Can everyone hear me? I mean, those of you who are joining us online? Gentles, perchance you wonder at this paper; but wonder on, till truth make all things plain. It is the results of a Phase II trial of a CoV2 vaccine, and if we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent scientists.

Bottom: I see a voice. You have to unmute.

Theseus: His speech was like a tangled chain; nothing impaired, but all disordered. Who is next?

Snout: Here the data lay, for us to ponder. Here neutralizing antibodies, and here the T cell response. The values are fair, and significance met.

Demetrius: It is the wittiest partition that ever I heard discourse.

Quince: But alack! Here, adverse effects, and here, anaphylaxis. We are wont to believe that this is evidence of efficacy, for it is not. This is the greatest error of all the rest.

Snug: *Rawr!*

Lysander: This lion is a very Red Fox for his valour.

Hermia: True; and a Dolphin for his discretion.

Lysander: Not so, good Hermia. For his valour cannot carry his discretion; as Red Fox carries the Dolphin and the Quokka. They, too, encouraged are, and adverse effects can be managed.

Hippolyta: This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard. It bodes ill for widespread administration without medical supervision.

Theseus: No epilogue, I pray you, for your presentation needs no excuse. We must await Phase III, and results of other, promising trials. Still, I am encouraged by this news, as should be we all. Away, and let's gather for drinks online.

Snug: *Rawr!*

ACT V

(Enter Mole, pursued by a lion. Okay, it's supposed to be 'pursued by a bear', and that's a different play, but I always wanted to fit that in somewhere.)

Mole: If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended – that you have but slumbered here, while these visions did appear. Okay, I just thought that a bit of puckish foolery might be fun for a change, and the news of the first reported Phase II trial is indeed good. And one of the ex-Molets did have his nuptials, albeit sans us, so I molested (get it?) A Midsummer Night's Dream, with apologies to William Shakespeare (and Dr. Seuss). Besides, I'd be a good Robin Goodfellow, I think. Look, this Terrible Pandemic is getting us all down, and we need a bit of diversion. And, truth to tell, I am having an absolutely awful week (but perfectly healthy, thank you). I'll get through it, and I'll be back with something a bit more pithy next time. I am reminded that the secret of a happy life is to not argue with fools. And if someone disagrees with this, of course they are right.

So, good night unto you all. Give me your hands, if we be friends. And Mole shall restore amends.

Snug: *Rawr!*