

SPARTACUS NO. 39

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It's mid-May and the virus still rages. Two thousand more American lives will end today because of COVID-19. But fantasy still has a grip on us all: the country, slightly but significantly, is opening up.

Because we have no safety net worth speaking of, no government assistance offered besides an initial pittance, people are desperate for release from the viral incarceration of the past tri-month. No blame there. People need their paychecks and unemployment insurance is bollixed nationwide. But it seems as if boredom, not jobs, is the point: the emphasis of our populace has been on beaches, parks, malls, salons – recreation. And on boosting support for Trump. To enhance his re-election chances, protesters with AK-47s in biker leather face nurses in scrubs – armed brownshirts invade state capitols – signs proclaim, SACRIFICE THE WEAK side-by-side with DON'T WRECK MY GOLF GAME and I NEED A HAIRCUT. Weak governors capitulate, and far too early to beat this baffling virus, idiots sunbathe and throw frisbees, restaurants open, barbers snip hair behind plastic shields, a simulacrum of our 2019 lives tries desperately and recklessly to

reappear.

A second wave of infection is inevitable. I've been reading a book of essays edited (and loaned to me) by my friend Fred van Hartesveldt, an academic historian. The subject is the "Spanish flu" of a century ago, the only equivalence to this nightmare America has ever known. They had a bad first season of infection then, too. Then, too, they felt they could escape once the initial inflammation calmed down. Then – and it will probably end up being another 'then, too' – the disease came back, stronger, meaner, more murderous. COVID-19 is already showing its plasticity: kids are subject to unique heart problems should they catch it. There are longterm pulmonary, joint and worst of all, neurological problems. This disease is a *bastard*.

Any competent government would be providing aid and sustenance and testing for our people, but the federal response is a shambles. The President is a fool, promoting disinfectant as a cure – "sarcasm," he later claims, on the day America topped 50,000 deaths – and firing whistleblowers and inspectors for offenses to his ego. His entire focus is on the economy, fatalities or no. His surrogates send in goon squads to intimidate legislators and threaten medical workers – the man is more of a thug, more an Al Capone than a national "cheerleader." No, more a cult figure, a David Koresh, a Jim Jones, shepherding his followers into danger to mollify his own warped self-image. More than ever, the monstrosity of Donald Trump's psychopathic administration is self-evident.

The destruction of America's reputation and influence continues. Worldwide mockery descends again and again on America because of the mountebank we have somehow allowed into authority. Getting Trump *out* of authority should be the aim of every citizen with heart and wit. Needful of the best alternative we can offer, we await Joe Biden's choice for a running mate – I cheer for Elizabeth Warren, the smartest, best fighter among the contenders. We'll need a scrapper. Recent TV spots and Trump tweets have revealed one of his election tactics – with the assistance of Attorney General Bill Barr, smear President Obama and through him, Joe Biden. We'll see more and more of this in the coming months. God grant the strategy fails.

The White House itself has been infected. As someone said, the virus has Trump cornered there like a rat. Nevertheless, he refuses to wear a protective mask, still, and disputes with Dr. Anthony Fauci over reopening. All true to his character, or lack of same. Check out Greg Olear's interview with former *Celebrity Apprentice* "talent handler" Noel Casler. He describes Trump as dyslexic, drug-addicted, herpes-ridden, unintelligent, incontinent, egomaniacal – and quite incapable. Ivanka and Jared Kushner manipulate him, Casler says. They run the show and want to run the world. He avers they're more dangerous than the moronic father figure. See the site: <https://gregolear.substack.com/p/full-disclosure>.

There are good signs. ERs are emptying – a little, and for the time being. New Zealand is effectively virus-free. (Could a physical Worldcon be back on?) Other countries, with less population and less diversity than our melting pot, are making progress without severe threats of a more vicious repeat. Speaking selfishly, our trip to Europe looks more likely now, but by no means certain. I *need* the Louvre and Stonehenge. Rosy *needs* Versailles. We both need the delights of London. If these attractions aren't open, if the trains aren't running, if the Chunnel is closed ... we'll wait.

In the meantime, I go out only with mask and gloves, on unavoidable errands, and let Rose-Marie stay home. Here she works designing her father's book covers and a new website for *Challenger*. I fight our flaky network to scan my *Chall* articles, a book of my own the object, and work on zines, *viz.* Together, we watch movies and good TV (I'm picky). Lotsa MSNBC.

And read. I read the final draft of one of my father-in-law's novels. George Wells sent me three books by "Enemy Mine" author Barry Longyear. From I learned all there was to know about the Zodiac killer. (The cops are pretty sure they know who he was, just as Scotland Yard is convinced they know Jack the Ripper. Not to worry, though; the Zodiac guy is dead.) I fill my Kindle with horror novels (*The Reddening* isn't bad) and Hugo nominees. (Charlie Jane Anders' *The City at the Middle of the Night* is very well-written, even if the metaphor of planet-to-sexuality is obvious.) Take sweet-yorkie Ginger for a walk outside.

The normally-polluted canal out back has cleared up significantly. Birdsong resonates overhead, and people say they've seen manatees and dolphins in the Banana River. Our planet seems to be using this quiet spell to recuperate. The strain we, Earth's dominant species, puts on its systems is obvious. It's nice to see Gaia relax a bit.

And at month's end a manned space launch is planned. Before that, Comet Swan could well shine in the night. We'll watch from the backyard. We'll endure.

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I should mention Tara Reade's sexual accusations against Joe Biden, and explain why I find them untenable – as I do: I doubt her story to the max.

It's pretty obvious what's going on. Republicans, desperate to find an "e-mails" scandal they can load on Biden, demand to know why Brett Kavanaugh's accuser was generally believed, and Reade is generally not. Quite true, any woman who brings an accusation of sexual harassment or assault is due a fair hearing. But buying what she says as true is another story – and there are two huge differences between the two cases.

One, Reade is a Trump/Putin booster who has changed her story multiple times and accused scads of other men of the same offense. The accusations against Biden have never surfaced the many times Joe has been vetted before. Two, under questioning, Kavanaugh was hysterical, obnoxious, arrogant, partisan, and unstable himself. I learned in a quarter century of dealing with criminals that the louder they squawk, the guiltier they are. Joe, by contrast, has been steadfast, calm, and his outrage has been restrained. Kavanaugh *did* it. Biden didn't.

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Everyone squash a *murder hornet*! Since the bug is the size of a Lear jet, that might be challenging ...

Letters to my Alphabet

On *Spartacus* 38 ...

Dale Speirs a.k.a. **Opuntia polyacantha** <opuntia57@hotmail.com>
Calgary, Alberta

Canada went into lockdown mode a week before the USA did. I'm retired with independent income, so it isn't as bad for me as others. Canada normally has 27,000 unemployed applying for benefits per week. Last week 500,000 applied, which smashes all records since the Great Depression.

The next issue of my zine *Opuntia* will have some interesting photos and reports of the effects of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in Calgary. [*Indeed it did. See the zine and also my review in **The Zine Dump** #49 on eFanzines.*]

I suspect the statistics you quoted, which came from China, will not be as bad for Canada. China doesn't have much of a health care system. Thank God and Tommy Douglas (the founder of Canada's universal health care system and Keifer Sutherland's grandfather) that Canada has much better health care.

On March 19, I went to my doctor for a regular prescription renewal, normally for 100 days, but he gave me a 300-day supply. I'm relatively healthy at age 64 and he didn't want me back in the waiting room until after the pandemic is over. [*Just 64? *scoff**]

All club meetings were banned by the Ministry of Health, which put a tremendous crimp in my social life. I'm not a blogger and I consider the phrase "social media" to be an oxymoron. I can keep busy at home but even so I try to get out of the house every day for a walk.

The panic will blow over sooner than we think. Remember that the doomsayers were wrong about SARS, Ebola, H1N1 influenza, and swine flu.

Adds Dale: "I'm going through a huge number of old-time radio shows, available as free mp3s from www.otrrlibrary.org (Old Time Radio Researchers) and pulp magazines as free pdfs from www.archive.org." That's a cool way to keep busy.

Justin E.A. Busch
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Your comment regarding ConZealand (*Spartacus* #38) strikes me as both poignant and generous. I've lost access to e-mail with the closing of the public library here, so I'm not up-to-date, but that Norman Cates and Kelly Buchler did the right thing I do not doubt. I would go so far as to suggest that, should the Kiwi collective feel up to organizing another Worldcon so soon, the WSFS should simply allot the next year of eligibility to them. [*I'm all for that.*]

Apropos your speculations regarding the future of conventions: I think you're right about the commercial cons' the organizers and supporters are interested mainly in profits, and if they can make their profits some other, less labor-intensive way, they will ditch conventions without a pang. The fan-run conventions, though, will last longer; the motivation behind them is enthusiasm for the field and its many practitioners, not the acquisition of cash.

It's too bad you elected to waste more than 10% of the issue on Bret Stephens, the least intelligent and most vicious of the *NYTimes*' gaggle of conservatives. Your subsequent points are apposite but scarcely necessary; Stephens' column is incoherent on its own grounds. Since he assumes *a priori* and without any demonstrable reason that the welfare state is a bad thing (to be equated with dictatorship and shoot-to-kill orders), he is able to simply ignore the way in which the government could help (and, to a degree is helping) avoid millions of "business failures and personal bankruptcies." If one decides in advance that nothing *should* be done to ameliorate poverty, sickness, and suffering, it is not difficult to conclude that nothing

can be done. (Notice also how Stephens conveniently omits the use, by his own party, of the coronavirus crisis to assault the rights of women and visible minorities.)

To end on a cheerier note – I quite enjoyed the (uncredited; by you?) cartoon on the last page. One does need to watch out for one’s sources these days, whether of masks or recommendations for mainlining Lysol ...

*Alas, I don’t know who to credit for the ‘toon, or for this issue’s art either. Everything is stolen off the internet. Apologies to all artists offended and assurances that I make nary a **sou** off any of my fanzines.*

A special stolen Facebook reprint ...

*“Why do some British people not like Donald Trump?” **Nate White**, an articulate and witty writer from England wrote the following response:”*

A few things spring to mind. Trump lacks certain qualities which the British traditionally esteem. For instance, he has no class, no charm, no coolness, no credibility, no compassion, no wit, no warmth, no wisdom, no subtlety, no sensitivity, no self-awareness, no humility, no honour and no grace – all qualities, funnily enough, with which his predecessor Mr. Obama was generously blessed. So for us, the stark contrast does rather throw Trump’s limitations into embarrassingly sharp relief.

Plus, we like a laugh. And while Trump may be laughable, he has never once said anything wry, witty or even faintly amusing – not once, ever. I don’t say that rhetorically, I mean it quite literally: not once, not ever. And that fact is particularly disturbing to the British sensibility – for us, to lack humour is almost inhuman. But with Trump, it’s a fact. He doesn’t even seem to understand what a joke is – his idea of a joke is a crass comment, an illiterate insult, a casual act of cruelty.

Trump is a troll. And like all trolls, he is never funny and he never laughs; he only crows or jeers. And scarily, he doesn’t just talk in crude, witless insults – he actually thinks in them. His mind is a simple bot-like algorithm of petty prejudices and knee-jerk nastiness.

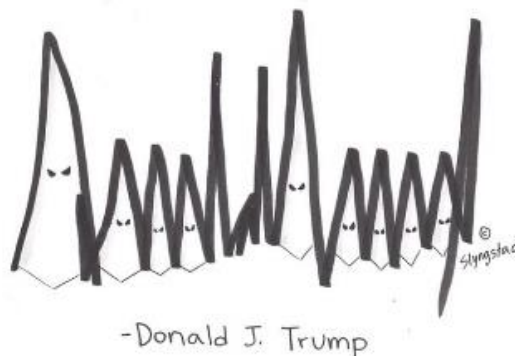
There is never any under-layer of irony, complexity, nuance or depth. It’s all surface. Some Americans might see this as refreshingly upfront. Well, we don’t. We see it as having no inner world, no soul. And in Britain we traditionally side with David, not Goliath. All our heroes are plucky underdogs: Robin Hood, Dick Whittington, Oliver Twist. Trump is neither plucky, nor an underdog. He is the exact opposite of that. He’s not even a spoiled rich-boy, or a greedy fat-cat. He’s more a fat white slug. A Jabba the Hutt of privilege.

And worse, he is that most unforgivable of all things to the British: a bully. That is, except when he is among bullies; then he suddenly transforms into a sniveling sidekick instead. There are unspoken rules to this stuff – the Queensberry rules of basic decency – and he breaks them all. He punches downwards – which a gentleman should, would, could never do – and every blow he aims is below the belt. He particularly likes to kick the vulnerable or voiceless – and he kicks them when they are down.

So the fact that a significant minority – perhaps a third – of Americans look at what he does, listen to what he says, and then think “Yeah, he seems like my kind of guy” is a matter of some confusion and no little distress to British people, given that:

Americans are supposed to be nicer than us, and mostly are.

You don’t need a particularly keen eye for detail to spot a few flaws in the man.



This last point is what especially confuses and dismays British people, and many other people too; his faults seem pretty bloody hard to miss. After all, it's impossible to read a single tweet, or hear him speak a sentence or two, without staring deep into the abyss. He turns being artless into an art form; he is a Picasso of pettiness; a Shakespeare of shit. His faults are fractal: even his flaws have flaws, and so on ad infinitum. God knows there have always been stupid people in the world, and plenty of nasty people too. But rarely has stupidity been so nasty, or nastiness so stupid. He makes Nixon look trustworthy and George W look smart. In fact, if Frankenstein decided to make a monster assembled entirely from human flaws – he would make a Trump.

And a remorseful Doctor Frankenstein would clutch out big clumpfuls of hair and scream in anguish: 'My God ... what ... have ... I ... created?' If being a **** was a TV show, Trump would be the boxed set.

Another point of view, by an unknown commentator, also stolen from Facebook...

You have to understand President Trump.

He doesn't go by expert advice; he goes by his intuition and by the opinion of the people he likes. He likes to hear his daughter, pundits Carlson, and Hannity and his son in law, Kushner.

He is not afraid of risking everything, don't forget he had 4 Bankruptcies of his businesses.

In addition to not listening to experts, he hates anyone looking over his shoulder, whether it is the Press, or Inspectors General, or Congressional Oversight. He wants all of them to go along and accept everything he does. If they don't, he will "crush" them.

And this is one of those times when his Intuition and His friends' perspectives were all wrong. And his lack of prompt actions has caused thousands of lives and is collapsing economically the country.

South Korea, Germany, and many other Countries did what they had to do, with urgency and expertise. Not the USA. The first request for funds to attack the Virus from Mr. Trump to congress was \$2.5billion. Congress advised him, it was not enough, that we had a real danger. Congress approved \$10 billion.

The rest is history! Trillions of dollars spent & more to come, over 70,000 deaths & more to come. We hope and pray we don't have the 5th Trump's Bankruptcy and that we protect ourselves and others, so we can stop the killer virus. At least we know for sure when we can stop Trump.

*And to move, at **long** last, to science fiction fandom ... Here's Orange Mike, who won the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund this year this year – but has no con to go to.*

Michael J. Lowrey orangemike@gmail.com

As we all know, a lot of what would normally have been raised for TAFF at cons has gone by the wayside. What sayeth the hive mind as to the appropriateness of my starting a GoFundMe campaign to replace said funds, as well as monies lost on tickets I cannot either get refunded or re-use? I have a separate credit union account for TAFF monies (US\$), into which it could be paid. *[I'm all for it. Take your TAFF trip whenever the virus and your comfort level allow.]*

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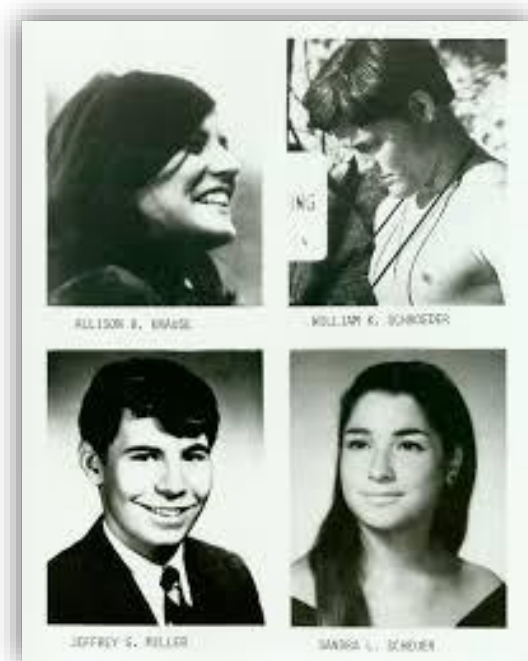
I embarrassed myself on Facebook the other day. A Trumpy shamed me for criticizing the lockdown protesters– he called them patriots, and me a *traitor*. I don't tolerate such crap, so I told him unequivocally what I thought of those clowns – not patriots, but Trump's brownshirts – and since he called me "son," shot back that I'm a 70-year-old retired *lawyer*. I ended up addressing him as "hillbilly." I realize now I played into his paranoid world view – an elitist who thinks his superior education makes him a superior man – the class differentiation that has empowered Trump. Well, since I love hillbillies, have met Ph.Ds. and professionals I wouldn't piss on if they were *burning*, and the best man I've ever known had an 8th grade education – I remand the tone of what I said. *But not the substance.*



On that day, 50 years ago, I was at Berkeley, taking a writing class from Jackson Burgess. With sadness, the dear man told us that Nixon had invaded Cambodia, that the Vietnam War was widening. I was 20 years old.

The timeline is muddled in my head, and my journal for those days is buried in storage. The next incident I recall, I was standing at the window of a bookstore adjacent to the campus, staring with others at the newspaper posted there. Four individual portraits of some very clean-cut college kids. *Scheurer. Schroeder. Miller. Krause.* I've never forgotten those names.

That was a hellacious day. I stood across the street from a police car that had driven a route through the southside of the city – Telegraph Avenue; ever see *The Graduate*? Katharine Ross runs out of Moe’s Books there – belching CS tear gas from its exhaust. Some guys had scoped out the route, intercepted the car, chased the police off, turned it on its roof. Nearby, also watching in astonishment, was a beautiful young lady I wouldn’t meet for many years: Catherine Asaro. Later, I watched Berkeley cops invade and trash the Free Clinic where gas and club victims were being treated. They captured a hippy phocomelus – a Thalidomide kid – outside. They amused themselves thwacking him playfully with their nightsticks as he writhed upon the ground. You see such a thing, it’s a victory to become friendly with policemen, even thirty-five years and 1500 miles distant; I congratulate myself.



One night the English Department, of which I was the most minor part, held a meeting at a church on the untouched north side of the campus. We were deciding whether to go on strike and dedicate our semester to efforts against the war. Our chairman, a soft-voiced academic, spoke on the value of intellectual pursuits and the necessity of civic action. Damned if that gentle, brilliant little man didn’t give the best speech I’d ever heard in my life. (Since then I’ve only heard one to compare: her brother’s eulogy for Princess Diana.) So we were ready the next day when the student body gathered in the Greek Theatre on the hillside above UC-B, and another English professor read the faculty resolution: on strike. Work against the war. We cheered approval, and walked home past baffled Berkeley cops, who were clad for battle but had nothing to do.

Professor Burgess, a black girl and I went out into middle America – Walnut Creek, where my family had lived when I started Cal – and collected

signatures supporting the McGovern-Hatfield Amendment cutting off funding for the war. We ran into a terrifyingly silent Doberman Pincher and a lady who had lost a son in Vietnam and a girl I’d know at the Barrington Hall co-op, now living in the ‘burbs and raising a male toddler who wore a UC sweatshirt. From Barrington we sent letters to every Senator and Congressman. The war didn’t end, but five years later I was at Tulane University when Gerald Ford announced that America was Out of Vietnam, at last and for keeps.

85% of the Americans polled blamed the students for the deaths at Kent State. Some Guardsmen were indicted, and the right-wing kill-‘em-all governor of Ohio was thrown out of office, but the Guardsmen were acquitted, the governor was returned to office, and Nixon was re-elected. Overwhelmingly. That summer I got within two feet of him at the New Orleans airport. He ignored my jibe of “Four more?” I didn’t mean years.

Many years later I drove north through Ohio on my way to visit my mother and my brother’s family. Kent is not quite on the way but I made the detour, aghast that I’d passed a sign advertising a concert by bluegrass singer Alison Krauss – no relation – on the way. At KSU I asked a bearded lad for directions to the site of the shooting. “Archery?” he asked.

When I finally found the place, buried in the middle of the campus, I was astonished. It was so small. The photos had exaggerated the size of the killing field; the kids didn't stand a chance. There was a stone memorial there listing the four victims, markers where each fell, and thousands of flowers to commemorate the number of dead from Vietnam. A pretty little bird perched on a curb and *cheep-cheep*-ed me out of a reverie, and I went on.

I don't understand our parents. Greatest generation? They deserve that accolade in so many ways. They survived the Depression. They won World War II against the two most militant societies on Earth. They got educations, built the American middle class and kept us Boomers comfortable while we grew up. They took humanity into space, and began the civil rights movement. They did stunning stuff. I'm lost in admiration for them.

And yet they cheered Kent State. They massacred their children for Richard Nixon's pleasure. It's been 50 years, and I still don't get it.

*A wise response from **Sandra B.**, a beloved friend, on Facebook ...*

What can OUR generation do? Teach our grandchildren well. Tell them about KSU and why it happened. Watch the news with them. Make sure they watch a few episodes of All in the Family (Archie Bunker attitudes still reign) while you explain what it was like when so many things we know are wrong were 'ok' then and still haven't been fixed. Stop leering at young girls, stop taking kickbacks, avoid labeling people you don't know, stand up against corporate "personhood," and abuse (physical, emotional and financial) by religious leaders. Teach them that their right to swing their fists ends well before my nose. And when they tell us we are too old to understand, LISTEN. There's still so much WE have to learn.

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Marty Pasko helped make my year at DC Comics one of the greatest experiences of my life. He was a brilliant, acerbic, accomplished and devastatingly funny dude, and his death this May was like a blow to the gut. I salute his work, his memory and his legacy. (Hey, Liz Copeland ... remember "Carson Bingham"?)

My friend **Keith Ferrell**, from Greensboro NC, died recently, and I am devastated. Keith and I used to hang out at a local bookstore in Greensboro and talk science fiction. I was very very proud of him for his work with *Omni*. The last time I saw him was at Confrancisco, at Harlan's speech. He was a fine guy and a good friend and a terrific writer and editor, and to repeat, I am devastated.

Al Fitzpatrick and I shared a ride from Atlanta to St. Louis with the late **Ned Brooks** in 1976, stopping *en route* to pick up **Liz Schwarzin** (now **Copeland**) and attend a terrific party at **Donn Brazier's** house. (Thanks to Richard Brandt & others for helping me recall Donn's name.) Al was fun; I still remember the face he made tasting the cold medicine he bought. *Ansible* reports his passage in April.

And goodbye, **Little Richard** ... or as they say, in the First Church of Rock'n'Roll...

A WOP BOPPA LOO BOP, A WOP BAM BOOM!



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It's tough these days to call a halt to a *Spartacus*, since you can never tell when Trump will come forth with another atrocity that requires response, but like all good zines, this one must come to an end. I keep busy adding to the *Zine Dump* I have in progress, and tweak the law articles from *Challenger* for my book. It's irritating to deal with layout chaos and painful to eject my illos from the text, but I'm enjoying revisiting the preposterous and penurious career of Guy H. Lillian III. Esq. Lots to do – including finding a name for the tome. Suggestions?

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From Facebook ...

[Guy Lillian](#) Tonight arrived in my e-mail an extortion letter from a fool calling himself "Isaiah," claiming that he had hacked my computer while I was watching porn and had video of me "self-pleasuring." He demanded \$2000 in Bitcoin to keep him from spreading this video far and wide.

My reply was straight out of Elmore Leonard, to wit, "Bag Your Ass," but alas my e-message didn't go through. If you see anything from Isaiah allegedly about me, please let me know, so I can supplement the FBI complaint I filed on this dingleberry. By the way, I'm far too old for ... well, you know.

This explains all the models, hookers and dominatrices who have been showing up as Friend Requests these days. And I thought it was the Axe I've been wearing ...

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I was watching *The Diary of Anne Frank* on TCM recently, trying to remember some of the lines (I played Papa Frank in our senior high school play). A few were familiar, and I could still warble along with "The Hanukah Song." Was thinking, as I returned to my office, that in these daysweeksmoonths of coronavirus isolation, this house had become our own "secret annexe." Although it isn't secret, and everybody has an "annexe" of their own.

And instead of Nazis, we have COVID-19.

The Franks' society survived – but changed. What kind of society will survive this pandemic? What changes will *we* see? If – as seems the case – this bug will be around for a *long* time, what will our new world be like? C'mon, we're science fiction fans, and as I said at the beginning of last issue, we've seen this before. Absent a quick, magical miracle vaccine, there *will* be changes, and we'll live with them ... surely SFers, of all people, can foresee what they might be. Fears? Hopes?

