

Book review; Humorous Stories of the Great Pandemic of 2020 by Armando Simon

By Carl Nelson

The author, Armando Simon, is not a stand-up comic. But, I'd guess that the author would agree that these [eleven vignettes and/or stories](#) are intended to bring the comedy with them.



Many of the situations have been thrown a lateral pass from the headlines and run with. For example, there was the fellow

out paddle boarding who the COVID cops tried to arrest (in the story he's a solitary fellow out enjoying the beach), and the toilet paper hoarding (and bartering) business)("Oh, one more thing: when you get the roll of toilet paper make sure to hide it inside the mattress. It can be an extra pillow."), a professor fired for using an anatomical word which triggers a student, plus mandated inoculations (via armed drones), ruinous small business closures, involuntary mental commitments, doctors fired for prescribing the "horse dewormer" and vaccine free patients denied transplants – with all of the stock functionaries. Rather like clowns, in an Italian Comedia del Art, these functionaries of the COVID pandemic overlords are herded past us one after another to perform their follies in a series of events reminiscent of Gregor Samsa, if he were waking up normal but to find his world has become a giant bug brigade. Unfortunately, the clowns all perform like lockstep NPCs speaking the lockstep dialogue with a uniformity that covers every situation. Perhaps if the linoleum floors of these apparatchiks were littered with banana peels we could get something going. As it is, the narratives are like someone getting Novocain. There is the autonomous bureaucratic functionary who anesthetizes anything human. There are shouts and screams. We've been jabbed.

The clowns described here are not the sort to evoke laughter but rather the sort, like the NPC cutouts, to be scared of. When people tell you they are scared of clowns, these might be those they are thinking of. The world described is very much like that described in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, where the vaccinated are trying to find whether you are one of them, and to convert you if you aren't.

"No, it's true! And I'm not the only one that it's happened to. The whole world has gone mad!" Dr. Latimer said. But "It was no use. There was an impenetrable wall Latimer could simply not get through. The end result was inevitable. Doctor

Latimer was fired. The official protocol was reinstated.”

We’ve all lived through this, and understand the scenario very well. But though the clowns come and go, it’s still very hard to find the laughs. (Not to mention prosecutions.) The morbidities and death which descended upon us – and which still arrive – are just too enraging to laugh about. The situation is rather like the Disney cartoon, *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* – if instead of the phalanx of uncontrolled brooms hauling buckets of water under Mickey’s spell, they were all killing people and it were blood swelling up. Too many buckets of water flooding the Sorcerer’s digs are funny – mortalities and morbidities, not so much.

Not our poor author’s fault, really. What seems vividly evoked is that humor and sarcasm and satire struggle to sting the target in this mad world which has come upon all of us recently. Finding humor in this situation is like yelling at your lawnmower, kitchen appliance or power pole. They are not a good comedy partner. We feel like we have made a good riposte, but it might as well be as if we’d acquiesced. An artificial world has been foisted upon us, which gives dictated responses to our various aggravations.

It’s as if our current cultural inversion has appeared like a Texas haboob or derecho of astroturfed crowds, astroturfed opinion, and astroturfed rebellions edited for consumption by lockstep media, financial and political opinion. You can be as sarcastic before your TV as you want, but it will continue repeating its nostrums, nevertheless. (He who has the gold makes the rules.) Crowds might spontaneously shout “F*ck Joe Biden!”, but the media will report, “Let’s go, Brando”. Downtown business districts might be burning but the TV media will report “mostly peaceful demonstrations”. What to do besides turning it off? Humor within this context seems as handicapped as trying to explain a joke to a fellow with pretty severe Aspergers.

Anyway, the struggles of the free spirited are well encapsulated in this slender book of eleven stories of eleven people grappling with the dystopian knot that their common heritage has suddenly assumed.

– More of the author, Carl Nelson, may be found on the substack, barkingsquirrel at carln.substack.com or at Magic Bean Books at magicbeanbooks.co