

EDITORIAL

PANDEMIC EDITING

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A.T. Greenblatt's first tale for *Asimov's* was written pre-pandemic. Elsewhere in this issue she says that she didn't realize how prophetic it was to imagine so many people inhabiting their own bubble universes. *Asimov's* is just one bubble universe among many. While the situation in a lot of other bubbles is far more stressful, I thought it worth recording some of the effects Covid-19 has had on all that goes into creating and distributing the magazine.

We are very fortunate to work with Chris Begley. Chris is vice president of editorial and product development for Dell Magazines and our parent company Penny Press, and she's been my supervisor for over twenty years. In early March, she suggested that the company start looking into moving operations into our individual homes. There were mountains to leap for editorial, but these were hills compared to the obstacles facing other departments. Unlike accounting, circulation and fulfillment, typesetting, art and production, and other essential components of magazine publishing, most of the science fiction editorial staff already worked at home three days a week. With mighty assistance from our intrepid IT department, the transition was relatively smooth. The company was in a decent position when nonessential workplaces in New York and Connecticut were closed down on March 22nd and 23rd.

I have long read and edited manuscripts, and usually write my story editorial, story introductions, and next issue announcement from home. Now I had to start working on production stages of the magazine that were much easier to manage in the office. Our pre-war Manhattan apartment building was not designed for the internet age. It certainly wasn't designed to accommodate my husband and me working full-time from home while our high school senior attended virtual classes in her bedroom. The job was made a little easier when my company sent me a laser printer and IT support staff member Ché Ryback patiently talked me through the installation process.

I'm very proud of what my staff and I accomplished. Some duties that were once handled by an individual now are performed in duplicate or even triplicate because we are no longer able to meet on the same premises. Emily Hockaday, *Asimov's* managing editor, says of the experience: "My spouse and I juggle our work-at-home schedules while caring for our three-year-old with the help of a detailed hourly chart. I no longer work in a blissfully quiet apartment while my child runs around like a maniac in day-care. The two days that we met in the office were often crucial to the magazine's well-being. Performing tasks like checking the spreads page-by-page, printing and inserting revisions and ad pages, discussing editorial changes and poetry purchases, and printing and marking up the very final PDFs seemed unthinkable from home. But as time marched on, we became pros at Adobe Reader and managed to hit our deadlines as we always had."

At least the lockdown gave us a chance to gain new skills. This is an aspect of my job that I've always loved—as publishing morphs and changes I'm constantly learning new things. Still, as I'm sure many *Asimov's* readers can also attest, picking up new skills while coping with a pandemic is not an ideal situation.

The pandemic has taken its emotional toll as well. In mid-March, against my better judgment, I took my daughter Juliet to Bloomingdale's to buy her prom dress. Even then I knew a prom was unlikely, but she was adamant that she wanted the dress. I was happy to spend this rite of passage with her. We wore disposable gloves on the subway, we passed a few people on the streets with masks, but for most of us masks were unavailable. The store was nearly empty, and we had terrific service. Afterward, we celebrated with a lunch at McDonald's. It turned out this would be our last visit to

normal world for a long time. By that Monday, all NYC schools were closed and would soon be going virtual. Prom would end up being a dance party in our living room. The big Model UN trip to Washington, DC, and the senior class outing would both be canceled, while graduation was a brief online event.

Ambulance sirens were nonstop by late April. They screamed constantly as I read manuscripts and edited in my bedroom. I felt as though our neighborhood was besieged. As it turned out, our zip code was one of the lightest hit in the city. Covid-19, however, got into a nursing home a half block away, which led to the deaths of sixty-five people. In May and June, my daughter's friend lost both his parents. We were very fortunate that a close relative recovered from the disease around the same time.

Although it was sometimes difficult to keep up with my reading, I found that having to meet deadlines was actually a good way to cope with lockdown isolation. By the time New York City's restrictions began easing up, we were well supplied with masks. The masks were sent to us by members of my family as well as by friends in the science fiction community. I was also touched when throughout the spring a number of science fiction authors emailed their best wishes and concern for Emily and me.

One interesting aspect of the coronavirus quarantine was that it gave authors an opportunity to write new stories. Despite my delayed responses we received a record number of submissions. I didn't really see a big uptick in stories about epidemics, but the isolating influence of the pandemic was everywhere.

As the months have progressed, my reading speed has mostly gotten back to normal. I'm hoping the rest of the world will get back there soon, too. Emily speaks for me when she says: "What I miss most, and what I look forward to most when it is safe to return the office, is the environment of easy collaboration and open communication that working in a creative space with coworkers fosters."