

Thanks for the Smokes (InfectAMart #3)

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[This is a descriptive piece on what it was like shopping this day. ]

Six weeks had passed since the great virus had shown up first in the land of Infectia. And that meant another drudging to the grocery store.

This is my third trip (in six weeks) to InfectAMart since the start of the great virus. Before going in, I don now the obligatory face mask and gloves. During the first trip, only two people wore them. How many would be doing the same in this store session? It would turn out only to be 40%. That great sense of individualism and resistance in the proud country of Infectia could someday kill the dissidents in one fell swoop.

I found it funny that InfectAMart would send coupons for items that were very likely not to be there. Wasn't computerized inventory systems supposed to eliminate discrepancies like this?

While driving on the nearly empty roads, I was wondering what to expect:

- Would the store aisles continue to be barren?
- Was the promised plexiglass installed all around the cashiers?
- Were there markers to indicate social distancing?
- Were there still limits on what you could buy?

It took a while to get used to the mask and gloves. But as said in Buddhism, *every thought and action is a practice to awakening.*

Soon enough after taking one the designated "disinfected" carts, I found the answers:

For the first time in weeks, a few items were showing up in the aisles. Plastic spoons and forks. Canned chicken. Some limits had been removed such as bread and potatoes. But other items like toweling and toilet paper would arrive on the shelves only to disappear in 30 to 60 minutes later. I wondered during that time if there is fighting or name-calling just to get this essential item whether to add to a diminished collection or increase a growing horde of paper-based treasure troves.

The aisles mostly had people that grabbed what they needed and moved on. The dawdlers hadn't still gotten the message and ruled a few aisles.

Soon it was time to check out. InfectAMart seems to have more staff this time including the always needed baggers. I waited at the designated social spacing spot which was more like three feet than the socially prescribed six feet. The plexiglass, installed to "protect" the cashiers was only on one side. An elderly woman came up asking the cashier if they had her cigarettes. She indicated yes and indicated that the woman would go behind me. Seeing how desperate that she was for her nicotine

replenishment, I said go ahead of me. She smiled and thanked me profusely three times. She also wore no mask. Be it the virus or the bloody pack of cigarettes, the Grim Reaper already had her claws deep inside her. I put my card in the plastic-covered credit/debit card reader. It barely worked through the plastic. After being bagged and being wished a Happy Easter whether carrying a Christian soul or not, I headed out relieved to survive the ordeal and thrilled to be soon de-masked/de-gloved.