

TT 13 Day 19

Tiger Roll finished fourth, not in the Grand National but in cyberspace. This was all about there being no sport of any kind during the CV crisis, so wizards have to put their minds towards finding other ways of making money. If that sounds a bit cynical it is the truth of the matter but, at least, some of it will go to charity – and the NHS particularly. I like watching horse racing in much the same way as I sit rapt in front of Crufts, Blue Planet and sledges being pulled by eager huskies in the wild north of Canada, but this was something different.

It did, indeed, look like a video game but a highly realistic one at that. Cleverly ‘fixed’ to be as entertaining as possible, the organisers arranged the result to be decided by algorithm and, in the end, it was Potters Corner that romped home. I had to ask the Guvnor what an algorithm was and he (alias Mr Google) said something like ‘An algorithm is a set of instructions designed to perform a specific task. This can be a simple process, such as multiplying two numbers, or a complex operation, such as playing compressed video files. In computer programming, algorithms are quite often created as functions’. I’m none the wiser (and neither is he) but I sort of get the gist of this one – that the Grand National has been simulated by computer geeks to allow a great many people to have some fun, raise some money and learn another way of seeing each other on a screen, thus obviating being stupid and breaking the rules on self-isolation and/or social distancing.

There will be no real race this year so we will all have to wait until next April to see if the scientists got it right or if Tiger Roll

really could have emulated Red Rum’s hat trick of wins in 1973, 1974 and 1977. The Guvnor remembers these years not just for that; he was with his Regiment in Ireland in each of those years and recalls how quiet things were, albeit just for a day. Many Irish people were in Liverpool and even the IRA was glued to TV sets, so the Army and the Police had some respite. He also recalls his son being born while he was patrolling the Turf Lodge in West Belfast, and the Queen’s Silver Jubilee being celebrated by all, bar the Republicans. If we are back to ‘normal’, whatever that is, in 2021, the real result may be surprising - like those of this year’s exams and any other ‘estimate’ in these strange times. Twelve months will tell us whether predictions were very clever and spot on, or some terrible travesties have been foisted on us all.

This family of ours linked up across the country online via a medium called Party Pants (or, if the Guvnor stops calling it that and I can rid it from my mind, House Party). Their son-in-law up in the Midlands (they get really tired of us calling it the Midlands, but it is Banbury, after all) master-minded it. Virtual horses were picked out of a hat, a real kitty was opened, proper Champagne corks popped, and the Guvnor was forced to remove his ‘fascinator’ before House Party exposed his idiocy to the world. We all watched the ‘race’ on ITV at home with the sound turned down and pretended to be excited race-goers training binoculars on the wall, slurping the fizz and making a show of tearing up the fallers’ tickets and throwing the confetti in the air. The children thought it was all mad.

Just when the finishing line was in sight and excitement was peaking among the twenty or so of us, I squealed not with delight but in anguish. It was 5.30 pm and my tea time.