

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Saniah

15 years old

With a zap of illuminating cyan Astrid's cognitive implants summoned a platinum-glazed automobile; levitating, luminous and in all its glory. As she got in her mind immersed itself in a nostalgic bubblegum melody, its rhythm oozing an overwhelming sweetness like confectionary. The air around Astrid was infused with an aromatic mist of industrial candy cane, accompanying the grapefruit-tinged tangerine sky. A crooked asphalt trail lay ahead of her, scattered with bushes of wild freesia on either side. Extending her arm, engraved with several radiant hieroglyphics, she attempted to graze the delicate freesias. Confusion darkened Astrid's features. She stared blankly at her palm and then back at the freesia. Her hands mindlessly wandered through and beyond the bush. She exerted all her focus on that single flower, pinpointing its exact location in her cognitive implants, trying once again. When her mind registered that no sensation could be felt Astrid fell face-first on the cold, hard marble floor of the institute.

When Astrid had opened her eyes, her vision was a hazy kaleidoscope. Neon hues of harsh purple and green splashed around in her head. With a buzz her implants cleared out the acidic trance her mind had lost itself in. Astrid saw that a swarm of droids had gathered around her, eyeing her down as if she were a feeble prey at the mercy of a predator. Without a second glance Astrid sprinted back to her room, shakily wiping the tears that had put her vision into disarray. Astrid hated the feeling of being looked down upon, especially by those that had caused the destruction of everything she had ever cherished. A shrilling alarm went off at the back of Astrid's mind, shooting needle-like daggers through her spine. Flickering red came into view, accompanied by a robotic voice.

'Alert, alert! Human in distress sensed! Please take your Happiness pill.'

Astrid chuckled and numbly retrieved a circular pill, which was adorned with the luminous hieroglyphics that were embedded in the roots of her arm. With a weary push she inserted it into the back of her head. Astrid's eyes rolled back as she adjusted her implants. Her mind now engulfed in a static recording of her mother and Sen, who endearingly gazed at her and told her tales of how the world used to be, before the droids took over.

Sharp knocks echoed from the front door. Astrid was sure it was the droids, and she was prepared to tackle the consequences for being human. With a drowsy click of the knob, Astrid let out an unintentional gasp, the hairs of her neck prickling upwards. It was Sen. His piercing emerald eyes gazed into Astrid's, so intensely it was as if he looked at her for

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



any longer his irises would bore holes into Astrid's soul. A shock of relief flooded through Astrid's body, her eyes welling up with tears of remembrance, and pain. She hesitated before speaking.

'Sen, where were you?'

Curtly, Sen silenced her with a press of a button sending an electrifying surge to her mind. Astrid spasmed uncontrollably her heartbeat quickening to a fraction of a second as if her insides were to burst any time. With a look of unfamiliar malice, Sen started to speak. 'Ma'am, you have used your Reality Conjurer, as well as Happiness Pill more than the designated amount this week. I'm afraid you will have to stand trial in front of the council tonight.'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ruya

11 years old

The sun floated through the window and stirred the dust as it lit up the pages of her book. It lit up the folds in the pages, the sagging spine, the scratches and fingerprints on its cover.

'Evangilline! Lunch!'

The book was thrust off her lap and landed with a thud on the floor.

A clank.

A bang.

A little clatter.

Shadows passed behind the book's spine and light weaved in and out of the places on the carpet. The black rectangle in front of the book was lit up and colourful shapes moved across it.

This was the book's new world.

And it was beautiful.

<>

The pages flopped as another layer of dust fell on the Book and the clear shiny plates on the walls darkened. The Reader had not been back, and big, fluffy bears were not good company at all. Barely any pages had the joy of turning lately, and the Reader's fingers that normally skimmed and smoothed over the Book's surface were gone. The comings of light and dark were slow and all it could see was a strangely thick, soft mat covered in thin, light colourful sheets. There was no hope. The Book had been forgotten.

<>

When the darkness came, the Reader grasped the Book so tight that her long fingers pressed into its cover. She threw it dramatically on her lap and air gushed out of her with a whoosh. Her fingers trembled as the pages flicked over onto one another. She made another loud, forceful sound and some wet, tiny things splashed onto the pages.

'Muuuum!' she sounded desperate.

Another, bigger creature that looked like the Reader rushed in. She put her fingers onto the Reader's back and hurried her out of the room. There were more noises, muffled ones, but they didn't sound good.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



When light came again, the big Reader swiftly grabbed the Book and threw it into a dark place where something scratchy rubbed against its cover. After a few long, bumpy minutes it was brandished in the light. This setting had a queer, sickly smell that gave it a feeling of artificial fruit. As it got used to the brightness, he heard the big reader make a noise.

'But she loves her book!'

'I'm sorry, but she can't have anyone else go into her room.'

'Pleeeeeease!'

'I can check with the doctors.'

'Yes, thank you!' Different fingers clasped the Book. These were white and smooth and strange, not at all like the Reader's.

The Book once again was drowned in blackness.

<>

When the Book was finally in the light again, it found itself in a new space with glossy white walls. The transparent panels were open, so cool air flowed through. In this place the same sickly smell hung in the air, despite the fresh breeze. It sat there for countless shifts of darkness and light until finally, a reader dressed completely in white came into the room. His face had something blue and papery covering it, which made him look alien. The White Reader strode towards the Book with big, confident steps. He roughly grabbed the Book and took a tube from his belt. He twisted a nozzle on the top of the tube and pressed a lever next to it. Tiny, tickly droplets fell onto its covers and pages. The white reader nodded and walked out of the room with the Book in hand.

The White Reader stopped at a rectangle in the wall. He pushed on it, and it creaked open to reveal another huge panel with a great blaze of light shining out of it. Under it was another soft, thick mat that was nearly concealed by the brightness. But then there was a movement under the sheets. The White Reader gently placed the Book on the plush surface and said, 'Evangilline!'

The mat was soft and bouncy and homely. The Book wouldn't mind having this instead of a shelf. Suddenly, the light was shaded by a figure sitting up. The light made the figure look like a shining, dark silhouette with spiky spines of brightness coming off it. The Book cringed inwardly as the strange shape in front of it swayed. It seemed like an angel floating down from a blue, picturesque sky. The figure drew nearer and nearer until the Book could see a pale, speckled face.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



The Reader was back.

The Book was not forgotten after all.

A wrinkled, crippled face beamed down on the scratched and tattered Book. Even now, when each of the Book's pages were ripped and folded with love and compassion, the Book was not forgotten. The wrinkled face drew closer and whispered into the pages for one last motion of empathy. Her nose skimmed the dents in the beaten cover and her eyelashes brushed the stained pages. The world was still.

Until, moments later, a little coughing reader dragged the book out from under her grandma. 'Wow.' she breathed, 'a real book from the time of COVID.'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Leo

15 years old

I Survived Online School!

'More online school...I really hate it.' I opened my eyes and stared at the usual old white ceiling. It is always the same ceiling, no colour change, no added texture, just the same old boring one. I groaned. It was a new week, but a new week of more torture. Grabbing my laptop, I headed out to the table, feeling already exhausted. There was no way I was going to complete all the given work.

I sat down and opened my laptop. The laptop buzzed, and a great light shone onto me, blinding my eyes.

'Argh! Too bright!' I shouted as I quickly pressed the button to dim the brightness. That definitely destroyed my eyes already. Sooner or later, I will need glasses: big, thick, circular glasses, just like my uncle. I opened Google with a click on my trackpad and my email just popped up out of nowhere. I guess I never turned off my laptop.

I held onto my cup, the red cup that I brought from my home country. I saw my reflection, my tired face glimmering in the water. With a big gulp, I drank all the water. It felt refreshing. As soon as I turned back to the screen, my laptop was just drenched in water, like it just came out from the swimming pool. I just stared at the one part of the screen. The number of emails continued to rise, the red number changing every second. My heart was pounding. I have never seen such a thing happen before. Finally, I pulled myself together and put my clothes into the washer. I was entirely drenched. What a great start of the day...

I went to wipe my laptop too, but when I grabbed some toilet paper, my mum stopped me. I have never seen her stopping me doing something so quickly. Usually, she will not care what I do unless I do something wrong, and even if I did something wrong, it would take her 5 min to realise that. Was toilet paper so important to her?

'Don't waste the toilet paper! Use the towel there!' She shouted at me. I sighed. How was toilet paper useful for stopping COVID-19? I do not get why people were buying so much toilet paper. Did they have to use so much for all their toilet sessions?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Finally, I sat down again and scrolled through all the work. It was a pain to see so much work. There was poetry work for English, there was quadratic equation work for maths, there was random DNA work for science, there was a quiz for music, and there was more and more work. How annoying to see that much work. I shook my head in frustration and pushed myself away from the table for the one thing that could calm me down: breakfast.

At around 10:20 am, I received another notification from my email. Not again! I thought. I did not want more homework. I braced myself as I moved my cursor to the email tab. Closing my eyes, I clicked on it. Sweat dripped from my forehead and made my laptop wet again. Slowly, I opened my eyes to find a Zoom Meeting ID and password. Great...it was a science Zoom class. The day seemed to progress so painfully slow. It felt like an hour made me another year older.

Nobody enjoys Zoom meetings, including me. All we do is stare at teachers, who talk for hours and hours, later realising that nobody was even listening to their lecture. We, as students, just sit back and do our stuff, some even leaving in the middle of the meeting. That is what exactly happened during the science Zoom class. The teacher just talked for ages, ranting about DNA, and how it replicates. We literally did an exercise on this two weeks ago, and now she was talking about the same thing again. Finally, every student knew that something must be done to release all our boredom. Two seconds later, we saw blue lines on the screen. The teacher told them to get rid of it, but nobody did. Instead, more people were drawing on the screen and ruining the lesson. I just watched it. Half of me wanted to tell them to stop, but half of me was laughing hysterically. It was so funny. In the end, I could not help it but laugh too. The teacher's reaction suited her dinosaur background very well. It was the best ending to a Zoom meeting ever in history.

* * *

Many students usually just do their things after school, but I don't. I often continue to finish all the school work so that I don't have anything to do at the end of the week. I hate doing work last minute because of the pressure I have when I do that. So, on this particular day, I did the same. I typed furiously and completed all my work at around 5 pm, which was definitely a world record. One by one, I handed the schoolwork on Google Classroom, clicking the submit button seven times in a row. However, as soon as I wanted to save the last document I had, my laptop screen just turned into darkness.

'No! Not now! Right when I wanted to save it!' I examined the charging cable. It was plugged in. I looked at the power brick. It was plugged in too. I turned to the switch on the

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



wall. I slapped my head in anger. It was not even on! Turning the switch on, I quickly ran back to the laptop, and it booted nicely, without any problems. I logged in and prayed for everything to be saved. The first message that popped up already told me something was wrong. I opened up my document again. It was blank, blank white. There was nothing. Nothing! Absolutely nothing! I was pissed off and punched the table again and again. I wasted my 2 hours, and now I get nothing back. I was fed up.

I am sure every student has had the same experiences as me. I can tell you online school is a pain. I am glad that I survived online school. Please, don't make us do more online school. I don't want more torture.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Oysharjo

12 years old

Life in Quarantine

Lonely Penguins

The penguin pressed its face to the glass tank. Where did all the humans go? Why aren't they pressing their fleshy faces to the tank as well? His penguin buddies were all wondering the same thing. 'Are you a human?' a penguin asked an escaped monkey wandering the penguin enclosure.

Goofy Sock

After countless boring hours, I got up and looked at my floor, filled with dirty socks, each filthier than the last. With no other options, I picked up the sock in front of me. It was grey, and dull. That would change – when I'd glued some googly eyes on it!

Roof

Being not allowed out of the house, using the attic window, I climbed onto the roof with my dog. The sun was setting as I looked at the rest of my street. Everyone was still stuck in their houses, so the area looked deserted, except for the occasional person. Turning around to go back inside, I noticed the window was closed, leaving my dog and I stranded on the roof.

Lawn Mower Fun

All this time to kill and nothing to kill it. *I could start a new hobby?* I thought lying lazily in my bed. Nah...that'll be boring. I prefer chaotic stuff. I finally get up and look out the window. Maybe there'll be something interesting out there. It's just a neighbour mowing their lawn on the other side of the street. They're on one of those lawnmowers that you ride, going back and forth over grass. That looks fun. It looks more fun than whatever I'm doing. Maybe I'll ask...

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Raining

I love it when it rains. Especially in quarantine. Well, it's basically the same thing, just with less car noises and being at home. The raindrops roll down the window. To my dismay one that I was looking at suddenly stops. I stare at it until it keeps going, absorbing other raindrops, getting faster and faster, until it reaches the bottom of my windowsill. It's all peaceful until I get bored and bring out a bag of chips - the loud crunching clashing with the quiet pitter patter of the rain. Alright, time to get some more food and a book.

Walk Faster

Of course, I'm the one getting the shopping, I thought to myself. Walking to the shops downtown. I was trying hard to keep clear of the people around me, trying to social distance. As I was walking, I was thinking about random stuff, like songs and things that would fit the mood.

Making my way downtown, walking fast...

I looked behind me. People were over there walking way too close for my liking. I put my head down.

Walking faster...

Book

'Read a book', they said. 'It's fun', they said. 'You learn stuff', they said. I was staring blankly at the paper printed with words. None of the information was going into my head. The sentences just went right through my brain, all of it not making sense or adding up. Why can't I go back to watching movies and stuff? Why do people read books? I looked over the pages again, before realising I was holding the book upside down.

Potted Plant

Week five of quarantine and I'm convinced that the potted plants on my balcony are having more fun than I am. The days seem to drag on forever, becoming boring and hollow. I decide to join the plants on the balcony and try to look at the world from their perspective. Sitting in dirt and staring at the sun. As boring as it may sound, it's more productive than what I do these days. Eat and sleep. Maybe I should plan a career as a potted plant. Not a bad idea.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jethro

15 years old

The year is 2040. The air is hazy with carbon monoxide. Everyone is wearing a gas mask, inside and out. I turn on the TV. Every channel is singing the praises of Donald Trump's latest bill. I laugh. I know better. Donald has been dead for years - it's obvious that it's just Alec Baldwin in a wig. No one believes me though I'm some crazy fake news conspiracy theorist. Ever since he put off the 2020 election due to the great pandemic, a new one was never actually held. When the POTUS died Alec made sure to jump in at this amazing opportunity.

I switch off the TV, and take out my phone, to scroll Reddit, or Tumblr, or something. Immediately I feel a great pain in my chest, as I remember that all those sites had been outlawed long ago.

What is the truth anymore? What can I do to change it? The idea of a vote or a petition is long gone, and Wikipedia was taken down in 2029. I turn to my empty bookshelf and breathe a heavy sigh. I turn to my robot cat, fast asleep on my couch. People don't have pets anymore - they are costly. Food is far more scarce than power, thus many turned to artificial intelligence to keep them company. As I stroke its cold, lifeless hair, I think back to the numerous cats I have had over my life, and the light they brought to it. If only I could afford real animals...

A quick look at the time sends me into a panic. I thought my dad was joking when he told me that a degree in data science would be a good idea. He was right. Information about people is the only currency. Advertisements reign supreme in order to inform people about endless products that they may or may not need and could never buy even if they wanted to.

I haphazardly pull over my plain black suit and run out to the car. Bill's gonna kill me. I broke the speed limit several times on the way to my colleague's house, but ever since the 2031 Bill that allowed essential business commuters to drive over the speed limit, it doesn't matter.

I work at Advertising Incorporated, whose name itself is a testament to how long they have existed. Rumour has it they coined the term, though I suspect that said rumours were started by the company. We are owned by the state. So is every business. American

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



capitalism at its finest.

As I screeched into the driveway, I saw a very angry looking coworker standing at the door.

‘YOU’RE LATE!!! AGAIN! HOW HARD CAN...?’

‘My alarm didn’t go off. I’m so sorry.’

He laughed his hearty laugh. ‘I’m kidding, moron.’

I laughed with him. ‘How you been?’

We talked and talked on the commute – so much that we completely forgot how late we were and as a result drove under the speed limit for the entire journey which is unusual for both of us. It was only upon arriving at the grimy glass towers and discovering that we were 3 full minutes late that we remembered the verbal beating we were about to receive.

Like dogs who ate their family’s dinner we trudged up the boring, grey steps to the 3rd floor. Bill gave three sharp taps on the door, and we winced as it slowly creaked open.

‘Come in,’ came a soothing voice from inside, yet it sounded like nails on a chalkboard to my ears.

‘You two are late. Again.’

He adjusted his thin, blue-rimmed glasses, and paced back and forth in front of the table. We stared at him with an air of a pair of schoolboys getting punished for our misdemeanours.

‘You, as well as I do, know how much it hurts the company. We pay you millions of megabytes every day and yet you have the nerve to show up late.’

He continued to pace back and forth with a stern expression on his face. ‘Go.’

As I walked out the door of the office I breathed a sigh of relief. I still have a job! I made my way to my desk and sat down to start the days’ work. I opened my email*. A company called Jon’s Electric Nose Scratchers Inc, asking to pay us a hefty sum in exchange for a

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



television** broadcast advert. I got to work, producing a 20-second long video depicting a man with an itchy nose scratching it. Then a slow motion of someone grinding pepper. Then a storm of mosquitoes. Black screen. A new scene comes into view, of a woman sitting at the dinner table with her family, looking very happy, with an electric nose scratcher attached to her face. 'Jon's Electric Nose Scratchers: No more itchy nose***.'

* Emails are outdated, but still viewed as the best way to conduct business

** This refers to corporation-owned internet livestreams, that the general population still refers to as 'television'

*** Slogans are viewed as overrated by marketing experts, and thus people don't try too hard

In an hour, the simulation render was complete, and I took it to the board to be examined. Within the first three seconds the entire board was furiously scratching the tip of their noses.

'I think we've got a winner, Moses.' Moses, still scratching, and becoming self-conscious of the fact that he had fallen for the advert, nodded in agreement.

'Steve, without people like you I don't know where we would be with this company,' he announced in my direction, a small but noticeable grin on his face.

'Stuart, get this on at prime viewing hour, and get this man a raise!'

A raise? Wow! Can I upscale my apartment now? Perhaps buy a better computer? The possibilities flew through my mind as I made my way out the front door to meet Bill.

'Hey!' I looked up to see the man himself, grinning from ear to ear, arms outstretched. 'Good job man! I heard about the new commercial!'

'A raise. A raise!' I smirked at him. 'You need any maintenance on your house?'

'Not at the moment but save some for when I do!' We laughed as we began our journey to the kitchen.

We walked through the bustling town centre to the much less busy nearby ghetto. This is where our favourite lunch spot was located. Most businesspeople go to eat in the ghettos, because even with salaries like ours fine dining is expensive and often ghetto restaurants

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



have much more wholesome food. It was with much dismay that we found the location deserted. The door was missing, and several windows broken. For a moment, I was shocked.

I turned to Bill. He was gobsmacked as well. As soon as we made eye contact we went back to looking normal. It's dangerous to notice things particularly if others do not want you to. Particularly if 'others' are the government.

I broke the silence. 'I suppose we'd better find a new lunch spot.'

He nodded solemnly, and I followed him away from the ghostly remains of our favourite restaurant for the past year at double our usual walking pace, without so much as a glance back.

After some walking, crowd-dodging, and locating many other restaurants (some empty without a trace of the proprietors, some full to the brim) we eventually found a small hut made of various pieces of recycled plastic. As we walked through the door, if it could be called that, we were greeted by a dark-haired old woman, who appeared to be in her 60s. The place was dusty, and consisted of two long reasonably long tables, with a door presumably leading to the kitchen and family home.

'Hello! Please take a seat!' she exclaimed, in a particularly sweet voice that only seems to belong to grandmas and people who definitely want something from you. In this case, it seemed to be a grandma.

'Today it's BBQ chicken!'

'Don't mind if I do!' exclaimed Bill. I nodded in agreement. We had been searching for food for quite some time, and could think of nothing better than a warm, hearty meal. The woman disappeared to the kitchen for a few minutes.

I heard a strange noise coming from another room, like a low growl, but shorter... a bark. A bark? Were there? pat pat pat pat pat pat pat pat...

'AWOWOWOWOW!' announced a dog as it bolted through the doorway to meet the strangers.

It ran up to me and sniffed my hand, then proceeded to start licking it. I laughed.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'Woah, there boy.' I gave him a pat. A real life dog? I thought back to my childhood. I only ever had cats, but I remember my cousins' dog well. We were good friends. A whip from a very excited tail through me out of my daydream.

'Are you seeing this, Bill?'

'I can't believe it!' He began laughing hysterically. After much patting and stroking the dog decided it had had enough and disappeared back where it came from.

The cook reappeared.

'We cook everything as it is needed. We're a very small business, and batch-cooking has only ever gone badly for us.'

She paused and laughed. 'That's code for: please be patient! It will be a while before we serve you!'

Bill and I laughed along with her; after all we were not pressed for time, Advertising Inc. are generous with their lunch breaks.

'Where are you two from?' She eyed us up and down, taking note of our suits and badges.

'Some massive conglomerate for sure. Advertising?'

'Got it in one.'

She shook her head from side to side, lips pursed.

'Well, while you're waiting for your meals, please allow me to tell you a story.'

'We'd be glad to!' said Bill, not very convincingly. He wasn't interested in any nonsense, and just wanted his lunch.

'When I was growing up, the world was a different place. Racism was rampant in corporations, and gay rights were near non-existent and highly contested. There were two political parties, and anyone you came across who supported the other one was your sworn enemy.'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



All of that changed in 2020. Just like that. The great protests were successful...in a way. Corporations were forced not to discriminate by race when employing. The police were disbanded, and instead community-led service groups replaced them. We thought we'd won.'

'YOU MEAN YOU WERE A PART—'

'Ssshhhh! Don't speak too loud!'

A long silence ensued. Bill frowned. I maintained a neutral expression, or at least tried to.

'Anyway, as I was saying. Everyone felt a bit defeated when Donald postponed the election. But he'd let all our new laws go through, so maybe he wasn't so bad after all? Over the next few years, every individual law we had passed, and some others, was slowly dismantled by his administration.

All we could do was watch as he formalised what is essentially a caste system. He managed to prosecute several people who were part of the protests and the courts gave them severely unfair punishments. Several years later, most of us have served our time but are unemployable by law. We are the people who run these restaurants or grow small produce.

Inflation of course went rampant, as international relation after international relation went sour, and America was finding it hard to stay afloat. Do you remember real currency? As in currency that you can see and feel? People just decided that it had no value anymore and moved to other currency. Even the government.

And that is where we are today. We trade information about people in exchange for basic needs. Some of us have cushy jobs in multinational conglomerates, and others are forced to squeeze out every last calorie from every last byte we earn.'

'All that just...for a guilt trip?' Bill was no longer angry, just disinterested at this point.

'No, that's not what I meant. It's not a personal attack and it's not directly your fault.'
Bill was not happy.

'So what do you want me to do? Give up my job? It's not like I'm even paid that much! I'm only a writer.'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



‘No, I want you to just recognise that you are privileged. Don’t think that because the system is the way that it is, you can’t change it.’ She paused and rubbed her eye. ‘Particularly someone like you. Anyway, your chicken should be ready.’

Having finished our lunch, we made our way back to the office.

‘Well that was one way to keep us entertained.’ said Bill. I didn’t reply. I was still thinking.

After a full afternoon of work, we hopped in the car and made our way back home.

‘You know, I’ve been thinking about the crazy woman.’ Bill said.

‘What she said...It is kind of selfish to be in the position I’m in and not try to fight for what I think is right. I mean, I’ve never thought about it before, but the world’s really messed up. I’d just thought that it had to be like this.’

His eyes fixated on an imaginary faraway point.

‘Do you think we can change it? Do you think we have to live this way?’

I thought for a moment.

‘You know...my life does feel a little meaningless. I’m useless. I’m just one tiny gear in this whole evil machine. And it is evil. I’ve never thought about it before I feel like we had our morals extracted from us under the sedative of comfort. We are just utensils used by the big boss to line his pockets.’ I stopped to take a breath.

‘So even if it doesn’t work out I think we should do something. Give me a minute, I need to phone my parents.’

Beep. No answer. I try again. Beep. No answer. It then occurs to me that I can’t remember when I last spoke to them. Longer than a year ago. Much longer than a year. They could be dead, for all I know. I try one more time. Beep. No answer.

‘What’s the matter, Steve?’

‘I...haven’t spoken—’

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'To your parents in a long time. I was just thinking the same thing. I don't even know if they're still alive. I've been so caught up in work-'

'I'd forgotten how to feel.'

I found it very difficult to sleep that night. The why was over. I'd found my motivation. I never got to say goodbye to my parents because I was so wrapped up in making money. Now I just needed the how. I remembered something. I hopped out of bed and reached into the pocket of my coat and pulled out a metal chain. So I still have it. On the end was a small metal cross. I hadn't thought about religion in a long time. It had been banned by the government, as were all other ideologies that favoured information and morals.

I remembered the people I knew at church when I was younger. Why had I forgotten about them? They were such a part of my life and now I could only remember the names and faces of two or three of them after thinking for quite some time.

'Listen, Bill, we have more power than you think we do.' He nodded soberly.

'We need to do something. I don't care if I die if you don't care if you die. I have no one to live for other than you. I have no family as I am not allowed to. I have no friends other than you, only self-proclaimed 'allies' that wouldn't so much as blink if they were forced to leave me.'

I sighed.

'I get how you feel.' he replied. 'And I think I feel the same.' He paused. For a long time. I thought I saw a tear escape his eye.

'They took my parents.'

'What?'

'They took my parents. The government took my parents. I didn't realise it at the time but they were a part of a resistance group.' He was struggling to speak over the sobs forcing their way out of his throat.

'I...came home from school one day and the police were making their way out of my house and into their van. They just ignored me and drove off leaving the door open. I walked in

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



and—’ His speech dissolved into a barrage of indistinguishable sobs. I beckoned him closer to me, and gave him a long, long hug.

I’d forgotten what human contact is like.

It’s quite comforting actually.

The next day, I couldn’t concentrate on work. All I could think about was how complicit I was in this humanitarian horror. The amount of people I had manipulated into spending money they didn’t have...

‘Struggling today, are we?’ I started as I noticed Moses standing behind me. How long had he been there?

‘I don’t know, Moses, I just don’t have the inspiration.’ If you appear overwhelmed enough, people will believe anything.

‘Well, some days will always be better than others.’ He gave me a sympathetic look. ‘You’ll be yourself tomorrow, I’ll bet.’ He winked at me, I gave him a pathetic smile, and he went on his way.

It seemed only seconds until lunch came around. I met up with Bill, and we made our way to the new restaurant.

‘How was your morning?’ He looked at me defeatedly.

‘I couldn’t produce anything.’ I stared at the ground. ‘I don’t know if my inspiration fled or my conscience joined me.’

‘Same here.’

We dodged a beggar and rounded the corner to find the restaurant.

Window shattered. Front door left open, blowing in the wind.

Instinctively Bill began to leave, but I stopped.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'Wait, this is exactly what we've been waiting for.' I tugged on his jacket. 'We need to conduct an investigation.'

'And then what? No one will want to do anything, we all know what happened here and the gov...'

I slapped him.

'Right, yeah, the 'burglars' won't do anything about it.'

I stared at him, exasperated. How did a man so stupid end up in his position?

'Well, let's go in. There's no one around.'

We both stood still, looking at each other expectantly.

'Umm...you go first.' he said at long last.

The door creaked open as I nudged it, to reveal the remnants of the dining hall. Several chairs and tables had been overturned. The dusty, beige tiled floor had several red patches. Light filtered in through the smashed window behind us. I nervously crept forward through the door to the kitchen.

The fridge door was open, and a stew was still cooking. The cook must have been captured in the middle of preparing a meal. I looked down at the tiles and saw a long trail of blood leading from one of the puddles in the other room.

'What do you make of this, Bill?' I asked my co-conspirator. No reply. 'Bill?'

He was probably checking out another room.

I stepped out of the kitchen, and found myself in a short, narrow corridor. I decided to take the door opposite the one I had left. I slowly opened the door. The floor had blue tiles and I could make out a sink in front of me. I fumbled for the lights.

I turned my head and gasped in horror. Just to the right of where I walked in was a bathtub. It was filled with some liquid, probably bleach from the smell. And there, piled on top of each other in this viscous white swamp were several decomposing bodies. I could make out a few humans and several dogs, all polluting the chemical bog with red from several open bullet wounds.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



I became aware of a presence behind me and spun on my heel to see a hand pistol pointed at my head. I jumped back and threw my arms in the air.

'This was my fault, Steve.'

'Put down the gun!'

'It was my fault! I reported them to the government and look at them now!' Tears were cascading down his face.

'I can't live with this, Steve!'

'Forgive yourself, you are a better man now.'

'Men are defined by their actions, Steve. I have murdered innocent people in cold blood. It takes a toll on a man's soul, Steve. I am tainted! And you saw me do it! You are witness to all of this!'

'Bill.' I could barely hear myself think over the sound of my own heartbeat.

'You might not forgive yourself, but I forgive you. Yes, your soul has been tainted, just as mine has from the millions of minds I have corrupted. But I believe the soul can heal. Join me, Bill. We will leave the city. We will start a new life, away from the evils of advertising and conglomerates.' I choked back tears. Stay calm. If you stay calm, he will calm.

'Steve, words could not express how much I would like to do that.' He whimpered, and coughed. 'But I can't live with what I've done. I'm evil, Steve. I killed people.'

He coughed again. A little blood shot out and landed on my shirt. I tried to ignore it.

'Steve. I ha—' He began blubbering uncontrollably.

'Steve, I have to do it, you don't understand. And my parents, I did nothing for them, I was complicit. I didn't even try to save them'

'There was no way you could have known! It wasn't your fault!' A few tears escaped my eyelids.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



‘And anyway, what good does killing yourself do? The problems will continue, they will just be hidden from you.’

‘I can’t cope, Steve. I killed my parents, and, and,’ He let forth an unearthly howl, and raised the pistol to aim at my chest...

BANG

I fell backward against the wall, a searing pain in my chest. I looked down and winced. Blood was spewing out of my torso, and I could feel some kind of organ damage.

‘It was the only way, Steve.’

‘It was not—’ I whimpered. ‘It wasn’t the only way. You are a COWARD! YOU ARE A COWARD, BILL! YOUR PROBLEMS WERE TOO MUCH, AND SO INSTEAD OF FACING THEM, YOU KILLED YOURSELF AND YOUR BEST FRIEND!’ I paused for a breath, but none came.

So, this is the end.

‘I am a coward, Steve.’ He had stopped crying. ‘And that’s why I had to do this. My soul is irreparable.’

‘ONLY.’ I choked on my words and coughed. I moved my elbow away from my face to find it covered in blood. ‘ONLY BECAUSE YOU REFUSE TO FIX IT!’

My vision grew blurry. He stood up and dragged me by the feet. I blinked. The bleach...it smelt so strong. I couldn’t think. ‘Help, save meee!’ I cried halfheartedly. I hear a bang, and felt another lifeless body fall on top of me. I blinked again. The bleach...eating my flesh. I tried to scream, but all that escaped was a weak moan. I blinked and willed my eyes to open.

They refused.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Sophie

11 years old

I wondered why my owner has been home all day. Normally, she would be here until 8:40 am then leave and be back at 3 pm. She would then spend the rest of the afternoon here, annoying me and picking me up all the time. But, now she's here all day, getting more time to annoy me and pick me up. She seemed pretty OK with it, happy that at lunch she could grab a device – such as her beloved Nintendo Switch – and annoy me. With my view from the 4th-floor balcony, I could see less and less people, most of them wearing the new fashion-statement masks. Strange things that looped over their ears and covered the mouth and nose. This lockdown was going to be the opposite of fun for me.

'Ahh, lunchtime!' I heard Sophie call from her desk in her room. She got up and headed for the kitchen and made lunch, a bowl of rice drowned in sweet soy sauce with an egg cut in half perched on top. She dug in and finished the sweet soy sauce-drowned rice quickly. She looked at me and called me. Of course, I had to come. It was the code of pets.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Yashneil

9 years old

Click! Click! Click! sounded the Lego bricks, clashing together like glue. I constructed this really cool building with two towers on the side and with an epic laser shooting from the top of the building. Crash! The building fell like cats and dogs. It made even more of a mess. I gathered some more Lego pieces and thought about creating the Leaning Tower of Pisa. I used cream coloured bricks and a combination with cream to make a one metre tall tower. Now I need a stirring of wind to make it lean a bit. I left it outside but the air was still and stiff, until a little breeze slowly came my way. 'Yay,' I exclaimed. Then I decided to show my masterpiece to the Lego hallway of creations.

Then a thought came to my mind: why not play some soccer to celebrate my creation? I called my little brother from the living room and asked him 'do you want to play soccer?' He then rushed outside and decided to play at 2:00 pm with the blazing sun like a sack of fire heated stones right on your skin. My 6-year-old brother decided to play a match under our massive patio. I had an advantage because I played soccer before my brother Dhrish. We counted down, '3, 2, 1!' and we kicked the ball from every direction. Goals were increasing and the game got intense. It was 0-0 and I had to score a last-minute goal to win. Boom! The soccer ball soared over my brother's head and it blasted in the top corners of the goal. I shook my brother's hands and celebrated in style. 'Woo hoo!' The crowd cheered. Applause was heard all over the neighbourhood.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Karla

12 years old

In the future, people will no longer take things for granted. The smell of food cooking at every fast food shop made everyone stop and lift their noses for at least a moment. You could almost always hear the happy sound of chattering and laughing everywhere you go. Friends and family are CONSTANTLY there when you need them, and in person. The airports have been made bigger and better, way more comfortable and fun, because of the amount of people that are going on holiday. Whether it's to the beach or to Paris, everyone goes everywhere because it is cheap and fun and beautiful.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nawal

14 years old

How My Hate for Dark Chocolate Became Love

Oh how I love Dark Chocolate. It's probably the best thing I could ever have. I am so grateful someone came with the idea to it. Oh thank you very much J.S Fry for this delicious idea. He was a British chocolatier who moulded the first bar of chocolate. The richness and bitterness would melt in your mouth the minute it went in. I do know my history when it comes to chocolate. You may think I have loved Dark Chocolate my whole life, but no, it wasn't like this at all. I hated it back in my teenage days but when COVID-19 started a terrible lockdown happened everything changed even my hatred for Dark Chocolate. It was 6 years ago in 2020 I decided to suck it up by buying dark chocolate bars. I will take my revenge on those who took the Milk Chocolate bars.

'WHERE IS MY CHOCOLATE' I screamed at my assistant who forgot to buy me a Milk Chocolate bar while buying me my favourite Starbucks drink.

'I'm sorry Miss Smith but I couldn't find your favourite chocolates anywhere. I asked all the store managers they said they will have order in by tomorrow.' My assistant said in a scared tone because of my sudden outburst.

'Whatever!! Finish these files and paper work then you can go home.' I passed him the paperwork.

'Yes Miss' and he left to finish the task in his office.

Being the youngest CEO in the world is hard work because of school and then work. My parents help out but I have to do more than them because I have to do what I started. But lately things have been getting harder because of this virus that has been spread across the globe and people are panicking because business is going down but not mine. Mine is still going up, no one I mean no one has lost their jobs in my company except the people who messed up the work which was for the biggest client.

But I'm losing energy because lately I haven't had my chocolate bars because I couldn't find any in the store and if I don't get chocolates by next week I will have to go to the hospital because of my state. While I was writing email to the workers reminding them

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



about meeting tomorrow I started to get dizzy I knew it was because I haven't had chocolates for three weeks I packed my stuff, sent the email and called my driver to pick me up from work because if I stay any longer I will get worse from overworking myself.

On my way home I saw people with hundreds of chocolate packets walking along the streets I was curious where can they be getting so much chocolate from so I asked my driver to stop at the nearby store where they sell stop chocolates. Before the driver could park properly I hopped out of the car and dashed straight to the store to get some chocolates bars but when I got there all the chocolates were gone except Dark Chocolate. I spotted the last Milk Chocolate bar right on the middle shelf but there was a problem – there was another kid younger than me on the other side giving me a 'my chocolate woman' look. How dare he give me that look. Doesn't he know I am? Suddenly he started racing to grab the last bar! When the kid started dashing I started to run at my max speed but that short kid won and blew a raspberry at me. Just you wait kid if you try to apply for a job in my company in the future I won't be hiring you.

I went and grabbed some tablets and juice because I have this headache which is going to be the death of me and headed for the cash register and paid for the items. When I arrived at my mansion I didn't see my parents' car outside. I guess they might still be in Japan attending some meetings for their company. Looks like I have the house/chocolate for myself. When I opened the house I saw the maids cleaning the kitchen and the living room. No one even bothered to greet me so I slammed the door to get everyone's attention. They all greeted me asking if I want dinner but I declined in a cold manner because of my headache.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Kavya

12 years old

Have you ever put on a pair of cosy slippers? For me, it's a snug, warm, satisfying experience especially on a cold night. Ugg boots have been my personal choice of footwear and I have to say, it has definitely improved my lockdown experience. Now I don't have to walk on cold tiled floors and can enjoy moving around my home in comfort. This feeling is something that has linked me to the pre-COVID experience where we could go outside, do our own thing comfortably and happily. Where we had our own lives and didn't have to worry about going to the supermarket or even a friend's place. Where we would not be in fear.

That's what brings me to this, an article that I was reading a few days ago:

'Ruby Princess inquiry: COVID survivor fell sick after waitress 'sneezed' in her face' - The Daily Telegraph (June 23rd, 2020)

One specific part really caught my eye: three simple words that I think really represent what we are going through at the moment and contradict this Ugg boot, pre-COVID era. Three words that have completely changed in meaning and perception when this virus was released. Three words that have changed people's lives.

'I've got it.' One of the passengers onboard said to a friend. 'I've got it.'

This three-word phrase has become a fear-inducing maxim. Fears of contracting the virus. Fears of spreading the virus. Fears of being stuck in isolation and lockdown. Fears of dying from this virus. But the truth of it all is that most of us will be unaffected by this virus yet we still have flocked to supermarkets and hoarded supplies such as toilet paper and hand sanitiser in fear. The truth is that if we abide by the rules and restrictions by staying at home, and practicing safe social distancing measures, we will be protected. We are not the heroes on the frontline who are risking their lives to save lives every day. The truth is for many of us we have the luxury to stay at home and wear our Ugg boots. Our fears have blinded us from reality – we don't need much to survive this, all we need is common sense.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Experiencing and trying to survive through this pandemic has been hard for all of us. We have had the smallest of impacts including restricting gatherings of more than 10. And, we have also had some huge challenges, where we had to stay at home, isolate in lockdown and even adapt to new lifestyles during this. It has made our world muted, colour-drained, alone and blank of any signs of livelihood. Now, every country has locked its own doors, preventing any visitors from coming into their homes, for everyone's safety. Now the world is feeling distant, separated and cold. Wearing my Ugg boots have helped me feel the warmth, snug, safe feeling before the world became like this. And maybe, just maybe, we can return to the Ugg boot period of time.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Johnny

14 years old

Orthodox Easter this year was completely different and more unusual than ever before.

There were no family gatherings; no cracking of red eggs, no attending midnight mass, no cutting tsourekia, no making biscuits...the matter of the fact was that we needed to sacrifice this sacred holiday of ours to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

I vividly remember hoping that the virus would miraculously disappear before the annual paschal festivities. Not exactly disappear, rather that all the issues surrounding it would be rectified. I would meticulously open my laptop, searching desperately in hopes that restrictions were lifted and I could spend Easter Sunday with all my extended family.

Then Holy Week began and it became clear that our whole paschal routine would be turned completely upside-down.

Where once my grandmother and I would be making biscuits, we were now struggling to find the flour and sugar necessary to the mix.

Where once my mother and I would be purchasing red dye for eggs at the Greek Wholesaler, we were now adorning ourselves with masks, gloves and sanitiser simply to go to the supermarket and buy some milk.

Where once on Holy Saturday Night we would be making our way excitedly to our local Orthodox church for midnight mass, we were now seated upon our lounge by the lit fireplace, watching Netflix and struggling to stay awake.

Then finally, Easter Sunday rolled around and it seemed like a regular day in quarantine - the monotony of life inside had rendered the day insignificant. There was no music and the usual seventy people that annually flocked to our house were nowhere to be seen. The familiar smell of lamb on the spit was absent and grey melancholic clouds blanketed the usual sunny Easter sky.

The only words to describe the day were sorrowful and dull. There was no bubbly laughter and the only visitor we had was my grandmother. My father wasn't carving lamb off the spit for everyone, since there was no lamb. My mother wasn't running around frantically trying

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



to organise all the food, since the food served was simply a small roast in the oven and a Greek salad.

Suffice to say, my favourite holiday of the year had completely and utterly failed me. Where Easter was once a joyous and happy occasion in my family that involved everyone coming together and celebrating, now it had the potential to kill.

That night, where we once would have still been entertaining, I was seated before my fireplace with an open book in my lap and I vividly remember thinking: 'Well then...this was definitely not how I envisaged this year's Easter.' It could have been worse though...thankfully, no one in my family or close friends were confined to a hospital bed.

But just as the sun rises every day, so does the promise that next year's Easter will be the usual celebration that includes my being able to crack red eggs with my family and smile as the smell of roasting lamb wafts through the air and the beautiful chaos of Pascha ensues around me.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Tomin

12 years old

'Here you go, wear this, honey,' said Grandma.

'Grandma!', replied Alice 'Why do I have to wear the necklace, it's old-fashioned!'

Grandma frowned and sighed.

'Alice, you know how meaningful the necklace is for us, it keeps us safe from dangers,' answered Grandma. 'Especially a time like this, COVID-19 kills people, this necklace will protect you.'

Alice knew her grandma was obstinate and she wouldn't grant Alice permission to leave without it. Furiously, Alice snatched the delicate necklace and placed it around her neck. She made a face and exited the house. With distaste, she took her necklace off and placed it in her bag. She set out to meet her friends and went to the restaurant.

They arrived at McDonald's, and Alice was bewildered at the safety measures. Tables were metres apart, workers were wearing gloves and masks etc. She ordered a cheeseburger and relaxed with her friends. The air was chilly, but Alice felt warm from her anger. She went outside to see the view, leaving her friends. The beach next to the restaurant was shimmering green, with smooth, white foams. The sky was deep blue, with fluffy clouds. Alice felt younger, freed from fears. She felt a peculiar sensation of calmness.

Suddenly, she felt guilty for not wearing the necklace. She didn't feel hungry, anymore. She took her necklace and gazed at it. It was a gorgeous, golden locket, with stunning jewellery. It appeared ancient yet modern. She opened the locket and stared at the photo. It was a photo of her entire family, at Christmas and everyone was grinning madly. Alice blinked back her tears, hard. She knew why grandma gave it to her.

Her parents had died in a car crash and the other members were already dead or they were somewhere else in the world. Alice felt serendipitous and honoured for her family to watch her and prevent disasters for her. Alice felt desperate. She took the necklace and proudly wore it. With newfound confidence, Alice went to eat her cheeseburger.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ella

14 years old

It has been fifteen years since the pandemic started. The world has become a wasteland, deserted in every aspect. Human contact has been abandoned as we live alone in isolation. The streets are quiet and dark, not a human to be seen. The 33rd wave of COVID-19 has recently hit, restraining us back to our homes. I have spent my days on Zoom meetings, talking to my young nieces and nephews who have recently discovered the pen. They are confused by the aspect of it, only paying attention to their recently upgraded TV holograms. Their bewilderment amuses me as I remember being their age, using a pen as if it was just another piece of stationery.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



JC

14 years old

'What the hell!!! Coronavirus, I ain't scared about the flu! The government is trying to scare you guys. That's how they get money from you. Look at Brazil the prime minister ain't scared at all. I respect him, he's got guts.'

'Yeah mate! That's bloody rubbish, I agree with Jacob. Even if it's real everyone will know what to do because we been through SARS.'

'Wait, what if North Korea is trying to scare us. They used the nuclear bomb to scare us right?'

'The nuclear bomb threat, that ain't bullcrap. I believe its China is trying to scare us. They're communist you know.'

'No they were communist not anymore hopefully. I agree they are trying to threaten us.'

'Well I don't know about the communist idea but the threatening idea is probably true.'

'Hey, look at the people running to the supermarket!'

'What are they doing?'

'Let's wait and see what they get.'

'Is that toilet paper?'

'What! Why the hell do you need toilet paper?'

'I don't know can't you use water?'

'Nah man, wasting water.'

'Oh yeah true, water bills cost a lot.'

'Jeez is that Glen 20?'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'Why do you need that for? Isn't there soap?'

'Yeah I know. That's kinda stupid, right?'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



JJ

14 years old

'What are we going to do, people!' screamed Trump

'What can we do?' The aliens took all the Glen 20!' replied Kim Jong Un.

There was a moment of silence all the country presidents thinking. 'We go on a strike on the alien government!' said Trump proudly. 'No, No stupid idea.'

'We can't fight the aliens they're too strong' replied Scott Morrison. 'I know, but then how are we going to fight coronavirus if the aliens have all the Glen 20?' Trump asked.

Then there was a moment of silence again.

'Why don't we send our best spy to retrieve a can of Glen 20 then we will remake it and make more!' Vladimir Putin shouted.

'Ahhh good plan,' everyone said. 'Ok we start tonight. We will have a can by tomorrow morning.'

Everyone left the room and assigned their best spies to meet with the others and retrieve the can of Glen 20.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Trinity
Year 10

The world is a lot different depending on where you stand. Massive cylindrical towers pepper the surface of the world, within are bustling mechanical cities. Farms are surprisingly frequent for such an industrial landscape, especially since all of the residents are apparently inorganic.

However, beyond the walled wonders, the civilisation is rustic or in some cases not present. Most of the more central cities have either been replaced, flattened or abandoned, ensuring that what was once before cannot be pursued again. Groups of people are scattered and distant, forced to rely on the land they almost ruined to survive.

Nature has reclaimed most abandoned areas.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Naira

13 years old

During the global pandemic, I had made a new best friend *Haikyuu!!*, the best TV show Netflix could ever have. My new best friend and I would sit together every day. *Haikyuu!!* would entertain me and in return I gave him company. We helped each other out. That's what best friends are for! To help each other during the hardest times of our lives.

Volleyball has entertained me for as long as I can remember. I play volleyball and I breathe it. Whilst COVID-19 was happening and we all were in lockdown I couldn't enjoy what I loved the most. *Haikyuu!!* came by to me and entertained me whilst I was going through one of the hardest times of my life. By seeing someone play volleyball, it was almost like I, myself, was on that very court playing and enjoying one of the things I loved.

That just made my day. I am ever so grateful to have a best friend like *Haikyuu!!*. I will never forget how we met each other. It was when we were first in lockdown. It was heavily raining outside and the fierce raindrops continued to attack my bedroom window. It was then *Haikyuu!!* first came to me. Oh, how grateful I was when I became friends with *Haikyuu!!*. My best friends, Lyansie, Alyssa and I just loved hanging out with *Haikyuu!!*. Even if it meant not seeing each other for very long. Each day, we would FaceTime each other and be entertained by *Haikyuu!!* and of course we returned the favour and kept *Haikyuu!!* company. I was so grateful to have a friend like him. After school, each day we would attack the couch with our snacks and lazy bodies.

I would turn on FaceTime and chat with my best friends and then *Haikyuu!!* would come and we would enjoy the rest of the afternoon together. Eat, school, *Haikyuu!!*, sleep and repeat. That was my routine for almost all of my quarantine time. One very wet afternoon, I went to again attack one of my comfort spots when one of my best friends gave me a call. She was extremely sick and I couldn't go and visit her. It broke my heart. Of course, *Haikyuu!!* came along and cheered me up like always. I knew that *Haikyuu!!* would always be there for me. We spent our days happily entertaining and keeping each other company. Things were so great but when time came *Haikyuu!!* had to leave. He told me that he would return when the time was right. I knew he would. He was much more than someone who entertained me during the crisis but had become one of my best friends.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ahan

11 years old

Germi the Wormi

Mission Bait Bucket

One fine spring morning, Germi, the floppy worm, the last of his kind, was still drifting in his deep sleep, while all of a sudden he heard the door slam followed by the loud growl of his hungry stomach.

Germi climbed out of his bookbed and jumped off his bookshelf and onto the table. He ran across the table, which took him about four or five minutes, and took a great big leap and landed on the kitchen platform. Now at this point his hungry stomach gave another loud growl as he reached for Tim's plate. Germi grabbed a few breadcrumbs and journeyed back to his bookshelf. Germi munched cheerfully at his crumbs when all of a sudden a thought came to his mind, and the thought was 'where did Tim and his mum and dad go?' At this point Germi remembered that Tim and his family had a campervan, Germi forced himself to go and check if the campervan was still there. When Germi arrived at the garage door he couldn't reach the door knob...

Chapter 1: The Ants

Germi decides to get help from the ants, the ants live in a wall in the land of kitchen, they are a kind and helpful tribe of about 41,000 lives.

Germi creates a catapult by first pushing a spoon into the kitchen desk; grabbing a pencil from Tim's study desk and putting the pencil under the spoon for leverage. He then ties a tiny thread to Tim's eraser; sits himself onto the dip of the spoon and gives a great big pull on the thread which then pulls the eraser on to the other end of the spoon which then flings Germi over the kitchen desk right in front of the wall where the ants live.

There was a tiny hole in the wall in which Germi could just fit should he want to jump into it. Germi decides to jump into the hole...soon he reaches the bottom of the hole with a great big thud! Then a loud 'ow!' Germi got up with his aching back and was walking through the tunnels when he met an ant also walking in the same tunnel. Germi's exact

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



wording was 'I am lost in these twisting and turning tunnels, I need the queen's help, can you please direct me to her?'

The ant said 'sure! Hop on!'. Germi was very confused and didn't know what the ant meant, so he asked what the meaning of what he said was. The ant said that it meant that Germi had to jump on to the ant's back and the ant would zoom through the tunnels as fast as he could and in no time at all Germi was at a thick heavy stone door.

The ant said some secret words to the door and it rolled over to one side, there were about a dozen ants which looked like guards standing around a tall fat mound of dirt, and on this mound of dirt there was a big female ant with a crown on her head. She was the queen of the ants. Germi told the queen how Tim and his family had disappeared and how Germi needed the help of the ants to open the garage door to check for the campervan. The queen agreed immediately and told four of her ant guards to go and gather all the ants in the wall. Soon all the ants started walking like a colony full of soldiers. When they reached the garage door they all started climbing onto the door, they reached the door knob and turned it clockwise, the door swung open with a cold gush of air whooshing out.

The ants climbed off the door and started to high-five each other. Germi thanked the queen a lot, the queen told Germi that it was her pleasure to help him. Soon the queen gathered all the 40,000 ants and they went back into the wall through the hole. As Germi had learned how to make a catapult before he made another one and slung himself onto the light switch, Germi clicked the switch, the light turned on with a flicker.

Germi stared at the empty ground and the cover of the campervan flat on the floor. Germi sprung off the light switch and travelled through the house straight to the front door. Germi took a great big leap and he landed straight through the little dog door. Germi had checked the clock inside before going outside, the clock said 8:58 am and he had realised that a boy comes daily for a bicycle ride in the morning at 9:00 am. Germi got ready for another big jump and as the boy came through the street Germi leaped onto the boy's bicycle and landed on the handlebar, Germi was so small that the boy couldn't even see him. Germi knew that the boy rides his bicycle to the local park where you can park your car, camp and fish.

When the boy reached the park, Germi jumped off the bicycle and sprinted all the way to Tim and his family's campervan. Germi saw Tim's mum and...Germi raced all the way to the table that Tim's mum was sitting on, Germi also saw that Tim and his dad were on a boat and were fishing! Germi walked up to the edge of the lake and deeply thought about

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



how he could get to the boat, 'ah ha!' He was going to ride the native super fish. It was the fastest fish Germi knew about, Germi threw a few pebbles at the lake and suddenly there were a few bubbles in the water and a huge splash of water bursted of fthe edge of the lake and a fish appeared where the splash had occurred. It was the super fish! Germi climbed onto the back of the fish and somehow the super fish knew where Germi wanted to go. Soon Germi had reached the side of the fishing boat. As the super fish was swimming away Germi gave the super fish the small piece of cheese he had been saving for later. Germi climbed up the side of the boat and saw a terrible sight. It was a bucket of bait! These worms were going to be eaten! Germi had to save the other worms!

Germi knew the easiest way to free the worms, Germi climbed up to Tim's shoulder and whispered into Tim's ear: 'I need your help Tim, I need you to pick up the bucket of bait and throw it all the way to the other side of the lake.' Tim immediately did so. And Germi triumphed at his victory and slipped into the picnic basket so that he would automatically be taken home. But sadly Tim was grounded for his mindless show of the bucket of bait.

The End

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Daniel

12 years old

The Future Breakout

'You have been sentenced for 15 years for creating a dangerous invention' the Judge says as he strikes the hammer down.

'But it wasn't...' I plead to the Judge.

'Guilty! Now while you're in prison make me an invention to help me around'. The guards grasp my arms as they throw me into the jail cell.

<>

'Mark, I think it's ready,' Bruno says excitedly. 'The Trash Collector is ready and set.' The invention was going well until it started to do crazy things such as write and dance and a man called John called the FBI. 'Hello, yes one of Mark's inventions has gone wrong, it has nearly killed his lab assistant Bruno. Yes, we need all the help we can get.'

Fifteen minutes later I find myself in court and here is where we have caught up.

'Guilty!' The Judge says as the hammer strikes down.

<>

'Here's the parts you need to build the invention for the Judge' the prison guard says as he gives me the parts to build. A thought suddenly pops up as the guard leaves the cell. *What if I built a Time Device?* I start to work on the invention straight away, while making it look like a robot assistant. It took hours, and days, and then eventually I finished it and asked the Judge if I could demonstrate.

This would be where I would travel back in time and never invent the Trash Collector.

<>

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'Demonstrate the invention Mark, then give me it so I can use it.' The Judge orders as I walk into the room with the Time Device.

'When you press the button, it will...' I demonstrate as I press the button and disappear before their eyes. 'WhAt iS HaPpENing?' I shout as I see swirls and things that I have never seen before. I had noticed that I was in New York City, but it's not my New York. The streets were empty and trashed, and buildings were destroyed.

I realise one problem, my Time Device was broken. If I wanted to get out, I would have to fix the machine before it's too late and I would be stuck here forever. I started to look around to find anything that could help me fix it or any clues that would tell me what year I was in. After a while I found an old torn up newspaper that had the date of 28th of July 2051, titled 'Leaving tomorrow to Mars'. I read a bit more, it said 'Mars has now become habitable to live and because Earth is losing its photosynthesis, we will have to move there as quick as possible...'

I realised I was all alone, with no hope left, I started to look for food because I was getting hungry. Suddenly, I hear a pile of boxes fall to the ground, I run and check it out. I grasp the boxes in my hand while I start throwing them away, an unfamiliar face suddenly pops up in front of me, 'AHHH WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE U STILL ON EARTH??' we both exclaimed in surprise as we stared at each other in astonishment.

'I am Sofia, I was abandoned and accused of being mad after having the curse of the virus, and being vicious, when I felt fine. I had to flee and hide because I had no other choice.' Sofia sadly said.

'Can you do me a favour? I need to get back to my dimension, but I can't fix my machines because they wouldn't work in this dimension anyways.' I ask.

'We can probably find Professor Mark's Lab, his work is a bit like yours but it's more advanced now, come on follow me!' Sofia replies.

As me and Sofia walk to the lab, I explain my backstory to Sofia so she gets to know a lot about me.

'Here we are, to your future lab. Do you think you have the parts you need to build this thing?' Sofia asks. 'I'm sure I do.' I reply.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



By the time I'm almost done, the building starts to collapse. 'Mark! Get out of there!' Sofia screams.

'Grab everything you can! I need the parts to finish this thing!' I shout back. We start grabbing everything, but I get stuck. 'Help!' I scream. 'There's no point Sofia, just finish it and teleport back to the moment the building collapses... it's your only hope.' Sofia does what I say and tries to finish it as fast as possible. *Teleporting*

<>

Sofia runs as fast as she can, she grabs Mark and throws him in the teleporter, and sets the time to 15 minutes before the incident. 'Goodbye...' Sofia says for the last time.

<>

'What are we building today, Mark?' Bruno asks as Future Mark walks into the lab. 'Stop! Don't build anything, if you do, something bad happens in the future.' Future Mark says. He starts to explain and when this happens, Future Mark disappears because of the change. Leaving me behind.

'So what do I build?' I ask Bruno. 'Maybe a robot assistant?' Bruno replies. 20 mins later...

'You have been sentenced to 20 years in jail' the Judge says.

'Here we go again...' I think to myself.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Dihansa

12 years old

Lizzie's Diary

I'm cleaning out the ward when I come across a diary under Lizzie's mattress. I'd known her for twelve years, and I hadn't ever noticed her writing a diary. I raise the mattress just enough to tug the diary out from under it, and I start reading...

22 January 2020

Today is my 12th birthday, which means that I'm officially a tween!

Anyway, let me introduce myself. My name is Lizzie Gray and I have been living in a hospital room for more than half my life because I have cystic fibrosis and practically have to keep six feet away from almost everyone.

In case you were wondering, I was born with this disease. It affects cells that produce mucus, sweat and digestive juices and causes the fluids to clot vital passageways, like my lungs. That's why I always have to wear a mask when I leave the walls of my room.

My doctor said that I would only live until I was around 37 and so far, I'm twelve – almost halfway. Even though I have a debilitating illness, I know that I can live through it for many years to come and I will survive. I like to draw animals and people to remind me that I'm living, and I read fantasy books whenever I have the chance.

I have to go now; Sarah, my nurse, is giving me my medicine and then I have to go to virtual school, because apparently, I still have to learn, even though I'm sick.

I'm back!

Today, in virtual school, we had to write a poem about what we're grateful for and I lied about everything I wrote. Well, almost everything – I am grateful for having Sarah, and my family, but I'm not grateful for living. What I mean by that is that I don't live; I survive. Other people don't have to be careful about how close they are

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



to their friends and other people don't spend half their entire lives in hospital. It's so unfair – I can't go anywhere now because I have to be extremely careful of this new thing called coronavirus.

I've got to go – Sarah's coming and, well, you're a secret diary. Emphasis on the SECRET.

*Signing out,
Lizzie*

22 February 2020

Sorry diary, I forgot to write about my life for a whole month! I kind of lost you.

Anyway, we don't need to talk about that, and just for your information, my life is actually very interesting. The day after I last wrote, I had surgery. Well, I was just under anaesthetic, so it wasn't real surgery; it was just to knock me out so it didn't hurt when they were cleaning all the mucus out of my passageways.

Oh, Sarah's coming! I'll be right back.

Apparently, I have this thing called coronavirus, aka COVID-19, and Sarah said I have to watch the news to see what it is and 'acquire knowledge about the deadly disease.'

It started a few days ago when I got really sick – I started coughing, which isn't good for me. I got a fever and cold and I was feeling really faint. At first, I thought it was very interesting because nothing really goes on in my life, but then again, I found out that COVID-19 does kill.

How INTERESTING. By the way, I'm being very sarcastic!

*Signing out,
Lizzie*

'Sarah, a new patient has arrived!' I hear one of my colleagues call and I hurriedly flip to the next page. And that's when I realise, there is no next page.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Elise

12 years old

Lucky in Love, Lucky in Lockdown

I woke up feeling happy and excited about the day ahead. Lockdown has been pretty good for us here at South Golden Beach. I'm loving life.

Today, we are heading to the beach for our permitted 'exercise time'. 'Come on, hurry up,' Ella says. Even though Ella is two years my junior she is always bossing everyone in our family around, usually having a go at being so slow to get out the door. Finally we are on our way and I wonder if Bruce and Bella will be there. I can't remember how long it has been since I played ball with them on the beach, and I'm pretty sure that last time Bella was flirting with me. Well maybe just a little.

Arriving, we leap out of the car, racing each other over the sand dunes and dumping our possessions closest to the shore line that is still on dry sand. I notice there are plenty of people around but everyone is keeping to themselves, voices hushed. Yes, social distancing is practiced here in Northern New South Wales.

Feeling exhilarated, I bound towards the water's edge, then suddenly in front of me is the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. She is dancing on the shore, her long blonde hair shining in the sun, she is splashing the calm waves with a stick and I'm captivated. 'Well hello,' she says as she turns towards me. I'm transfixed to the spot.

The girl turns around and heads off further down the beach. I'm quick to follow, anticipating her every move, I keep a safe meter and a half behind her. I glance back at my family now in the water swimming about. Ella calls out to me to come back but I ignore her. 'Hello again' the girl says, stopping to turn around and smile at me. My heart races in my chest, I can't take my eyes off her. 'You're very handsome, you know,' she says with a giggle, and that's when I know...we are meant to be together.

I think I could spend the rest of my life with her, starting today. But could I just up and leave my family? I remember, not so recently, family life was not so good. I felt no one ever listened to me or cared about things I wanted to do. I was the naughty one, always being told off and left out of family decisions. Everyone was always so serious and too busy to play around. They didn't care that I felt depressed and very alone at times. and

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



extremely bored. But since lock down, I must admit my family has totally chilled out. I guess because they are around all the time, they are kinder to me and I feel they make an effort to make me happy. Could I seriously see myself running away with this girl? My question is, when lockdown ends, will everyone go back to being too busy and boring? My new love sits down next to me and writes her name in the sand with her stick. Yes.... I decide, she is the one, we will be together forever.

Suddenly, I have to jump up, a deep rumbling in my bowels, I squat right in front of her and let out this morning's breakfast. Jumping up, she shrieks, and runs away. Was it something I said? Luckily, she leaves the stick which I pick up in my mouth.

'What have you been up to, Rocky?' says Ella, walking towards me with one of her plastic bags. 'Do you want me to throw that stick?' and like that, I'm transfixed.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Honey

12 years old

Hero of Token-Key

Austin Cage. A man living in the city of Token-Key in 2042. He lives a wealthy life and is a hero in everyone else's eyes, well known for working as a physician. Austin entered the hospital he worked for often. He put as much effort as he could into treating his patients that he so adored, and believed they deserved the best life possible. Caring, researching, experimenting, treating. It was a never-ending cycle that he did not want to change given the choice.

Recently though, times have been tough for him and the people living in Token-Key. An unknown virus was introduced to the city. In the first couple of days, it was fine. He and many other doctors had control over this virus. That was until it started to spread uncontrollably. Hospitals were filling rapidly, everyone desperate to find a cure for them or a loved one. Many depended on Austin to find a cure to this disease. What they didn't know was that Austin Cage, the man who undoubtedly had the cure to every disease that there is, couldn't find a cure.

The pressure of his community weighed on his shoulders. He felt it was his job to find a cure. Something that will save sick innocent people, innocent people that were dying. The stress, tension, anxiety was too overwhelming for him to handle. But he didn't stop. He couldn't. He wouldn't. But unfortunately, it did.

Another day on the 2nd of March in 2042. Austin woke from his slumber after sleeping from 3 am to 6 am.

He groaned quietly as he lifted his head to reveal papers in front of him. Looking around, he saw his office, located on the very top floor of the hospital. His usually neat brown hair was unruly and his face revealed his tiny freckles.

He made an attempt to stand on his feet. But was then shot with a wave of pain and agony, causing him to fall back into his chair. His body felt like it was bathing in boiling water. He had a runny nose and tired eyelids that were only inches away from closing again. He felt faint.

'What is this?' He asked himself quietly. The noise of the door sliding open caught his attention.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'Boss?' His coworker asked him. 'Did you stay here all night? You look terrible!' He mentioned as he made his way over. 'Sir? You're not looking too well. You should get some rest.' He pleaded with Austin, trying to pull him out of his office.

He swiped his arm out of his coworkers. 'No...I...need to find...a cure...'
... Bang.

'DOCTOR CAGE!' Austin heard him shout.

His head was foggy. His throat was dry as his breathing got shorter every second that passed. His burning body felt like he was sitting in lava instead of boiling water this time. With only the tiles of the floor cooling his cheeks.

The shouts of his coworker crying for help became murmurs. And the light he could barely see at first vanished. There were only echoes filling his brain.

'Doctor please stay with us! Someone get some backup right now!'

He managed to open his weak eyes a bit. He was welcomed with rays of lights appearing and disappearing repeatedly.

'Is there another room for him?'

'There's only one more on this floor! We should hurry!'

He then finally gave into the world of unconsciousness.

He woke up to a white ceiling and the sounds of beeping. There was a mask around his face that was transferring oxygen to him. There were tubes sticking out of his wrist, and he was laying in a hospital bed. The hospital bed that belonged to the neighbouring hospital.

'He is very lucky to be alive. If you had gotten here any later than you did he probably wouldn't have made it.'

'What am I doing here?' He caught the attention of three nurses that were in the room.

'You're awake!'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



The hospital that he worked at was already filled with patients so he had to be transferred to another hospital. He had been one of the many people that caught the virus. He had been so focused on the cure to the point where he succumbed to the disease.

'I found all the work you've been doing to find the cure. I was able to experiment with a few things and finally found one for you!' His co-worker said. 'Next time, you should really ask for some help.'

He gave a small and understanding grin. 'Thank you.'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Lauren

17 years old

Common Sense

Common Sense. A saving grace, that has prevented so many mistakes. A gallant prince to save the day. He was a hero to so many, a protector of our world and of humanity. Today we are gathered to say goodbye to our fallen hero.

Common Sense sadly passed away at the beginning of this year, 2020. He attempted to fight valiantly, but he was already decrepit, frail, and feeble from his constant battles against stupidity. It didn't take much to take him down. Common Sense was slain by the thing known as 'coronavirus', 'The Virus', or simply 'The Rona'. A blight upon our earth. A villainous being. Although others may argue that it was a joint effort, paired with the growing folly of humanity.

Common Sense lived for a great amount of time, long outliving generations and eras of time. We have no definite way of knowing how old he was, as he came into existence long before humans thought to record anything. I know many of you will be greatly saddened to hear of his passing, as he accomplished so much and affected many. His light touched so many lives.

In this trying time of uncertainty, it has never been clearer that common sense is gone from our earth. As we watch people scramble and squabble over toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and non-perishable goods, we see truly that he is gone. His heroics are never to be seen again. That sense of hope extinguished like water on flame.

I remember there was a time when people didn't ask to be tested for a virus just because they lived with an Italian person, had eaten Chinese food, or had a runny nose. When birthday parties weren't discouraged. I remember there was a time when people didn't act on the smallest and inconsequential rumours. Common Sense prevented this, now he's gone, and there's no one left to hold the fort.

Now that Common Sense is gone, we no longer have the safety net that keeps so many people safe and in line. Already there are so many people running around like headless chickens. And who is there to keep them in line? Apparently not our government. Not their own logic. Just look at the fool leading one of the world's largest nations, he wants us to be

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



injected with disinfectant to ward off the virus. Sadly, we must acknowledge that the reality was, as soon as the human race started to develop a reasonable conscience, it also allowed for stupidity and rumours, which started the unfortunate decline of rationality that Common Sense on his own couldn't put an end to.

Common Sense did some great things for humanity. He allowed us to make better decisions and progress our state of living. He allowed for us to be decent people, to help others, and make better life choices. He allowed for some to make good decisions for our countries, to have a good say in matters that would affect many, standing by our side, encouraging the right decision. He was the one that gave us a light tap on the shoulder, or a whisper in our ear, a reminder to do good. He was a light in so many people's lives, one that guided so many of us down good paths, keeping the darkness at bay.

Not to speak ill of the dead, but there is a part of me that thinks, as Neville Longbottom once said defiantly to Voldemort: 'it doesn't matter'. People die every day. It doesn't matter that Common Sense is dead. It just so happened that this was his time. What most people don't realise is that there is something else that can keep us going. Regular sense. Just a regular instinct that people have, it isn't always common, like our deceased once was, but in trying and uncertain times, regular good sense can do a lot of good. It's been around for a long time and has done as much good as Common Sense.

I think he would have been proud of those of us who have continued on despite his absence. I believe he is smiling upon us, casting his light from wherever the dead go. He is glad that we have found a way forward.

In this time of crisis, we must attempt to stand strong. We must find ways to keep going in light of this death. While we are saddened by the loss of our hero, we acknowledge that while Common Sense did us good, he wasn't necessary for our society to function. We can find ways to succeed without him, even if it isn't easy. I hope that the human race will put aside any illogical thoughts and work together to forge a way for a new future.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Loyola

13 years old

Whispers

Part 1: Honest Whispers

I crouched by my house, trying to stop my tail from quivering. Whispers. Whispers everywhere. The whispers of all spirits surrounding our world. What I had was supposedly a 'gift', but sometimes it felt like I had millions of spirits watching whatever I did. My 'gift' was the ability to see, hear, and talk to spirits of all animals. My humans, of course, do not know this. How would they know that their dog could see spirits?

'Lucky me...' I groaned, curling my tail around my paws. The outside world, beyond the window, was crumbling and abandoned, with thick sheets of dust. My ancestor, Poppy, who was the mother of my mother, had lived a life on what humans had called a farm, with plenty of fresh air. I envied her.

'Feeding time!' My friend, Gale, howled from another room.

'Coming!' I replied, surprised that my bark sounded weak and shaky. *Why can't I get over it? This is the stupid world we live in!!*

As I approached my feeding bowl, Gale fixed me with his green stare. 'You okay?' He asked anxiously. 'You seem...distracted.'

You would be distracted if you had spirits whispering in your ears all your life. 'I'm fine.' I lied, putting on a straight face. 'Honestly.' Gale still looked sceptical, but he didn't push me any further, and just began to eat from his bowl.

Oh hello, Callista. Finally, I have found you.

Huh? I whipped around, ears pricked. *Another spirit? Oh please just leave me alone.*

No. This is important.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Say all the spirits that I meet.

Fierce, aren't ya?

'Shut up!' I barked out loud, furious, then stopped with a wince. Gale looked up at me, confused.

'I...I didn't say anything...' He whimpered, ducking his head with a hurt expression.

'No, no. I was just imagining...uh...something...' I said quickly, turning away.

Imagining something, hmmm?

'Okay...' Gale stared at me, then continued to it. His fur was ruffled and bristling, so he obviously didn't believe me.

You stupid, stupid spirit.

Just listen, young pup.

Stepping lightly, I bounded past Gale and headed into a room, careful to avoid my humans. The room was an old art room, with splatters of paint on the walls and floor here and there. I settled down on the old brown chair, tucking my paws underneath me.

What do you want? I thought fiercely, growling inwardly.

You.

I almost couldn't hear the spirit's reply among the faint whispers of other spirits.

Me? Why?

You're the only one that can change this world. Show the humans. Show them—

I can't! I stifled a wail. *What humans would listen to a young pup like me?!*

You will find a way. You were born for this, Callista.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Why should I listen to you?

Because I'm the spirit of one of your ancestors.

*What?! I sat up quickly, lurching to the side and just managing to balance myself again.
Who?*

Oh young Callista, I thought you had guessed. My name is Poppy.

Blinking open my eyes, I got to my paws. With a shiver, I remembered what had happened last night. I'd been talking to Poppy. Poppy, my ancestor! I thought her spirit would have faded already...then came the embarrassment as I remembered falling off the brown chair in shock and almost tripping over my own paws. I sat down, realising that I was still in the old art room. *Why do spirits have to be so confusing?*

We are not, you choose to think that.

Yes. Wincing at the wave of whispers, I put my paws on my ears, but still listening as I heard the whisper I was waiting for.

Looking for me?

Leaning towards the voice, I gasped, realising that I could see Poppy, faint against the sleek white walls of the room. Poppy was slender, with a narrow muzzle, short black fur, wide-spaced ears, one pure white paw, and glowing dark amber eyes. In other words, she was beautiful.

I rarely get to see spirits, but seeing you is the best I could ask for. Many dogs from the city know about you and your wonderful life!

I can see. But you do know that I had littermates?

Littermates?! YOU HAVE LITTERMATES?! OMG!!

You certainly are excited.

OF COURSE I AM. WHO WERE YOUR LITTERMATES?!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



I had five littermates. Three I cannot remember their names, but I remember two. Leena and Dasher. Cindy was a farm dog like me, but Dasher was a city dog like you.

Really? B...but I thought all dogs back then were farm dogs...

Not all.

I was speechless, then suddenly, with a blinding flash of light and searing pain, a darkness crept along my vision.

Callista! Watch out!

‘What is it...it hurts...’ I moaned, but before I could speak again, everything faded and gave in to a smothering darkness.

Part 2: Taken Whispers

I woke with eyes tight shut, legs shuddering. The pain. The scorching, blinding pain. I couldn’t feel my paws. I couldn’t feel anything. Every so often, all I could do was let out a chilling wail of agony.

Callista! Can you hear me? Are you—

‘Hurts...’ I managed to gasp out, twitching and groaning. ‘What’s...happening...’

Listen! Don’t let it overwhelm you. Focus on something, then try to open your eyes, okay?

I couldn’t respond, hugging my legs closer to myself, spine arched in pain.

Can’t....it...

Just do it!

My paws trembling so hard I forced out a snarl then, with a flash of pain so bright that I almost blacked out, I opened my eyes a narrow slit.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Door...chair...splotches of paint...I'm still in the old art room!

Staggering to my paws and breathing quickly, I fixed my blurry gaze on a pale form in front of me. *Poppy! What was that? It...really hurt...*

Poppy's pale fur glowed like a crescent moon as she stood up with her ears flat.

It was a Calamity.

A...what?

A Calamity is a ghost that is too dark in the heart to be heard by living animals.

What did it do to me? I found myself trembling so hard that I had to lean against a wall to balance myself. And...why?

It tried to take over your body, which it failed to do, and they did it because, well, you have a great destiny.

TAKE OVER MY BODY?! I gasped so loud I then ended up coughing and had to stay quiet until I calmed down. Fur bristling and tail quivering, I crouched down by the wall.

Poppy didn't reply.

'Take over my body...pfft. They failed. Ha.' I snorted, lifting my chin, ignoring little stabs of pain in my eyes.

'Callista? Where are you?!' Gale's bark came from the main room in the house, and I looked up and began to leave the room, careful to look out for any more Calamities.

The spirit world is so...

'Callie! What were you doing?' Gale pressed against me as I entered the main room. He watched me anxiously, putting a paw on my left flank. 'You're hurt!'

I turned, surprised, as I saw blood seeping from a wound on my flank. *Huh? When did I get hurt? Oh right, when A STUPID CALAMITY THINGY TRIED TO TAKE OVER MY BODY!!*

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'You okay?' Gale nudged me gently, flicking his tail. 'An hour ago you were murmuring to yourself about something. You're acting really weird.'

DUH. Why wouldn't I be with so much stuff HAPPENING RIGHT NOW. I realised that my teeth were bared in the beginnings of a snarl, and quickly snapped my mouth shut.

Gale shot me a confused and hurt look, then spun around and stalked away with his dark grey fur bristling.

Yay. My best friend hates me now. Thank you VERY MUCH spirits.

Callista, none of us asked for our destinies.

'Just great,' I muttered bitterly, putting my paws over my ears with a loud sigh. Suddenly I felt a tremble in the air, and something black flashed past me. *Huh?* I lifted my head, confused. *Poppy? Was that you?* I felt a rare pulse of overwhelming panic. *Poppy? Poppy?! POPPY?!?!*

There was no reply. Nothing. Silence.

Fear flooded my body like a wave flooding a beach.

'No...no...no...' I darted around the room quickly, quietly, and hopefully. My heart was speeding so fast that it felt like it was going to burst out of my ribcage.

Callista!! Callie! I'm here...

Relief was all I could feel. *You scared me so much...*

Yes....but be careful. That was a Calamity. It...it wants something. Its eyes were full of the determination that I see every time before...

Before what?

Before they're going to take over a body...

What?! Who are they going to take over?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



In reply, I heard a startled yelp from somewhere in a room to my left.

'Ow! What was that? Owww...oh gosh...'

Immediately, with a sinking feeling of dread, I knew who the Calamity had chosen.
Gale.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Pearl

13 years old

The Pandemic

Doors were locked and closed all through the streets. In a city this large, it was strange to hear such quiet. But it was an eerie sort of quiet, not the comforting kind. It was the quiet of waiting, of baited breath. We were all just waiting for it to blow up in our faces. Waiting for that one person to decide they had had enough, to come marching out into the streets with groups of people, infecting everyone all over again.

In the almost-dark glow of dusk, most of the windows were lit, little figures going about their lives, seemingly uncaring of the world grinding to a stop as they moved. The only figures on the streets were the ones in hazmat suits, making sure everyone stayed inside their houses. Roads that had once been so full of honking cars and yelling people were now empty, silent, lifeless.

A dog began to bark down the street, the noise echoing through judgmental skyscrapers, setting off other dogs, until the quiet was filled with yapping and people yelling. My sketchbook lay open on my lap, leaves fluttering in the wind, the blank white page leaching away any creativity left.

With a sigh, I turned away from the window, back to my computer and my schoolwork. The tens of useless assignments filling up my Gmail was enough to make me cry. *Your test on 'The Eight Steps of Ancient Egyptian Mummification' is due today, Calculating Angles of Elevation and Depression in Right-Angled Triangles, Beneficial and Harmful Effects that Micro-organisms Can Have on Living Things and the Environment, Keyboard Note Identification, Reflection on your Essay of the Common Elements Found in Fairy Tales.* The list went on and on and on. All of it useless, useless, useless. I slammed the computer shut and flopped back on the bed, ignoring the thud of something falling to the floor.

Music began to play loudly from downstairs, and I listened to it for a moment before playing Spotify and checking my messages.

I ignored the concerned extended family, frowning at Instagram.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Have you been able to contact Naomi? I checked, slightly confused.

Not recently. The bubbles popped up, then disappeared, then came again, as if she couldn't decide what to write.

Why, what happened?

Don't you know? I thought you guys were close.

I glared at the wall, fingers hovering over the letters. How was I supposed to answer that?

Just tell me.

I would but if she's not comfortable enough to tell u herself idk if I should, I would normally tell u tho but its rly personal sry...

I made a face at my phone. I had enough to take care of without added high-school drama. I couldn't deal with anything else right now.

But despite my uncaring thoughts, the growing fear in the back of my mind refused to be ignored. What if she...I curled up on the bed, letting my mind drift away, thoughts drowned out by bad pop songs. I felt thin and fragile and scared, like glass rolling down a rocky mountain. I wanted to scream, and I couldn't remember the last time I had actually used my voice. With a shuddering sob, I jammed my face into my pillow, crying without reason, or perhaps for too many reasons, as any remaining sanity left me here in this madness of a planet.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Phoenix

12 years old

The Last One

The light was shining through the window up in the top right corner of the room. As I sat in the chair with my arms tied around it, footsteps filled the room next door. I couldn't help but listen and find out what they are going to do to me. Whilst I sat next to the wall listening carefully a voice came from a hole in the wall. The voice was from the young girl that had been kidnapped a day before my kidnapping.

'Hello?' I said through the hole.

'Help!' she screamed.

'What's wrong?' I asked.

'They're coming to hurt me,' she said.

'Okay, wait what is your name?' I say.

'Jesse. Jesse Mew' she replied.

I go through my memories to see if I know who she is. Then it clicked. Jesse Mew, the girl that had been missing for 3 weeks. Jesse was a twelve-year-old girl the height of an average fifteen-year-old boy. I look at her face and study it and realise that my mother had said the day before my kidnapping that I had a sister named Jesse Mew.

'What is your name?' Jesse asked as she breaks the silence.

'Umm... Kyleen.' I reply. 'Stop talking to me, they are coming into my room.'

'Okay,' she says moving away from the wall.

A tall man walks in with a needle. I looked at him...then the needle. The tip looked sharp as though it could kill you as soon as it touched your heart. It shimmered in the light. The sunray moved away from the window and it turned dark. I scurried around looking for my

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



torch when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked at the hand and looked up. I saw a face that I never want to see again. My father. He stood before me and looked me in the eye then said.

'Well, well, well. Look who we have here. My own daughter,' he cackled, 'Walked straight into my trap.'

'You're a monster! Get away from me!' I yelled, kicking him backward.

'Don't you dare think about doing that or you will never see the light of day again!' he yelled.

'Fine! Now what do you want with me?' I asked.

'Nothing but I want you to tell me where your mother is,' he explained.

'She doesn't want you back. You're a maniac. She has already remarried,' I yelled at him, 'Now get off me!'

He stepped back and nodded. Alexander, my father left the room and closed the door behind him. His assistants remained. They walked behind me and one of them threw my head forward. The other cut my hands loose. The one that threw my head forwards, threw it backward, then walked in front of me. He cut my ankles loose and helped me up. I shook my body and sat back down. They grabbed my bag, clothes, and shoes then directed me to the larger room across the aisle. I was given my bag and other items then locked in my new room. I looked around and studied my surroundings. The room was larger than before at least. I walked over to the bed and sat down.

'Wow! This bed is so comfy!' I exclaimed looking to the other side of the room.

There was another bed opposite to me and I didn't know why. The bed was worn out and comfy but I hoped that I was sharing with Jesse. I wasn't tied up either, which was amazing. And there was a window in the door. I looked out of the window to where Jesse's room was. My father exited her room with Jesse behind him. I ducked and walked back to my bed and grabbed my phone.

Click

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



The door opened to my room and Jesse was thrown in and I ran over to catch her. I caught her and helped her up. She brushed herself off and she walked over to her bed and put all her stuff down. She came over to me and sat next to me. She looked at me and sighed.

'KYLEEN?' she sighed.

'Yeah?' I replied.

'Do you have anything to tell me?' Jesse asked me.

'Yeah. Did you know we are sisters?' I looked up from my phone.

'No!' Jesse yelled.

'Quiet down in there!' the guard exclaimed.

'Sorry!' I yelled back.

Jesse started pacing around the room, back and forth. She didn't believe that we were sisters. I could understand why, we had never ever seen each other before. Jesse, still pacing around the room, called my mother.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Sahansa

13 years old

Light Within the Darkness

Once a young girl was scared of dogs. Big dogs, small dogs, lively dogs, fluffy dogs. But still, her family wanted two German shepherds – her worst nightmare. Then, in the middle of a pandemic, they bought them. An unexpected source of joy in a time of great change.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Silvana

13 years old

Wheels for Cars

CRASH!

A ginormous, blue, shiny, clean car crashed into the building.

Nobody was hurt because the store was closed.

Nobody was driving the car.

James saw the scene and gasped, 'OMG WHAT HAPPENED HERE, I must call the police!!!!'

The police arrived in their car very quickly and were very stressed when they reached the crime scene. As the police were coming, they saw a large object on the top of the crashed car. The police looked surprised and thought, 'What is it?' One of the officers who observed said, 'It's an item that can connect to the remote control the other officers saw.' The police were shocked about the car. They yelled 'IT HAS NO WHEELS. WHERE DID THE WHEELS GO?' Then they saw James holding the remote. They sprinted towards James and caught him. James was arrested.

He was sentenced to two years in jail because he destroyed public property. The restaurant was repaired, and James was put in prison. All was good UNTIL...ONE YEAR LATER.

The Breakout

'CLING' His prison mate, Jack, got released and snuck over to James' cell to free him but he couldn't because he needed to find a key. But amazingly Jack then saw a guard with the key. With a grin Jack rushed to the guard and stole his keys.

Then he sprinted to James' cell to free him. Jack opened the cell for James because while in prison he saw how cool James was and how kind he was to him. He wanted to return the favour and release his friend.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



James and Jack looked around for the exit to the prison. James was first to see it and pointed out where the exit was. They both sprinted there and even though the guards chased them they weren't fast enough. James and Jack yelled 'YAY FREEDOM'. Then they both grinned at each other and ran together into the dark woods.

They ran and ran looking for somewhere to hide but couldn't find anywhere safe.

A FEW HOURS LATER...the ground rumbled and then collapsed.

'OW MY BACK' James and Jack both yelled and then noticed they were in a dungeon.

They both got up and saw three stands to hold three crystals. They looked everywhere for the crystals but didn't find anything. They looked at each other and yelled, 'NO WE CAN'T ESCAPE NOW'. They felt terrified!!!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Taha

19 years old

Sally Says...

In the midst of a lockdown, everyone is losing their minds. Along with their minds, they are losing something far more important than anything else, their patience. Although some count this time as a blessing when they can slack off and treat each day as a Sunday, some unfortunate ones cannot. They just cannot comprehend not leaving their comfort spaces. Locked inside a cage, and who knows who has the key. Maybe the authorities, their mums and dads, or maybe just themselves.

In a small spaced two storey unit, there is a similar occurrence. The creaking noise of a now dull wooden floor on the upper unit can be heard. The noise turned into steps, then into thuds. The loud noise could be heard by anyone near the property. It seemed to be a cycle, as if someone was walking in a circle, or the whole marching band is doing a circuit on the top floor.

It wasn't a circuit. It was just her, walking in a circle with her hands tied to her back. She just got the news and she clearly is not having a blast.

'This is so LAME! Why can't they just lock up the virus instead?'

Clearly, she has not one idea of the situation, but she seems confident in herself. She continues to pounce back and forth, now in a more aggressive manner. She does that for a while now and Sally, her goldfish is now scared in her bowl. She eventually gives up on the idea of rebelling as there is no one to rebel to, as everyone is taking a break from reality.

With a quick movement, she throws herself onto her bed. There, she lies, sweating and wheezing. She lies there as if she has just run a marathon in the scorching heat outside. But she was inside, all this time. Her phone is buzzing now, with lots of notifications and texts from people alike, all having the same thoughts.

'When is this gonna end? Are we gonna be stuck in our homes forever? What is there to even do?'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



She glances over all her socials and it just bores her. They give her the information she already has, not what she needs. This pandemic has led her to ignore her almost two hundred followers to be left unseen and unheard of. With nothing to do and care for on the Internet, she just lies there, staring at her ceiling covered with glow in the dark stars, which are not glowing anymore.

Upon looking at her ceiling she realizes one obvious thing, and that is her room. She has not even looked at the stuff she put up a while ago. All those writings on the walls, multiple shades of colour on one wall, those posters of chic bands all over the room, along with her own pieces of art. The room definitely deserves a spot in the art gallery but due to this 'stupid virus', the possibility of it happening is thin.

She stares at her room blankly, until a bright light strikes her blind. It was the sun, teasing her through her blinds on the window. She went up to look outside and to her surprise, everything was 'dead'. With losing all hope of even stepping outside, because there is nothing to even do outside, she gives up. Bored and defeated, she looks forward to accepting the fact that 'it is what it is' and sighs.

Suddenly, a bright reflection catches her attention again, and it is no sun teasing her directly. It is through the glowing golden fins of her goldfish. Her Sally, whom she loves deeply, is staying put in her small globe filled with water. She finds it amusing how her fish is just suspended in water her whole life. With nothing to do, except to move around any space she gets or to consume whatever she gives her.

It is amusing how a fish, who is meant to be free to roam in the depths of the oceans, just accepts its fate to live in a glass bowl. She does not speak but she can hear her. She knows how it feels to be encased and caged because she has been in a 'lockdown' her whole life. Sally gives her hope to get over the fact that she has to stay in the luxury of her home, where she can do countless productive and inspiring things.

She is given the choice that she can use this time as something to look back on when all this is over, or not to do anything at all. Her respect for Sally has risen and converted into hope and the urge to do something beyond her potential, just like Sally.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Yarrow

12 years old

Backstage

'We're going live in three, two, one!' I exclaimed, clutching my guitar tighter in excitement, the loading circle slowly spun on my computer screen and then the white and pink screen of apple music popped up with the lover album picture at the very top...

It had been one month since my album was released, now tickets had been sold for the concert and everyone was so excited. We had a huge tour planned and we are due to set off from LA tomorrow! I can hardly contain my excitement. I keep getting up and walking around my apartment and then sitting down again, over and over.

'Hey Taylor,' Jenny, my tour organizer bustled into the room, a worried expression painted across her face. 'Hey Jenny, what's up?' I say hopping up from the couch. 'Taylor, tour might be canceled,' she breathed.

'What? Why?' I asked, this wasn't good.

'Well, you know the coronavirus? Well, it might mean that we can't have the tour. But we might be able to so I guess it's up to you, would you still like to go?' She exclaimed, worriedly.

'Oh, I totally think we should still go, it's not like it's going to really affect that much right?' I say, 'let's go ahead and just see what happens'.

'Okay,' she nods, consulting her clipboard and scribbling something down, 'we'll go tomorrow and see what happens.'

Cars zoom past me and my crew as we wait for the taxi to come and take us to the airport. It is still dark and the street lights send an eerie light across the street making the white lines on the road glow. 'Jenny,' I call, 'what's up with the virus thing, how many cases are there?'

'Well, things aren't not looking the best, in America, there are almost 1000 different cases, I don't know what's going to happen,' she explains looking at her phone. I can't help but

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



feel worried, this virus has only been known for a matter of weeks and is already taking effect in such a short amount of time. If this keeps up then things could go wrong very quickly.

When we arrived at the airport we were stopped by security before entering. Why? I wondered, But I soon got my answer. 'Sorry miss, you will need to sign these documents and take one of the provided masks to enter the airport due to the up-rising global pandemic, coronavirus.

'What?' I ask, global pandemic, this is bad, if it's already at global pandemic stage this virus could ruin the tour.

After we had been on the plane for a while we received a message from the pilot. 'Good morning everyone, I am Pilot Evans and I hope you are having a smooth comfortable journey. I have an update about the global pandemic, coronavirus. When we land, everyone who has travelled will need to quarantine for fourteen days to stop the spread. All events, with over 300 people attending, will be canceled and the government has enforced social distancing laws – everyone needs to be two metres apart. I hope everyone understands why this is so important and adheres to these rules.'

WHAT! No events over 300 people. That means the tour is OFF. I look over at Jenny, she is studying her phone with a confused expression, 'Jenny, how many cases?' I ask. She consults her phone.

'7658' she replies 'and going up fast'.

After landing in San Francisco we were hustled into taxis and whizzed to our hotel rooms. Driving down the usually crowded streets I was surprised to see the cafes empty and closed, a few stragglers wandering down the cobbled pathways wearing face masks and hardly any bright yellow taxis zooming past. Everything was so quiet and seemed like a completely different country.

The person at the hotel reception desk explained to us how things would run while we were in quarantine, we were not allowed to see anyone, the hotel waiters would put trays of our food outside our rooms for us to collect and we were to stay inside our rooms at all times. After being shown my room I went to look out the shining window. The evening sunshine reflected on the usually busy city of San Francisco. Everything was quiet and a calm feeling had settled over the whole city, pigeons flew to trees to roost for the night and

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



lights switched off from glowing windows one by one. I took a deep breath, the world was experiencing something together, we were all in this together, and together we would fight the virus until we won. We could do this.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Amuor

16 years old

Sweet Dreams

Justin Bieber leans towards me, his eyes fluttering shut as he inches closer. My heart races in anticipation, as his soft hands caress my cheeks. The breath of hot air is the only thing separating us now.

BEEP BEEP! I am startled awake by a loud noise. I slam my head against my pillow and shut my eyes, hoping to finish the kiss. Unfortunately, my sweet dream was chased away by that terrible sound. 'AUGH!' I let out a loud sigh. *BEEP BEEP!* 'SHUT UP!', I shout. As I stretch out my hand to silence the dream killer, my eyes are drawn to the flashing red numbers, 8:10 am it reads. 'NOO! my online English class starts in 10 minutes!', I scream. I jump out of bed leaving behind an entanglement of blanket and pillows. My feet direct me to the bathroom. The huge mirror forces me to reflect on the stupid actions which I'm now suffering from. Dark circles stamp beneath my eyes, souvenirs of the many sites I visited on the web. Knots of kinky black hair have invaded my head, the aftermath of the new hairstyle I tried at midnight. I cough, causing a toxic smell of meat to escape my mouth, last night's dinner. The green toothbrush stares back at me, urging me to speed up. I seize it, coat it with the minty toothpaste and brush brush brush! I examine my mouth and conclude that it doesn't have a virtual smell.

With my half-brushed teeth, I race to my desk and press 'turn on' on my laptop. I wait for what feels like 2 hours before the screen reads 'welcome'. My fingers slam the keyboards to type in my password. 'Incorrect password' appears on the screen. I let out a sigh and try again. It finally works, so I press the Google Chrome app numerous times. The window opens, and I furiously type 'google classroom', and find the section that reads 'English'. During the chaos, I forgot to check the time, which now reads 8:19 am. 'Yes, I can make it!' I cheer! I scroll through my classroom trying to find the Zoom link. I search and search but it was nowhere to be found. I quickly pull out my phone and text my friend, *SEND ME THE ENGLISH ZOOM LINK ASAP!*. As I wait for a reply I glance at the time, 8:20 am it reads. *Ding!* 'Yes!' I shout, 'Finally a reply!' I look at the message, *It's Saturday you idiot!* For a moment I sit in silence staring at the message. 'Yes! I can sleep in!' I shout. I shut my computer, rise from my desk, and run to my bed. I quickly detangle the mess and jump between the warm sheets. As I shut my eyes my phone makes a *ding*. I reach for my phone from the nightstand and glimpse at the message. *Just kidding! Class starts now,*

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



refresh your page. I feel a scream forming in my throat, but I contain it. I turn off my phone and place it under my pillow. I shut my eyes and hope to resume my previous dream.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Hudson

12 years old

Apart

Peter and I have been best friends since we were babies. Our families both live in Australia and we like it here; it is hot in the summer and it even snows sometimes in the winter. Every time we have a playdate, we always have so much fun playing tag on the trampoline or hide-and-seek around the house.

I really miss him. His family left on a holiday to America about a month ago and were due home last week. Mum told me that there were some major delays with the flights back, but I didn't really believe her.

I go to school not far from where I live. The kids in the older grades keep on talking about some virus thing. I don't really understand what they mean so I ask if they can explain what is going on. They say that there is a really bad sickness that is going on all over the world. I find that pretty scary.

Later, I get back from school and ask Mum about the virus and if it has anything to do with Peter and his family not coming back. Mum tells me that what she said before about the delayed flights was only half true and that the flights were delayed because the weird virus thing is so bad that the government wants everyone to stay in their own country. That bit is kind of confusing, though, because I don't really know what a government is.

Later, when Mum and Dad tuck me into bed, Dad says that the leaders of each country want everyone to stay in their own country because the virus is really easily spread and could get passed on to other people; that's why Peter can't come home yet. I ask Dad when Peter can come home, and he says that he doesn't know.

Mum and Dad arrange for me and Peter to talk on a video call every now and then so we can talk to each other. We have a good time but it's not like it used to be.

Later in the month, my school shuts down, but they have some work for everyone to do, even when we are not at school.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



One day while I am doing some maths, Mum tells me that Peter really wants to talk to me. She sounded like it was something urgent. She puts me on the phone, and I go downstairs to my room and sit on my bed. Peter tells me some really alarming news: he and his family might start living in America. I ask him why, and he says it is because the virus has been going on for so long that no one knows when it is going to stop. Suddenly, I feel really upset and it becomes really hard to control the ocean of tears that spills down my face. Mum hears and comes down and gives me a hug. She says goodbye to Peter and then Dad comes down and they both wrap their arms around me. The hug feels really good, but it doesn't stop the rivers of emotion that are still pouring out.

I finish my schoolwork late and then we all have dinner and I go to bed. I can't get to sleep at all, though. When I eventually do, my sleep is disturbed by horrible dreams that are about people being separated from their loved ones and never seeing them again. When I wake up, Mum tells me that even though Peter and I may be far apart, I will always remember him no matter what because he is my friend. He will always be in my heart and friendship is the most powerful thing ever.

Even though you may dearly miss someone, you will always remember them.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Tegan

17 years old

Death of 2020

A shiver tracks the spine of an elderly French woman.

Fresh snowflakes fall in the crisp early hours in Japan, christening the new decade.

A kiss is held just long enough by a German couple to ring in the new year.

Hope of thousands soars when the ball drops in Times Square as the clock ticked over...

2020 was always there.

A luck of the draw and yet a sense of entitlement that was given to us in our first days.

From thousands of first words; you came and never left.

You were the only label that was loved, recognised and celebrated.

Not just nationally, no, but internationally.

Held and spoken about as "our year".

The year we were bound for greatness.

Good Evening everyone,

I never truly imagined this day to occur for a while, whilst we talked about it alongside the thousands of other things, I thought I would have a million more memories, pictures and stories to tell you all before this.

2020 had the ability to bring joy and love into every situation, everyone here today knew it. The secret notebook we wrote in as a pair with the uncontrollable blossoming friendships from kindergarten.

Pages filled with the beginning of signatures surrounding the class photo.

The goals we planned to achieve together and as a cohort were set, destined for.

The dreams we planned to dream, the places we envisioned to go and the people we were just dying to meet.

12 years as little fish in a big pond and there we were, top of the food chain!

And whilst we had our coalitions, our pride was strong.

Taking on the world was easy for us.

Everyone knew it.

The world knew it.

I remember we once screamed it from the rooftops.

Together, hitting the ground running, hard and fast.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



We believed no one was going to stop us.

Whilst most of you know this, I won't forgive myself if I don't mention it today.

I want to give to you the dreams we planned together;

The shared stories of the places we would travel, inseparable.

The wine we would drink in France.

The stargazing in Japan & Italy.

The summer abroad in Europe.

And then the beer we would drink whilst stumbling home in Germany.

I want to explain it to all of you;

How just like nature, we underwent change together.

Each having our demons, yet yours were tougher than others.

It all began slowly, with little changes;

*Mood changed like seasons
Friendships melting like icebergs
World crumbling like trees*

So many things were happening and yet every day at school and every afternoon spent together, you smiled.

And that smile lit up the room. The only good thing on one of my absolutely shit days.

We knew it would be a bumpy road.

However, this turbulence was unlike anything we could have imagined.

A constant battle occurring right in front of us.

You were struggling, and we failed to see it, to help you.

I'm so sorry.

It was nothing like I had ever experienced.

Nothing that had ever been taught in health class, at a science expo or on careers day.

It was as if Zeus was after you with vengeance in his blood.

Once we realised, we congregated, and as fast as your fires had begun, you taught us to love, to share, to savour and to assist.

2020 taught us how to extend a warm hand, to accept help from others and most importantly solidify our everlasting global friendships.

And for that and every second you are gone; we will be forever be thankful.

I remember in the middle you were happy, for a small split second in a dark cave, light shone through.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



And god, if I could have seen the future, I would have held onto you for as long as possible.

But you slipped. Like time passing by. Vanishing almost as quickly as you had just arrived. And I'm so so sorry I couldn't have helped fight your demons anymore.

I promise to one day visit the places we dreamed of travelling to together.

I promise to have one too many glasses of wine and blame it on you.

I promise to continue to do everything you taught us and whilst we don't know it yet, you made us all re-evaluate life.

You educated us.

Made us think twice and clean ourselves up.

You made us look at the world and really appreciate what we have.

And whilst it's unsure if you will exactly be missed, I want to thank you for everything.

Everything you showed us.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Olive

14 years old

A World Temporarily Still and Silent

The wind whistles along the streets, slicing through any warmth, sending dead leaves flying over grey footpaths and falling silently onto the road. It's deadly quiet, in this time, in this place. There's no sound save the faint voices from inside the houses, echoing into the silence, whispering through cracks in the doors, merging with the wind and then fading away like water trickling through a dam. Atop a wooden fence that lines the road, I wait, unseen, save two eyes glowing in the ascending darkness, dark fur blending into the shadows, just another stray out in the cold.

I can see the houses clearly now, fires flickering in hearths, people talking, arguing and watching the news with concern, afraid of what might come. A gentle frost covers the window panes, refracting light in a way that tricks the eye. Sometimes I think I see creatures, ravens with shadowy wings, people trying to tell me something, but when I look back they're always gone, gone, gone. Gone like the cars from the roads, gone like the laughter that once rang freely from people's lips, gone like the leaves in the wind. Gone. All I can do is watch. Watch as the seasons shift to winter, as the frost creeps over the windowsill, watch the clouds dance in their infinite freedom, as the weather shifts from snow to rain. And hope. Hope for a time when the sun shines freely, and the flowers bloom again.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Evie

14 years old

Una Pig

Once, long ago, in a land where platypuses lived on the moon, cats granted wishes and dolphins ruled the earth, on a farm near the forest, lived a small pink pig. He had pink skin, sapphire green eyes and four little black hooves. This little pink farm pig was named Pavlo.

Pavlo the pig had three great wishes. His first wish was that Plooty, his best friend the platypus, would come back from the moon, his second wish was world peace and his third and greatest wish was that he would become a unicorn.

One hot Tuesday afternoon, the sun was beating down so hard on Pavlo's pink piggy skin that he decided to put some mud-screen on. Pavlo looked and looked but he could not find his mud-screen! After six and a half minutes of looking he gave up and decided he would take a walk in the Unicorn Forest. The soft cool shade of the trees was such a relief after the burning sun of the farm.

'Negh!' Pavlo heard and zoomed over to the noise. He caught his breath as he found himself in a field full of shiny white, pink and blue...unicorns. 'Wow' Pavlo breathed as a shiny pink foal walked gracefully past him.

'Hi!' Pavlo called and she looked around.

'Hello,' she whispered, clearly shy.

'What's your name?' he cried, pushing his snout right up to the unicorn's muzzle.

'I'm Magnificent.' she said quietly stepping back. A large dark blue unicorn pranced up, and started to herd Magnificent away.

'Magnificent!' she scolded 'we do not go near disgusting animals such as pigs!' and without a glance at Pavlo she herded Magnificent away.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'Oh!' Pavlo cried. 'I'll never be as beautiful as the unicorns!' and he started to bawl. He cried and cried until there was a puddle of tears at his hooves. The unicorns had long since moved to a different side of the forest to get away from the noise of his sobs, which only made him cry harder and harder until he heard a small purr behind him.

Pavlo looked around and his jaw dropped at what he saw. It was a glossy black Wishing Cat! 'Hi!' she mewed, 'why are you crying?'

'Oh Wishing Cat! May I please have a wish?' Pavlo cried excitedly.

'Well' the Wishing Cat stuttered. 'Actually, I'm only a Wishing Cat in training, I've never actually granted a wish before.'

'I don't care! I wish to be a unicorn!' Pavlo butted in rudely and poof! He was still a pig. With a unicorn horn...

'Oh no! What am i going to do?' Pavlo sobbed feeling his horn in dismay. 'I'll never be a true unicorn!' and Pavlo started to cry again.

'Oh I'm so sorry little pink pig!' the black cat apologized. 'But if the unicorns can't see the beauty within then it wouldn't be nice to be one!' she patted him on the back sympathetically.

'I guess' Pavlo sniffed, wiping tears from his sapphire green eyes.

'What's your name?' the cat asked 'I'm Luna.' She held out her paw and he shook it. 'I'm Pavlo', he said.

And so Pavlo and Luna went down to the beach and they packed up their things to set sail, out to sea to discover new lands. After all they were a Wishing Cat and an Una-pig. What could go wrong?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Cassandra

16 years old

My Pandemic

From hating school to missing it.

From wanting to stay home all day to needing to get out.

From disliking pets to needing a companion.

From being a bad cook to being able to cook a couple of decent meals.

From having clear thoughts to your head turning against you.

From hating hugs to needing at least one.

From 'just having the flu' to 'better get tested'.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Mylee

11 years old

Poem About 2020

First things first let me just say the year 2020 is really a mess!

It started with fires, then World War 3 threats.

Then came quarantine, the whole world was kept in.

George Floyd was destroyed by the colour of his skin.

What is happening? I need to confess.

The year 2020 really is a mess!

But there are silver linings and let me share a few,

having extra family time, I loved the things we do.

Lots of visits to the beach, playing in the sun,

it really is so beautiful and I always have good fun.

And I love to hang at home with extra puppy time.

Thank you for listening this is the end of my rhyme.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Adam

13 years old

A Twisted Glance

Isn't it twisted

Petrol prices are at their lowest, yet cars are resting in driveways
Childcare is free, but challenging children are confined at home
Car parks complimentary, except shops non operational

Isn't it twisted

We are living in the modern world, yet everyone is back to basics
Resources are plentiful, but toilet paper has panicked us all
Luck is no longer a jackpot win, but a 1kg bag of Self Raising.

Isn't it twisted

Plan driven teachers feel disorderly and disarranged
Confident medical workers are startled and scared
We look at each other now like foreign objects from outer space

Isn't it twisted

Fast food industries now marketing McChickens and milk
Sales are bigger than ever, but we're in sleep wear all day
Ideal getaways in luxury hotels no longer luxurious

Isn't it twisted

Device usage should be rare but reliance is ridiculously rising
Virtual birthday parties, cake and all, are nothing but a tease
Neighbours are zooming instead of hanging over the fence
People are isolated but coming together like never before

Isn't it twisted

Mammoth matters in our lives celebrated with minimal mates
We are flocking to beaches like seagulls desperate for freedom
An outing with our wheelie bin has us waiting actively in anticipation
Daily outdoor exercise has never been so exciting

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Isn't it twisted

Nature has held its peace, finally it is at peace

Landmarks are finally in sight, now that everyone is indoors

Recyclable bags are programmed in us, but packaging is so prominent

Isn't it twisted

Our once adored family members are closer to being throttled

More than ever hugs are desired but distance disallows

Dying alone is literally dying alone

There'll be plenty of joyful tears when this pandemic passes!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Gregory

13 years old

The Pandemic

Turn the up to down

The people are scared

Turn everything upside down

We are all afraid of the pandemic

The people are wearing masks

The people are using sanitiser

The afternoon has turned into the night

The people stop working

The people use the unusual time to reflect

The people use the unusual time to quietly rethink

The pandemic enables the people to fight for their life

The pandemic plays an important model to the society

The little virus has a big impact to the people

We all have unusual life

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Marianne

11 years old

Road Trip

Plan a road trip

Our plan is postponed

Our plan is cancelled

We feel low

We feel near wide path with lots of wide holes

We worry pandemic will never be over

We worry when we can travel again

Least that we know why the pandemic goes on

We know going places causes harm

We will have to be cautious

We will have to stay at home

Panic buy, sanitiser, mask made the trend

World as we know it once has chosen to offer a dark place

Year 2020 is different

Year of true worth, year of true effort

Year heals, year radiant, year will, year road trip

Year to be brave, year to be fearless

Year to believe, year to peculiarly oar

Year to see the nutshell from a different eye

Year to establish, year to soar

Would you put attention to the test?

Would you put effort to get going?

Would you stay to win the battle?

Enthusiast will say turn up the wealth

Pessimist will say we won't achieve it

What will you say?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Munira

15 years old

This Perfect Endlessness

My mother says that this isn't the end of the world, rather, the edge, because we've always held up songs of mourning on worn limbs and carried our own men into the divine, only to return, and repeat, each morning.

Tonight, we won't feel the passage of time.

My mother says that this isn't the end of the world, rather, the edge, and I believe her. Time is a run-on sentence and that is what I remind myself as I

search: is time linear? I can already count the results boiling over in my gut.

My mother says that this isn't the end of the world, rather, the edge, but we'll sit here, unmoving, until tomorrow comes.

Tonight, we melt into the next day and repeat our rituals.

We perform our minor holies and rest under this slick moonlight that means less than it did the day before.

It reminds me that this isn't the end of the world, rather, the edge.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nerissa

17 years old

Chicken Soup

The common cold, turned deadly virus.

'Stay at home',

'Keep your distance',

I can't even get my groceries.

They have no rice, toilet paper,

They have no chicken soup.

A deadly virus, a worldwide pandemic.

'Make the most of this opportunity',

'You're living through history'.

I miss the outside world.

Maybe I'll ignore it for just one day,

So that I can find some chicken soup.

The worldwide pandemic, now infiltrating my home.

'Keep watch of your temperature',

'Don't go near anyone at risk',

I had to take a test.

I should've listened when it wasn't so bad,

Because now no-one can leave their home.

No one can buy

Chicken soup.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nikita

18 years old

Alone

I am a prisoner in the comfort of my home,
It's so quiet and desolate,
No rumble of steady-flowing traffic,
The laughing of children
Ceased.
The quiet surrounds me,
Suffocating me.
The silence echoes,
Haunting me.
I have never felt more alone.

I am a prisoner in the comfort of my home,
Everyone is afraid,
I don't watch the news anymore,
I avoid social media,
Cases growing day by day.
I miss feeling carefree,
Now I am careful.
I just want to feel safe,
Secure.
I have never felt more alone.

I am a prisoner in the comfort of my home,
I miss people,
Miss hearing my friends' voices,
Laughing at their antics.
Now the only person I speak to is me.
All I feel is lonely,
Destitute,
Even slightly insane.
I want to feel okay again.
I have never felt more alone.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



I am a prisoner in the comfort of my home,
But at least my home provides comfort;
I know there are many who aren't safe.
My prayers are always with them:
Those who suffer from violence,
Not secure within their homes,
Those who are sick and fearful,
Many shaking hands with death,
Those who risk their lives to help others.
I am thankful that all I feel is alone.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Rose

13 years old

COVID-19 Effected

Whose life is that? I think I know.
Its owner is quite sad though.
He really needs someone's love,
I watch him frown. I cry hello.
He gives his hands a shake,
And sobs until the tears break.
He really needs someone's help,
To enjoy distant birds awake.
His soul is sick, scary and deep,
But he has promises to keep,
Until then he shall not leave,
So he lies in bed with tubes that leak.
He rises from his bitter bed,
With thoughts of sadness in his head,
He wants to be a normal man.
But faces the day with never-ending dread.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Eva

16 years old

Sensations Through Nature

A flower blooms,
opens up to the sun,
breathes in the warm rays of daylight.
Nurtured by the moist soil,
admired by crawling garden creatures.
Brought to life by the dew,
that lies as a web in the early mornings.
Sings to the butterflies,
as they flutter by in the afternoon.

A baby deer is frolicking through the woods,
stirring up the grass and butterflies,
leaping into the air.
When all play is done,
her long legs carry her over to her mother,
where she sinks into sleep.
Her mother stands over her to protect,
admires the way her chest rises and falls,
as she sleeps in peace.

A tall tree,
rising above the forest.
The stern old tree,
with its flaking tissue bark.
It sheds but is replaced with a new skin,
ready to endure the elements of the forest.
The rings show the age and wisdom,
but hidden to those on the outside.
The father of the forest,
looking over,
a safe haven he provides.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Malika

Year 10

Freedom is running around feeling the cool breeze
Loneliness is like being the 52-hertz whale in an ocean
Everyone is now scared of a tiny germ
Isolated in their homes
Scared to touch other human beings
Freedom is sleeping without being bothered
Friendship is being able to communicate with your eyes
Loneliness is feeling invisible on the bus

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Agum

Year 10

Freedom is hanging out with my friends at the shops

Sadness is knowing the morning catch ups at the quad won't happen anymore

Peaceful is going for a walk around the park

Loneliness is leaving my friends at the school gates early

But happiness is the thought that I will hear their laughter the next morning and being able to eat out

But all-of-a-sudden my life turned upside down. Now...

Freedom meant trapped in a room by myself

Sadness is being locked away from everyone

Peaceful was the silent night

Loneliness is not being allowed to see my friends

Happiness is food being delivered.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Cody

Year 10

Love is not a person but is within a person

Passionate is one who cherishes every moment of friendship

Justice is the balance of two things like a scale that will find the way to equal the same

Jealousy is when the thunder rumbles and strikes down of anger and enraged

Loneliness is the feeling of dark, deep and depressed against you with no way out

As I learnt to do things through a screen, this is survival.

Love is the weight of a 100 Story Building collapsing on you

Passionate is the excitement of which you find when you finally get what you've been wanting

Justice is the arrangement of equality and perseverance of everyone

Jealousy is like a burning enraged fire that keeps on burning

Loneliness is the empty, feeling like being stuck in space and no way to get back

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Kaysier

Year 10

Helpless is the person who walked down to me begging for my last slice of bread
Hopeful is the bird that flies out of the nest at dawn
Peace is the smile that mum receives when I wake up in the morning
Passion is the number of brush strokes I apply to polish my Grade 7 art submission
Sadness is saying goodbye every arvo
Peace is being left alone to drift miles away in my books
Hopeful is the thought of friends' laughter
Helpless are the restrictions and penalties imposed on everyone
Peaceful are the streets which are deserted
Passionate are the Health Care Workers risking it all to save the planet

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Wat

Year 10

Movement, making a change to society until the unheard voices are heard.

Loneliness, trapped with a million people yet alone.

History though painful and brutal is a powerful reminder of the past.

Justice is an unconditional smile

Peace though a utopian dream, comes from within

A common sight, the face mask appeared

Movement became a prisoner's dream.

Peace is a desperate search during isolation.

History is the pandemic narratives that will be bedtime tales in fifty years

Justice is the awareness that has resulted after unheard voices have echoed throughout the world

Peace is the melodious tunes of equality that replaced the echoes

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Kimberly
Year 10

Peaceful is the harmonies of people to each other
Helplessness is a man help a grandma cross the road
Friendship is the happiness while we are having fun together
Happiness is when I open the pantry and saw it full of Oreos
Hope is like a birthday cake when I wish and blow the candle
Suddenly my friend is gone, I wake up in a quiet and dark room just like jail, what is happening to my life?
Peaceful is like a star when I am sitting in my room and look outside the window
Helplessness is helping parents doing housework
Friendship is the missing of friends while staying at home
Happiness is sitting on the sofa and having fun with siblings
Hope is the news that is heard by government

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jenani

Year 10

Beauty is pretending to study in front of my parents.

Calmness is waiting for dinner after 10 o'clock pm.

Friendship is talking to the mirror all the time.

Love is sharing grains with the birds.

Loneliness is paying attention to my class work with my friends.

Where then it was possible to feel every object but now the feel of the stinky sanitiser on the hands.

History is the tidy uniform that was waiting for school.

Calmness is an isolated park with some birds.

Friendship is playing with besties in dreams.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anonymous

Year 10

Kindness is a mind to help others.
Friendship is friends who I want to share with them.
Happiness is when I watch Netflix with some delicious things.
Hope is the future.
Peace is the sound of birds in the morning.

I shared a bottle with my friend but suddenly we have to separate from each other and now
Everyone can't share anything even though they live together.

Kindness is all the doctors who work without wanting anything.
Friendship is worrying about the health of your friends.
Happiness is that my acquaintances are keeping very well.
Hope is to decrease the number of confirmed virus cases.
Peace is that COVID-19 is done.

Now, all people have to wear masks and if there are people who don't wear them, everyone doubts them.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jenarthanan

Year 10

Innocence is like my dog where.

Friendship is like wurtzite boron nitride which anyone cannot break.

Love is a boomerang, when you give it you get it back.

Isolation is the best treatment to get all the good habits into your heart.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Angela

Year 10

Unity is a three-man job lifting a leaf
Jealousy is a disguised angel in times of war
Appreciation is the time that tells thankful tales
Calmness is a monk mastering each mystery
Friendship is a kite that cuts through the hurricane
All-of-a-sudden the scared animals that were once in hiding felt safe for a moment and are now wild and roaming.
Passion is the wild whisper in the wind
Peace is the calm claps of the clams
Excitement is the sudden surge of the seas
Pride is the proud pace that people prefer
Greed is the thief taking one's time

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Abishek
Year 10

Peace is a bird with freedom let free to discover and behave in its own way.
Generosity is the happy feel secure in one's heart caused by the kindness from others.
Momentum is like a magnet attracting the positiveness towards a side.
Beauty is a scenery with the amazed feel seen in one's admiring eyes.
Smoothness is the relaxed feel after touching something like a warm bath in winter.
Found a new era introduced to the world.
Peace is the hot tea drank inside homes imagining the true sense of quarantine.
Generosity is a mellow letter with the true meaning of humanity.
Momentum is a kite forcing and stealing the advantage towards a side.
Beauty is the everlasting presence of animals in the environment attracting its followers(people) towards the window to watch the movement of the new species.
Smoothness is the humbleness of people calmly waiting for the normal life.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anamaria

Year 10

Sadness is when someone feel hurt inside and feel that needs someone that would understand about his hurt feelings

Distance is the hardest thing to do when you want to be near the person you love

Friendship is the power of caring for someone

Loneliness is the saddest time when you have no one to talk to or share your emotions

Sadness is when someone feel hurt inside and feel that needs someone that would understand about his hurt feelings

Distance is the hardest thing to do when you want to be near the person you love

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nisara

Year 10

Friendship is me and my friends who have a good moment together.

Love is my feeling for my cat.

Kindness is when I share my chocolate with my sister.

Sadness is when my friend didn't come to school.

Helpful is when I use earphones to listen to music.

Then our world had an important event happen. It was a disease that spread from a virus.

And we started a lockdown to protect us from the virus.

Friendship is a relationship between me and my pillow during COVID.

Love is a virus feeling that likes to spread to humans.

Sadness is my feeling when the government said, 'Stay at home'.

Kindness is when the volunteers help people who need help.

Helpful is when I use Google Classroom to do my work.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bryce

Year 10

Envy is the eyes that sees everything that I don't have
Happiness is your love ones being with you during the pandemic
Knowledge is the stream of water in a waterfall going to your head
Stupidity is ticking in your brain like a clock
Laughter is the notifications in your phone ringing every day
All-of-a-sudden dozens of people began to horde.
Envy is the rally in America that is now stealing
Happiness is the last leaf to fall of a tree before winter
Knowledge is the stream of water with a dam
Stupidity is ticking faster as the lives drop with COVID
Laughter is the mode for do not disturb

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Mira

11 years old

The world is so different now

Happiness is the sparkling waves, crashing down the sandy shore

Acceptance is when my body is whirled into the Secret Garden, when I see Mary's stubborn, pale face

Camaraderie is when the lights of the sun beam in my face, smiling at me

Optimism rushes into me when the starting gun blasts off

Freedom flows into my body. It's the wind, blowing into my face, unstoppable

I hear the sirens race down the roads, I see nurses on the TV, and before I knew it, the doors shut around us and a new virus entered the world

Happiness is the ring of a phone, encompassing the house

Acceptance is the cry of a child, thrown in a deserted house

Camaraderie is the chatter of my friends, beaming at me through the blaring screen

Optimism is a cup of tea, flowing through my warm body

Freedom is me, lying on a couch in an idle room, being transported to the world of Harry Potter

The world is so different now

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ibrahim

17 years old

Freedom is the ringing of bells at any school

A signal that better times are soon to come.

Fear is the green slip of an arvo.

A sign that you might be better off if you run.

Submission is doing extra work for credits.

A display of immersing yourself into the drudgery.

Dissociation is what comes next, sort of like where your mind goes during detention.

The final resort of the damned who like to think of where they'd rather be.

But rebellion is the best of all, akin to truanting as you please

A display of dominance, however your parents won't be pleased.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ember

11 years old

Peace is sitting with my friends with a hot chocolate next to the fire on a cold night

Joy is what my rabbits feel when they jump high into the sky

Growth is watching the seeds of last year's peas grow into big vines

Belief is the feeling of looking into something like a mirror and believing it's you staring back

Kindness is when someone gives you something and you give them something back or you just accept it

I see a new world where people care about each other and where neighbours help one another and we keep our 1.5 meters of distance because we want to keep everyone safe

Peace is sitting reading a book with my cat on my lap

Joy is running out into my rainy and misty garden and feeling wet and cool on my skin

Growth is watching my cat get bigger and bigger

Belief is believing that you will be able to see your friends soon

Kindness is when someone drops off a package and waves from their car

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Mahad

12 years old

I look at the television, a sight of amazement. The ring when it opens, the PS4 near it. The beep of the PS4 turning on, and the click of the controller buttons. The stranded dog in the desert sun trembles in fear and hate, it stumbles upon the white grains of sand and falls on the bruised paw. The unheard cries of the 5-yo girl. The depression of the black widow.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Isabella

15 years old

Connection is several hundred colours tumbling on each other like Jenga falling

Dysphoria is a blue-white check with navy blue tie

Anxiety is a beautiful wooden knife, spray-painted silver with flaking edge

Strategy is a line threading through a white featureless plain of bishops

Distance is a red line thinning over nebulous space

Colour drained and shifted and muted and now my world is this:

Connection is neon-blue, electrical current tracing 27.1 km to a best friend's home

Dysphoria is a badly blended too-brown contour that's better than the alternative

Anxiety is black numbers 1-2-3-4 clicking through as I breathe

Strategy is a spreadsheet, blue – with green checks marks and bolded type

Distance is an off-white wall fighting my words like a thickening mist

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Herman

16 years old

Independence is the mice against the unnerving winds.

Gratitude is the clouds above us, unreachable and uninterpretable

Euphoria is being immersed in the treacherous and daring depths of life.

Resilience is the lion's mane.

Acceptance is the cool summer breeze genially sweeping into the thoughts and feelings and empowering it

As I wonder how fickle the human experience is and the reality that has evolved, I begin to notice:

Independence is the urge to the brave the cold winds through its skeletal fingers

Gratitude is the genially ticking of the clocks.

Euphoria is the butterfly that nest in the lion's nest, imbibed in nature's calling with a smile on their face.

Resilience is the bounce that reverberates

Acceptance is the stillness drenched in raging waters.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bettina

14 years old

Unsung

The deep blue expanse of water engulfs everything,
It closes in a void of comforting silence,
Creating a vast plain with no end,
An ocean of glass tranquility.

The powerful call and piercing gaze of an eagle,
Flying to justice, waiting to be heard,
Although alone, his cries voice the unsung, the deprived and ignored,
His weariness does not bother him, he has a cause, a purpose which must be fulfilled.

Crumbling bricks, flaking dust, shivering in the bitter cold of the harsh wind,
The lonesome echoes of its cavernous rooms are blown across the empty surroundings,
An unheard voice ringing out resonating in this pit of darkness,
The solitary dissonance of the fading cries, unheard forever.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Aiza

14 years old

Pain a knife stabbed through skin
An emotionless face
Lies spreading like wildfire
Love shattered like glass shards on the floor

Lonely trusted ones turning away
Sitting alone on a bench
Hand freezing in the cold
Smiles turn into frowns

Peaceful hands stuffed into pockets, warmth returning
Knife wound healing with time
Sitting on a bench surrounded by flowers, a gentle breeze blowing through long, flowy hair
A sigh of relief, smiles painted on faces.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Rebecca

14 years old

Paralogism is when a blindfold is aggressively tied over my eyes to prevent tears escaping from my wistful eyes.

Resilience is a lamp refusing to let the rain kill its strong and bright glow.

Frustration is shackles wrapped around my ankles preventing me from finishing the race I worked so hard to complete.

Depression is an empty room that I can't escape from or else I'd end up hurting myself even more.

Acceptance is a blood-shedding battle that I left at a standstill.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nethrra

12 years old

Anger is being stuck in homes, not seeing your friends, being lazy, not going out.

Love is being with your family.

Freedom is freedom from school.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anhaar

13 years old

I am the second shortest in my class but the oldest of four siblings; four sisters more specifically. I bring a love of Oporto chilli cheese chips and hot chips in general but a strong dislike for recorders, which I am terrible at playing.

From this pandemic, I will always remember my attempts at baking, which concerned me most of the time, but the fact I managed to not start a fire or food poison anyone, will always surprise me. I'll also remember all the unexpected positive things that came out of the crisis, like being able to sleep in, getting seats on much emptier trains, eating more food and becoming a bit more organised. Although it hasn't all been that bad, I really hope that things can blow over before my birthday, and that once all of this is over, a lot can improve. I've really enjoyed and appreciated online learning and I hope that schools might consider integrating it with face-to-face learning.

As soon as the world is rid of this virus, the first thing on my check list will be to hug my friends, I'm also really hoping I can improve my organisation, which definitely needs some help and there are a lot of needed changes that could come about after lockdown, like helping the homeless for example.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Clarissa

17 years old

I was always rushing. Rushing between bed and breakfast, rushing between one bit of cereal to another, rushing for the train in the next two minutes, rushing to live. Life is short, they tell you, and I believe it to be short. So short, the alarms ringing, the watches sweating, your phone buzzing. You are late again. There's so much to do and so little time. Your head is numb and your heart is beating off beat—

Then it all stopped. All of a sudden it all stopped. Your life could end in a minute, the world around you is dying, dying faster than it is living.

You look around you. I look around me. Time is still passing, slower now. People are blurring in the foreground, things are fading out of focus, and there stood a figure. You. I haven't seen you in a long time. You only appeared as passing shadows while I brushed my teeth with fury, splashed my face with cold wakefulness, a few awkward smiles in pictures taken months ago. How are you? How are you living?

The dishes piled up in your sink, the table cluttered. The clothes piled up outside your closet, the floor unvacuumed. Later you said, these are not important now, I don't have the time. Don't have the time to go for morning runs, don't have the time to eat properly, don't have the time to clean properly, don't have the time to care, properly.

There's 24 hours in a day. Be aware of that. Your 24 hours. It is a long time if you look at it. 24 movies. And they are all your life, every single hour. Life is long. Have you ever sat still with nothing in your hands for an entire hour? Stop, don't scroll. Put that cold metal bar away from your warm breathing skin for an hour. Fold that laundry properly, smooth out all the corners, iron the edges, take responsibility. You are responsible for you. First and last of all.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Zahra

17 years old

I am...a clown in my friend's group

I am...shy but very annoying

I am...the second youngest in my family

I bring...happiness and smile to my friends.

I bring...food and K-pop music with myself most of the time.

I bring...junk food with myself.

I'll remember...all my childhood's memories which makes me happy

I'll remember...falling from a chair in school when my friends put up a prank.

I'll remember...going to my favourite K-pop concert.

I hope...this quatrains and corona will end soon.

I hope...the class of 2020 gets a chance to graduate.

I will...try my best and move on with my life and explore new things. And hangout with my friends more, helping my parents and going to uni which could be exciting. And also start a donation and help other people. Lastly be successful and study my dream job.

I will always be...grateful for my parents for what they gave us and brought us here.

I will always set an alarm in the morning and go exercise.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Zimal

13 years old

The sadness grows over. Sorrow filled the air. We see the terror of COVID. I wonder how everyone is holding up. Feeling worse, against the warming sun, the deceased scatter. How peaceful they fly. Happiness is eternal, Excitingly the night becomes nocturnal. As we all run outside.

The after effects are worse, it is like a curse. Sorrow is regretting the time not spent with family. However, the world may finally be at peace. Happiness occurs at the weirdest point in time. Or so, life goes on. I see people wandering outside, do they grieve for others? The world is really a confusing place.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Thomas

17 years old

I'm Me

COVID-19 is a global pandemic that has affected the structure and flow of our everyday life. Everything from school, to work, to home life has been affected due to the restrictions we have been forced to follow. Our routines quickly changed from school and work every day to staying locked up inside and stressing about how we were going to manage. During quarantine, I faced many ups and downs. Face-to-face communication was virtually impossible, and my friendships were at stake. They were failing. My biggest down was when I thought I had no one and I felt isolated from others, and even myself. There were many times when I would break down and give up on myself, thinking that I had nothing and no one. I remember the feeling of uncertainty. The pain of that feeling is one I will never forget. All I could do was sit and cry, too scared to talk or move in case something else would go wrong. The fear and headache paralysed me. I can remember the sound of my voice screaming into the pillow, thinking it would release the pain, but there was no relief. I sat there and cried, and I think those feelings will always remind me of how unhinged I was. I had lost control.

Stress that strong can negatively impact one's self-esteem and they can fall into depression, a mindset that is hard to bounce back from.

When I realised my friends were still there and I would not have to go on alone, I started to focus on myself and build my confidence. It takes a while to build strength, courage and confidence but only a second to crumble. You do get there eventually and when I did, I started to realise that all those negative thoughts were just my excuses for me not loving and believing in myself.

I wasn't alone in those dark times. I'm proud, confident, powerful. I'm me, and it took the harsh truth of quarantine to realise it. I'm happy about the experiences I had. I'm happy that we were forced into this tough situation because it takes a situation like this to create the strongest people. It takes the strongest mind to pass this and come out stronger. It takes a real person to come to the realisation of who they are.

Many have referred to the stay at home order as prison-like, but 'prison' is extreme. At home, we are able to wander beyond a cell and we are able to sleep in our comfy beds

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



and do as we please in our own spaces. Prisoners, in contrast, have nothing to their name. We have everything, including freedom. We stay home in our safe space while prisoners are forced to look through a wire fence out at the freedom we have, so they shouldn't complain about what we must go through. Instead, think about what we're escaping from: a major, life-threatening disease.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ryanna

17 years old

An Unexpected Interest

When we heard the news that school was closing down for a few weeks, it was the best news I'd heard in a long time. The first week was okay but the second week got a bit boring. I had nothing to look forward to.

Then, I found a really nice jumper I liked online, so I decided to buy it. And that's when the craziness started. One jumper turned into three and \$50 turned into \$500!

A package, and sometimes even two packages, was scheduled to come every day. It was such a great feeling watching the delivery man pull up in the driveway, not knowing what order it was until I opened it. It felt just like my birthday.

Now, I'm sad to say all the fun is over: school's back and I'm broke!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Abigail

15 years old

Coasts (29th May, 11:41 pm)

One of the hardest things about lockdown was watching the year repeat its days.

It was as if I could reach my hand down into time and scoop up the copper-tinged powder of autumn a year ago in another place. I could smell the rain that came one morning as I trudged home, falling just inches from the pavement. I leaned my face in to feel it, existing in two dimensions simultaneously, knowing it had to end, and not caring.

When my hidden memories emerged, they pulled me like a planet engulfing a handful of space dust. It would only take a strange falling of the light and suddenly I was catapulted back into my childhood; an earth-buried kaleidoscope of days spent wrapping myself around the universe behind our house. I watched as I prodded the pond nymphs (believing myself an omnipotent god), little knees awash in green, thinking the whole world was mine until lunchtime.

I think I was compensating for the experiences I knew I had lost. For some time I didn't know how to face the feeling that life had somehow cheated me, like I had wandered into a forest of fruit trees and some dense force was stopping me from gathering the harvest. It was overwhelming, but I pressed on out of sheer necessity. I soothed my history, I held myself close.

One day, in my mind's eye, the sun ignited the leaves and I sat down the forest shade – I watched the fruit fall about me in piles (smelling of orange seeds, surrender and spoiled sweetness), my eyes alive and burning with all the permutations of fire – and told myself I can come back later. I will.

But I have locked away time, which carried me somewhere else: now it is evening, and music laps into the cove of my room. The space between my body and the bodies of the ones I love has grown. They are separated by coasts. I'm angry, of course, because I have to love from a distance. How can I piece myself back together? Put the thought on a little boat and push it towards the skyline, goes my thinking. Wave goodbye now as it floats into the night.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



I go through the motions, but it never works. Not really. So I breathe in the salty sea mist, stretch my arms across the wide expanse, and walk alone along the rough, shifting sands of everything.

And I feel that I am no good but for my gentleness, my ability to lie right down in the middle of the flood and make a home of it. Quarantine has destroyed some important parts of my life, and I am lonely and very easily damaged – but I've realised that I'd rather live with a tender heart, letting the ocean rise and swell and fall over itself, because I know the waves will retch up some shell for me to hold to my ear so I can listen better. I can look anew.

I don't have to remind myself that I'm living through a pandemic, that there's something larger than us probing the human flock, stocking the graves, pooling in the streets. In storms it flurries forth – weaves, dilates, eats the fruit of reason. There are recurring dreams of death: a human carcass stands up right in the dark street outside my window, staring lazily into some middle distance. Birds land one by one on its shoulders. They tear off swathes of cheek until their beaks shine with blood. At some point the body always slumps to the asphalt, as mute as a fallen god, heaped beside the sloughed ribbons of its face.

The fear is my reality – our reality – but I have the serious privilege of having a home to shelter me from infection, so I can push past fear and view the virus as an opportunity to reshape myself. I have spent so much time alone that I've remembered who I am. And I don't mean my alleged 'real name,' which was made up by someone else.

When I'm in my room at night, when I'm in bed and my breath spirals up through the darkness, I know that nameless person within me.

So I sit here on this fresh evening, in this broken world, listening to the slow, descending whistle of night birds. There is air coming in through a chink in the window. I turn my face to feel it. The air is so cold, so clean that I take it as a sign that I should keep going, just as I am.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Indira

11 years old

Stuck in Isolation

'Panic strikes the nation as shelves empty and borders close, all international flights are cancelled' droned the news reporter on Channel 12.

'COVID-19 or coronavirus, as some say, is causing essential items especially toilet paper to disappear from supermarket shelves' droned another.

There goes our trip to Italy and seeing my Avó (Portuguese grandma) and camp too, maybe even Year 6 Formal. What will happen? I don't know but the next thing you know people stop going to school, shops close and excursions are cancelled.

'There's school work online if you are staying home due to COVID,' said my teacher.

'You know what? You're not going to school,' my mother said suddenly one morning. And then...isolation began (evil music)! We were suddenly trapped inside just me, my mother and my two annoying brothers. A week later, homeschool hits (more evil music)! I had nothing to do and no one to talk to. So naturally I couldn't wait for school to come back.

As the days drew on and hours disappeared I got nothing done. I was bored, bored and bored. Did I mention it was so boring? I just wanted it to be over. I just wanted to be free to leave my home without a 'valid reason'. My mum would cook breakfast, I would cook lunch and my older brother and I would take turns in cooking dinner with mum (in case she got sick we could cook).

All of a sudden schools are back! How long would this last? No one knew, but I got to see my friends again! It was great to be away from my family. Don't get me wrong they're great and all (mostly) but I needed a break. It was so great to have my own space at home but I really missed my friends and during that time at home I realised how lucky I am. To have a school to go to, friends and above all affordable hand sanitiser.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Lara

17 years old

Snapshots of Life in Isolation

When isolation started, on weekends our family started doing puzzles together. We completed one puzzle and started another one, although we all took a break from it and haven't touched it for a few weeks.

We also started something on a whiteboard that is on our fridge. My sister drew a smiley face on the board, I added a nose, my dad added hair, my mum added ears, and so it continued. The next week, I rubbed our masterpiece off the board and began my own 'starter' drawing: eyes, eyebrows, mouth and nose. The rest of my family completed the drawing and turned it into another masterpiece. The next week, my mum started the drawing and drew half a mouth and some star eyes. I turned it into a snowman, and my sister added some buttons and some arms; Dad hasn't added anything yet.

I also seem to find that all I do lately is homework and housework. I am a 'people pleaser'; I like to make my parents happy and be the best I can be. During lunch and recess, between online lessons, I clean the house for them as quickly as I can. During my free time, I either clean the house or try to complete my work for all my classes. My parents get a bit cranky when I do my homework, but I get so stressed out and worried that I'll fall behind and fail.

During isolation, I have developed a love of witchcraft. I searched 'witchcraft' one day online and saw a book of spells. I thought that I would love to read that, so my mum decided to buy it for my eighteenth birthday.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Atoc

16 years old

Sleep

Ladies and gentlemen, we have been in isolation for a very long time, wait a minute, I don't think you understand, a very very VERY long time. While you may have dreaded staying at home with your mums, dads, aunties, uncles, dogs, cats, mice, and monkeys, I was enjoying the constant comfort of my warm and cosy bed. Now that restrictions have eased, I will terribly miss:

1. Sliding under my soft covers
2. Lounging around until dawn and
3. Experiencing the joy of bizarre dreams
4. Especially those of being chased by zombies
5. Perhaps I should have done some homework?

Sure, it was fun while it lasted, but now we must tie our shoelaces and head back to our classroom's books in hand. Oh, how I'll miss my bed!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jamie

13 years old

The Museum of COVID-19

I always wanted to go to the museum of COVID.

It was a lesson in many subjects. Cause and effect, the importance of hygiene. We learnt about it in biology, the anatomy of a virus and so on. However, I was never interested in all of that stuff. I wanted to know how people actually lived through it, what happened and what people thought of it. My grandmother would talk to me about her experience, life from a COVID survivor. She often used to say, 'COVID was just a base point for change. So many other things stemmed from it. We all discovered what racism really was and we started realising that we need each other, we realised that we could get through it.' I loved her as much as you could love a grandma. I cherished the moments I had with her and loved the stories she would tell.

'A lot of good things came out of COVID' she said once, pointing her finger at me and looking me in the eyes with a stare that reflected so much wisdom, 'but a lot of bad things too'. She chuckled, 'I feel like I've been through everything'.

When I arrived at the museum, I checked in with my passport and picked out a tour guide. They were all named after people important in 2020. I wondered how many my grandma would've known.

'My name is Donald. Let me show you around. Where would you like to go first?' The robot said in its automated voice. I hopped on the tour hoverboard and we glided across the air.

'What about the artifact zone?'

'Sure', it said and the darkness that was a new-age portal swallowed me.

I saw rows of objects in glass cases. Many of the objects were cracked and weathered but all the glass displays were in pristine condition. They varied in shape and size and I found myself marvelling at the people who had to shine and clean them.

The objects had a little description beneath them. 'Donald' the tour guide took me to some

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



of the popular artifacts and read them out to me. It hadn't occurred to me that people could make jokes out of a pandemic but I found myself laughing and wondered what my grandmother would think of it.

Toilet Paper

'Toilet paper was something the people of 2020 rushed to the supermarkets to buy. COVID-19 did not attack the bowel but that didn't stop the swarms of people who pushed and battered their way just to get a bog roll. This significant object saw the first-hand brutality of people who were afraid they could never wipe their behinds again.

The toilet paper of 2020 was the classic white and there were many brands but the one shown in the display is Quilton.'

Blue Ink Pen

'The trusty blue ink pen. Not many remember the time of handwritten notes or when school children had to write in paper books. Millions were produced each year yet this is a forgotten artifact that held great importance in the time of COVID. Many people turned to handwriting letters to their loved ones or writing things down with a pen and paper to battle the boredom that lockdown threw at them.

In the current days, the pen resembles an odd shape. 'So small' some people say or 'how does it work?' You can find out how a pen works in the '2020 technology and gadgets' zone of our museum.

As the world started developing into a more technology based society, the trusty blue ink pen was lost. Do you remember it?'

Tracksuit Pants

'In a time where comfort was valued above appearance, 'trackies' were a well-valued item during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Many were worn weeks at a time without being washed but no one would judge because if they did, they were a hypocrite.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



There were many different colours, shapes and sizes of trackies that the people of 2020 were drawn to but the ones on display were salvaged in the home of an adolescent girl. They sport dirt stains on the calves, manifested out of a reluctance to wash them and a tear in the thigh which we guess would have happened by catching herself on various sharp objects around the house.

Due to our irreversible global warming, there's been no need to wear tracksuit pants anymore or any long-sleeved clothing for that matter so these are a rare find.'

I checked out of the museum later that day and went to my grandmother's grave. She insisted on being buried like people were in her days instead of what we do now. I told her about what I saw and how I missed her stories and laughs. I felt as if I couldn't live without her.

Feeling tears well up in my eyes, I recalled a memory of her.

'Even if you think you can never get through something, pumpkin, know you can.' She looked at me with sparkling eyes. 'I will always be with you,' and placed her hand over mine, putting it to my chest. 'Here.' She whispered and kissed me on the forehead.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Malika

Year 10

Toilet Paper

Toilet paper was scarce and caused a lot of chaos in Coles, Woolies and Bunnings. The video of two women fighting over one roll of toilet paper can be played on the side.

The people would be able to witness how people got really sensitive and selfish during COVID. All the news about people panic buying toilet paper would be interesting. Scott Morrison describing it as un-Australian and pledging people to stop panic buying.

The toilet paper was life-saving during COVID. The visitors in the museum would probably think that diarrhoea was a symptom of COVID-19 but it was not.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Agum
Year 10

MacBook

Information Panel:

MacBook was my best friend during the COVID-19 lockdown. It brought entertainment and kept me busy. MacBook was a significant object during lockdown because it survived my mood swings throughout the day. I would harshly open it when I was bored and sick of lockdown.

The poor MacBook endured my teenage tantrums, kept me accompanied during the infinite hours of the day.

Slammed a million times, apologised to for being thrown off the bed, it was my only companion.

Face Mask

Ripped off and put on again this was a daily routine. At first, there were a few with the horrid masks. Slowly, it became a common sight. On the streets, in the shopping centres and at school.

I felt that as the virus engulfed the world, the face mask enveloped mother earth. Not long after its shortage became another problem. New designs popped up, new materials were used to manufacture it. Each one claiming to be better than its predecessor.

TV

While I spent countless hours in front of my laptop, the TV offered some distraction from the tiny MacBook.

Programs like ABC three and occasionally the news channel provided some reprieve during the lockdown. *Riverdale*, *Stranger Things* and Netflix were random programs that allowed me to drift away from the four walls of my bedroom

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Cody
Year 10

Face Mask

This face mask isn't your ordinary face mask. This face mask is the very thing that saved lives and was panickeded about from day dot when the pandemic of COVID-19 started.

It was adjustable to size and allowed you to cover your nose, mouth and most of your face. This helped with not breathing in all the air that surrounds you when you walked the streets and shops when going out.

Notice that this face mask was just one of many ways we adapted to the new ways of surviving in the pandemic of COVID-19.

Mobile Phone

The mobile phone you see in front of you is one of billions of things that people in the catastrophic event of COVID-19 used to adapt and stay in contact with family and friends and a source of not being stuck in an empty hole feeling sad and used to keep us from boredom

It was the technology that had kept everybody sane and entertained in the event of COVID-19. It was helping us find new innovating ways to stay engaged and keeping us from the depth of boredom.

This phone went through the depths and darkness that swept over me in the cruel, drenched wonder if there was ever going to be a time when everything would go back to normal.

My Couch

Standing before you is the very couch I sat in everyday in the same spot working through the horrors and demons that awakened me every day on my computer for school. And if

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



you look closely you can see the very indent that I made over time in that spot where I wore and tore the seams and stitches...

This couch wasn't always my friend. At first it took my pens, books and everything I left on it. But as I sat and sat on it, it became a comfort and warmth area for me when everything was collapsing and dragging me to the depth of the sea where it felt as dark and lonely as what it felt like in real life.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Kaysier
Year 10

Books

Reading books frees you and helps you learn new words and discover new things you don't know. Reading books also helps your imagination grow. It also makes you creative. I spent infinite hours reading – it helps time pass.

Reading fantasy books actually allowed me to realise the possibilities...magic, fairies, wizards, dragons...viruses!! I turned the page countless times that the bunny ears almost fell off. Cover to cover this book meant life for me. I could not step out to the library. Climbing those library stairs now felt like a dream.

Laptop

A laptop keeps you away from boredom and helps you communicate online, FaceTime family and friends and helps to do your work stuff. It also kept me busy

Teachers, seven different teachers uploaded work every day. At first, I would sit in front of the laptop imagining that the teacher was right before me. In a week's time the realisation set in that the teacher is not there!!! The classroom notification beep was the closest that I would get to a voice.

In two week's time warm smiles and face-to-face interaction became a dream. The cold computer screen replaced our reality. I asked myself a million times is this the answer to the exposition essay that I wrote unwilling? Technology is the future. We are a living proof of our own hypothesis!!!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Wat

Year 10

Instagram

During the COVID-19 quarantine, Instagram was and still is currently a very big social media platform to discuss racism and issues currently going on all over the world. I enjoyed going through Instagram to communicate with all speak to my friends and I feel that this platform enabled me to express myself freely. While doing so, I had to be extremely mindful of the comments being mad. Though I was and am greatly passionate about the issues facing the world, I tried my best to abide by the rules etiquettes of social media.

Hand Sanitiser

Prior to COVID, a tiny bottle of hand sanitiser was an uncommon sight – it may have made its way to handbags and used mostly in food courts by anxious parents only. However, as COVID became a common household jargon, so did hand sanitisers. The common economics principle applied to this humble sanitiser – as its demand increased, the supply was high enough – strangely the prices spiked from \$2.99 to \$6.00 – a purse pack. Not only that, for the sanitiser to be effective, its alcohol content had to be 99%...society even spent an extra 30 seconds to ensure that they got 'bang for their buck' not 'germs for their buck'!!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Kimberly

Year 10

Face Mask

Face mask is a mask made of cotton. It is designed to protect us from people who are sick. Face masks have become an important thing during COVID-19. Face masks have protected me from the virus spread. Every time I go out to get some groceries, I will hang it over my ear to cover my nose and mouth. Face masks are as important as my phone, I could never leave when I go outside.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jenarthanan
Year 10

Mobile Phones

There were many mobile phones arranged in a showcase. There were stickers in each mobile phone and the stickers said that these are the phones that broke the world record of the highest use of screen time. It was used the most in 2020 from February to May for 13 hours non-stop.

Mattress

It was very stinky and its name was COVID mattress. It had holes in every 2cm and it would probably disappear if someone accidentally touched it. There was a notice saying that this mattress was invented in 2020 and came through many problems. But I can't even imagine how they slept in this rubbish.

Headphones

There were masses of things at the museum but the headphone was my favourite. It was not looking like normal headphones. The wires and the magnets spouted out, the headphone was covered with rust. Its age is more than years but the ear wax was still a mess...

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Angela
Year 10

Music

Music calms my mind and even helps me go through the most unhappy of days. While listening to each unique song that plays, it surprises me with the huge imagination that each person possesses.

Chocolate

Chocolate suppresses my sadness through the smooth and sweet joy it brings me. It gives me a happy sensation that can make me smile whenever I'm feeling down during this world crisis.

Board Games

Playing board games during a world crisis has brought upon sadness to countless people both the wealthy and the needy, but apart from the problems it brings most families joy and unity.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Abishek
Year 10

Face Mask

Face masks in a museum show the protection that people took over to safeguard themselves. The covering is a shield for the prevention from the virus that the world took as a precaution. The masks were a small safeguard for people during the lockdown.

Laptop

The sounds of the news from the TV kept swirling around in my ears tempting me to watch it. The serious disturbance to the world was resounding all around the room. Everywhere I hear the news about the rise of cases and deaths of COVID. I have a lot of work pending and due today. This represents my education through remote learning that was done using laptops.

PS4

It was a hot afternoon experiencing very hot and strong winds. Just chillin' the warm weather with a little nap on the mattress with my friends after the lunch. All were too lazy and helpless to even fetch water. We were in no mood to play outside and thought how to pass the time. The world has gone online in the COVID-19 lockdown. Even important meetings have to follow physical distance. The PS4 showcased in the museum is the main device for many children to pass time during the lockdown.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jenani
Year 10

Food

All the time I feel bored, I eat. I think I have to survive till my daily routine restarts. I don't care whether it is healthy or unhealthy, I see whether I can eat it or not. Neither playing nor exercising, just filling my tummy. Remembering my lean days, I became fatter and fatter.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anamaria
Year 10

Virus

It is an illness caused by a virus that spreads easily from person to person and infects our immunity. Sadly it has no cure and everyone has a hard time through this devastating situation. Unfortunately COVID-19 is a big obstacle, which stops us from going anywhere and doing our favourite activities. This virus has brought sadness to the world and has changed people's life.

Hand Sanitiser

What is a hand sanitiser? A hand sanitiser is a liquid that is used every single time before eating, when we are going somewhere or in other situations. It might happen to have an unpleasant smell but of course we should use it because it kills the germs we have in our hands.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nisara
Year 10

Picture of a Google Classroom

People used Google Classroom to continue their work and get new work from their teachers. That's one of the options for students so they can work from home. Google Classroom has been used for a long time. It was made before COVID-19 happened and it became the way that people choose to do their work in this period.

Face Mask

At that time face masks were an important thing to protect us, and face masks were very helpful. People used it when they went outside or when they were in a public place.

Worksheets

Worksheets were another way that students chose to do their work from home. It was helpful for a student who could not conveniently use the internet to do their work, but it wasn't a good thing for the environment. If many students used this way to do their work it would use a lot of paper.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bryce
Year 10

PS4 Controller

This PS4 controller has gotten through many things including his owner raging and throwing the controller everywhere. This object is significant because it still hung on even if the owner was like that to the controller.

A Sponge

This sponge has cleaned many plates and utensils during the pandemic. This sponge was very helpful for doing many sorts of dishes during the pandemic, but the user of this sponge was very unhappy doing all the dishes. Note: this sponge was never been replaced during the pandemic.

PS4

This console helped his owner so much that his owner escaped boredom. Without this console I don't know how the owner would have survived during the pandemic.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Yashneil

9 years old

Soccer Ball

My soccer ball has been really handy because in my luxurious backyard I play with my little nimble brother. In this gloomy period, I enjoy playing with my soccer ball constantly to make me fit. I believe athleticism is more important than laying on your chair or sofa doing homeschooling. I bought it last year and it is a meaningful memory for me. It had my favourite colours which are black and white and my boots contrasted it with bright colours such as vibrant orange and baby blue.

Lego Set

Creativity is just as important as education so me and my parents went shopping to get some Lego sets. I really enjoyed it because at my home I feel bored and sick. Lego was extremely significant because of the time and creativity it took. I built colourful cities, vibrant cars and vehicles. Building could help me a lot of jobs such constructing buildings and can even help me in carpentry.

My iPad

My iPad was always a habit for me. Most of this period was usually spent looking at my devices. Technology was really the way to go during quarantine. iPads and phones were an addiction for my brother too because it kept us excited and jolly. I played games and watched videos in my living room. I usually played it in the afternoon next to the glorious view of nature. My iPad is super valuable for me because I have been using it for half a decade since my birthday. It had a leather cover and was laid down on a table. I played games such as Minecraft and built tons of creative builds.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Sophie

11 years old

Pets

Pets need a large thank you for their glee and boredom-killing acts during the lockdown during 2020. They helped watch a show or take a walk down to the local shopping centre to stare at the empty toilet paper shelves. Pets have provided the happiness we need and deserve some praise.

Hand Sanitiser

Hand sanitiser is an important part of the COVID-19 life, disinfecting your hands without the need for water. Many have a tube containing this disinfecting gel, using it after touching a handrail to make sure COVID-19 doesn't hurt them.

Glen 20

Although its suffocating and strong smell fills the house, this spray keeps corona away. People bought scents from lavender to original, spraying them on door handles and keys and more. This disinfectant is quite handy, keeping the unwanted coronavirus away and keeping us safe in a corona-free bubble.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ruya

11 years old

My Copies of A Series of Unfortunate Events

I have loved these books since I was seven, which was three years ago now. I fell in love with them at the library and on my ninth birthday I received the whole series in hardcover. As I had already read the whole series, they collected dust and were picked up for re-reading from time to time.

When COVID hit, and all my books ran out, they were used a lot more. The tops of the spines sagged and pages bent and I tried desperately to keep them in pristine condition. While some sat in their box, others were lovingly walked around the house like a pet. One would sit on my desk for a day and then be picked up the next morning to be launched onto a bouncy pillow covered in flowers or on the dusty carpet where the sun from the open window flowed onto the pages. They were read while tea was slurped and porridge was eaten. They were a good companion during Zoom lessons and on cold nights when there was nothing to watch on TV.

Now they sit, dustier and sadder than ever behind the doll house on my drawers and book eleven toils on my desk. But their novelly smell and quirky descriptions of idioms and characters and plots will always be in my heart. Always.

Boris Johnson's Ventilator

This was Boris Johnson's ventilator. Boris was the UK's Prime Minister in 2020, when COVID-19 put the world in a pandemic. He got the virus after shaking waaaay too many hands. He even boasted about it! Then, before anyone knew it, he was rammed into the isolation ward and his blond hair was in a permanent ruffle. Soon his breath wheezed in and out of his sagging chest so the doctors jogged him down the corridors that now smelt more than ever of sanitiser and Glen 20. His bed was rammed into a stuffy room with glossy white walls and a floor that looked like frozen vomit coated in plastic. A strange, clear mask flashed above his face and an elastic band found itself stretched around his head. The pillow was heavy as the doctors rammed their fingers on the buttons and switches of the ventilator and fiddled with chords and screens. Finally, after what seemed

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



like years of news of 'the poor Prime Minister', the countries screens were wiped of Boris's predicament, and the ventilator was passed onto someone else.

Home Hoodie

Although sanitiser and toilet paper were the main essentials of the time, no one stopped to even think about their cosy clothes that pushed them through the COVID crisis like army generals. I did.

This was my hoodie; plain white and fluffy inside with the remnants of stains I despised. I would put my beloved hoodie over my pyjamas at night while I ate dinner and over them in the morning when I had a zoom lesson. I would not wear them outside the house, as I did not want them ruined. They were a definite companion to my humble tracksuit pants. So, as an ode to all clothes who lived through COVID: THANK YOU!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nawal

14 years old

Dark Chocolate

Dark chocolates are one of the most valuable objects for the people who live during the COVID-19 Crises time. No one, I mean it, no one, could resist the rich, dark bitter flavoured chocolates. When the virus started spreading across the country, citizens started stocking up the dark chocolates. Every brand you could think of, for example Coles dark chocolate, Lindt etc. But the one DC brand that was being stocked up the most was... OLD GOLD. The most bitter DC ever in the history of dark chocolates. Many people brought that one but someone brought 99% of the chocolate brand! It was a 14-year-old chocolate-loving teenager! As a young age she loved chocolates, but mostly DC. She took chocolates that the stores had limitation for buying chocolates for every person who brought chocolate. But she had an exception because she was the world's richest billionaire! And no one could say anything to her because if they did they were sued in two minutes by her lawyer.

Books

Here lies the collection of the Books which were owned by the most beautiful girl in the world who spent her time reading books during the COVID-19. This 18-year-old who just finished uni and was about to apply for her dream job as an architect. Usually 18-year-olds would be out partying but she is always inside reading books, especially Harry Potter. She couldn't not stop reading that series she read them more than 50 times as child her parents would always tell to read books because her parents own an enormous library in their house.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Muhammad
14 years old

My Bed

As you can see this is no ordinary bed. This bed has been through many hardships with this owner. If you look carefully you can see pen marks and tears from when Neji died in *Naruto Shippuden*. This bed was there when his girlfriend broke up with him. This bed would listen to the owner rant more than his friends or family would ever listen.

Netflix.com

This website was always open on the owner's laptop. He would watch it 24/7 while simultaneously eating all the snacks in the house. He would start a show and finish it the next day without hesitation. Some of the many shows he watched were *Gotham*, *Arrow*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and even *Brooklyn 99*. Eventually the owner finished Netflix and moved on to the next streaming service AnimeLab.com

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Naira

13 years old

FaceTime App

This app has given the opportunity for its owner to communicate to his/her friends during the tough time they were going through. The FaceTime app let them have fun with their friends even if they couldn't meet in person. This app couldn't help but make its owner laugh with their friends.

They were very lucky to have his app. You could see their smiling faces when they were online enjoying their time with their best friends. The FaceTime app has done a lot for his/her owner during the global crisis COVID-19. It gave the owner a chance to talk to her grandma when the owner couldn't see her.

Haikyu!!

This TV show on Netflix has entertained its viewer during the hardest time of many lives. During COVID-19, the owner had turned on Netflix and viewed this very TV show. The owners were entertained whilst they were in lockdown for many months. They filled all their free time just to be entertained by this very TV show. Slouching on the couch and eating dinner they would just watch *Haikyu!!*.

After school, they would just hop on to Netflix and enjoy their time watching *Haikyu!!* Their snack wrappings were everywhere as they were too lazy to get up and interrupt their TV show. *Haikyu!!* has done more than entertain their viewer but has become a friend to them.

Kindle

Electronics were very helpful during the World-Wide Pandemic. This gadget helped its owners go through the toughest time of their lives - lockdown. Not able to meet your friends and have fun, this Kindle had allowed its owner to sit down and enjoy a nice book. Not able to hold a physical book didn't matter to the owner anymore. All they had to do

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



was download any books they desired. Online book shopping was just what they needed. During the winter time this Kindle had given the opportunity for their owner to sit in front of the fireplace and enjoy a good fantasy novel. This Kindle saved the life of a fellow human during the global crisis COVID-19.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Leo

15 years old

Face Mask

This face mask can seem quite ordinary due to its obvious shape and colour. However it does hide some historic values. This face mask belonged to the Chinese doctor, Li WenLiang, who first discovered the virus.

Li WenLiang was a famous doctor who worked in China. In December 2019, he discovered COVID-19 and warned everyone about it but unfortunately he was arrested by the government for telling people about the virus. Few weeks later, Dr. Li was infected with the virus and he soon died. This face mask was used by him and it is now treasured as a memory of this famous doctor.

If you look closely, this face mask was designed in an advanced way. You can see how different the material is. Touch it and you will understand why it was so advanced.

*Note: this face mask has been cleaned thoroughly. You will not get COVID-19 if you touch it.

Diary

This diary is a diary written by many people of the world, from young to old. It details some of the important events during the virus. According to the first page of the diary, the diary was written to tell people about how deadly a virus can be and how each country dealt with it.

Over the back of the diary, there are many graphs detailing the cases of each country and how each wave was flattened by the governments. It is sorted by countries that had the highest cases to countries that had lower cases. Of course the graph of the US was first.

Using the US as an example you can see that they have never entered into a second wave, while they were always in the first wave. This tells us that the government was a failure in the US.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Throughout this diary, you can see the different stories each person wrote and feel the pain of how people lived in lockdown. From young to old, it teaches people how to respect people who had to deal with the pain and the sadness of seeing their own family members dying.

You can buy this diary in the museum shop.

A MacBook Pro 16 Inch Laptop – 2019 edition

This MacBook Pro was used heavily by a student who came from Australia. He donated it to the museum to show how he has used it during the pandemic.

As you see, this laptop has been heavily used, which can be seen from the dirty screen and the scratched Apple logo. The laptop has broken keys, fingerprints all over the place. This laptop is also one of the best Mac laptops ever created. This was also the last Mac that had an Intel processor.

This student has been working very hard every day with this laptop, typing furiously to finish all his work. It is now the most valued laptop as it has been kept quite well.

You can access the folders of the laptop to find all the work this student has done during the pandemic. Also, the desktop screen shows a poem written by the student about Apple being a scam. This was his masterwork to tell Apple about its problems. He himself never liked his laptop at all because it was from Apple, but he still cared for it because it was expensive (something that he disliked most out of this laptop.)

This laptop has been respected the most. Go ahead! Touch it and look at all the documents stored inside the laptop.

Note: Again, it has been thoroughly cleaned, so you won't die when you touch it. Also, please do not smash it or break the system.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Prakash

12 years old

Antibacterial Wipes

Antibacterial wipes were an essential to surviving the COVID-19 crisis. It provided immediate cleansing, fumigating any surface it comes in contact with. One single swipe with these wipes would purify an area.

These wipes came in many brands, sizes and even scents and flavours. Several customers went with the Kleenex option in small or big sizes in the classic Aloe Vera scent. While others decided to step out of the box and go with Cetaphil's medium sized lavender scent.

As you can see, these wipes helped many going through this situation-provided an excellent cleaning device, created a scent that got many through staying in isolation and even gave some a hobby of cleaning areas.

You can find these wipes in the cleansing section- the 2019 to 2020 edition. If not, these wipes are available at the entry of the museum along with sanitiser so that all visitors are safe from the virus.

Cookie Trays and Cutters

Cookie cutters and trays are only few of the many baking devices used during the lockdown period in the COVID-19 era. These extraordinary utensils helped many bored and hungry survivors get through isolation.

Cookie cutters came in so many sizes, shapes and were creative in every way. Some of these included shapes such as hearts, stars, moustaches, bears and of course the classic circle cookie shape. Cookie trays on the other hand, seemed boring but were probably the most useful baking tool of all. They provided the very surface to bake cookies and other baked goods on – many wouldn't survive without this.

All in all, cookie cutters and trays were a loved baking tool by all ages and people globally. It helped sustain hunger, boredom and many other issues in the coronavirus period.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ugg Boots

Staying at home for several months wasn't an easy task for COVID-19 survivors. Walking throughout their homes every single day, looking at the same things and feeling the same floors was monotonous. Then came the especially famous Ugg boots.

Ugg boots were a special kind of shoe that you could wear in your own home. Many took these shoes as an opportunity to be comfortable, warm and snug when travelling down stairs to get a cup of coffee. But to others, it was much more than that. It was something that made the isolation experience so much more enjoyable and memorable. As you can see on this model, some boots were used so much that there were scratches, holes and some worn-out patches.

These Ugg boots are found in the homeware section of the museum and have many different colours, sizes and designs in this specific area. To find out more on these boots and get your own pair, visit the gift shop located at the front of the museum.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Johnny

14 years old

A Laptop

During the COVID lockdown, students were required to complete school via the internet, (online learning). Programs such as Zoom, Education Perfect and Google Classroom were used to share work from teachers to students during the COVID-19 months. As such, a device was necessary to complete the assigned work.

This laptop is an example of such a device. Markings on the laptop display its meticulous use. Such markings include loose keyboard keys, worn-away letters and scratches on its screen. The laptop was a vital and necessary piece of equipment that proved invaluable to countless students across the globe at such a time.

Disposable Gloves

Necessary trips to grocery stores proved perilous during COVID-19.

Many people equipped themselves with masks and disposable gloves when making such trips for necessary supplies and food. These disposable gloves were meticulously used – the holes near the wrists were created by excessive pulling, and the fingertips have withered away from extreme usage.

Needless to say, disposable gloves proved quite useful and handy during the coronavirus, allowing people to stay COVID safe.

Fireplace

Lockdown in Australia took place in the autumn, which meant weather that progressively grew colder. As such, families with fireplaces would light them and keep them burning all through the day to stay warm whilst inside.

The fireplace proved a common meeting ground in the house for families to gather around and congregate, talk and share about their day. Suffice to say, the fireplace proved quite useful during the COVID-19 period.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



JJ

14 years old

Can of Glen 20

This can of Glen 20 saved lives in 2019. This is the last can of Glen 20 in the world. This object kills 99.99% of bacteria so this makes it valuable. The cost for this is 10 million dollars for a single spray!

The Phone

This phone is the last one in mankind this device cannot be remade as it has many symptoms of diarrhoea, ebola, corona and many more deadly diseases. The owner of this phone is unknown as the phone is untouchable.

The Bed

This bed is immensely valuable. This bed has been sprayed with Glen 20 over a thousand times meaning it is COVID safe. This bed is the only COVID safe thing in 2019. This bed also has numerous uses. It could be used as a mask, table, chair and many other things.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jiah

13 years old

My Headphones

A beloved utility, tattered by the long hours of a lecture droning through the audio waves. Used during the era of sanitiser & strife, perfect for Zoom and Teams and those cheeky little Netflix streams. Blocking out the noise of your home, now you can focus on what matters most – meetings, just to show that you are working, well almost.

Toilet Paper

Used roll is almost empty now.
A solitary square
is hanging on the holder and
it's way too small to share.

I hope we find some paper soon
or other kinds of wipes.
If not, I'm told I'll have to use
my baby sister's diapers.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



JC

14 years old

Toilet Paper

A thin sanitary absorbent paper usually in a roll for use in drying or cleaning oneself after number 1 or 2. This object leads people in the world to panic as this is vital for the human race. Even two ladies fought for toilet paper at Woolworths in western Sydney.

Boris Johnson

Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson born 19 June 1964 is a British politician, author, and former journalist who has served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Leader of the Conservative Party since 2019. Boris Johnson got the coronavirus. He spent three nights in intensive care during his week of treatment in a London hospital after falling ill with COVID-19.

Board Game

A board game is a game that involves counters or pieces moved or placed on a pre-marked surface or 'board', according to a set of rules. Games can be based on pure strategy, chance or a mixture of the two, and usually have a goal that a player aims to achieve.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Evie

14 years old

The Onesie

Are you tired of having cold feet? Or having to get up out of your warm fluffy blanket to get a snack? Well look no further! We have the perfect solution! A onesie! It's warm and fluffy, a body blanket if you will and there are no more cold toes out of the end of the blanket, no more having to start again with your heating after getting a snack! Watch Netflix all day! And if a snack is needed, just get up and get one! No fuss required! It's warm, it's fluffy, it's snuggly, it's...the onesie!!!

My Cat

Do you need a friend? But you can't see them because of lockdown? Look no further, we have the solution for you! A purring fluffy, fur-ball. On cold nights it will warm you with its fluffy pelt. If she is sitting on a chair in the evening sun and you have to do homework, a hand can sit on her fluffy back, and then homework is not so bad. She's not so hard to look after, except when she catches a rat, and only plays with it on the floor, and dirties up the mat. But all in all a fluffy ball is what you need in COVID times. A cat I say, black or white. A purring heap upon the couch.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Zahra

17 years old

Netflix

Watching my favourite drama in a weekend not realising there aren't any more episodes to watch and have to wait for 6 more days. I feel like quarantine has made me lazy and hopeless and I jumped off the couch and throw all the pillows as I was pissed and annoyed. I didn't know what to do. But I ignored my feeling and decided to do a Zoom call with all of my friends and throw a party since my year 12 formal will not happen.

Slime

Playing with sticky slime during quarantine as I am bored doing nothing but as I touch the slime and throw it out of my hand to other side seeing it how far it could go but as I remember a quote. 'The slime of all my yesterdays rots in the hollow of my skull.' But I still played with it and messed up my room with all slime around me and tried to clean it up but I gave up remembering my favourite TV show. But suddenly my stomach started to make sounds. I decided to check out the fridge. As I opened my fridge the only thing I saw was slime not only one but a lot I was shocked. I closed the fridge and opened it again. I am not dreaming and it's real.

MacBook

Seeing everyone having MacBooks made me felt left out but seeing everyone staring to buy during COVID-19 which makes me think no one is social distancing. But I just left the place and eventually bought one for myself. I don't know from whose money. But I just bought one for myself to look cool. Seeing everyone look at me.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Saniah

15 years old

Hand Sanitiser

In its day, liquid gold, now an idle bottle of hand sanitiser sits still on a marble shelf. Its once clear interior disappearing into a muddy, pinguid brown. The hand sanitiser was once precious, sought after by millions because of its ability to obliterate 99.9% of germs. Many even chose to consume the translucent delicacy. We don't speak about what happened to them. The hippest brands of 2020 were nothing compared to the revolutionary hand sanitiser.

Camera

Shutter! A 2020 Canon camera malfunctions, processing an accidental snap. Its charcoal exterior, heavily decorated with all sorts of washi-tapes and stickers, indicate the quarantine boredom generations prior to us experienced. In its inventory are hidden cursed pictures of its owner, meme pictures, images of food, and just about anything you can bring to mind, when you think about 'low quality'. Shutter! I wonder what the camera's capturing now.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Mahad

12 years old

Game Controller

While many think of this precious artefact, this piece of history as very 2020. It was pretty revolutionary at the time. Compared to our VR-in-game-feeling-sensor-2000 it's nothing, but enough about it, back in 2020 they used this controller almost all of the time, used at home and... yeah that's it, it was apparently a great pastime.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jethro

15 years old

A Slightly Charred Target Billboard

A large red target printed onto a plastic sheet, supported by a metal frame. It is browned and charred in some places.

During the pandemic of 2020, numerous riots and raids occurred as protest against police brutality to people of colour. Many of the raids were conducted on the department store Target. Here we see the remnants of one such outlet, originally from Minnesota.

A Tea-Stained Political Cartoon

A tea-stained newspaper clipping, yellowed with age, depicting a certain US president holding a large bottle of hand sanitiser, tattooed with slogans such as 'Stops the spread of science' and 'leaves brains refreshingly soft. The figure is depicted to saying 'It stops the spread of science... and like me, it's a natural.'

The cartoon was a follow up to President 45's controversial remarks about drinking hand sanitiser to cure COVID-19. What ensued was a combination of hilarity and death as many mocked him for making such a stupid claim and others were rushed off to hospital after being so unfortunate as to believe it.

A Stock Market Portfolio, Ripped Up

A black binder containing details of various deals that has since been ripped into several pieces.

During the great pandemic of 2020, the stock market took a big crash. Many tried to seize on the on opportunity, such as the owner of these documents, however it is clear that he failed. We don't know why the owner ripped them up, only that it was probably not legal. Thankfully, ever since the 2071 bill that banned the trading of stocks under the premise that it was no longer to support promising businesses but instead to attempt to make money betting, we have not seen any more stock market fraud like this.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bettina

14 years old

Hand Sanitiser

This bottle of hand sanitiser belonged to the US president during the coronavirus pandemic. He was so fond of the product that he even proposed to the American people that they inject themselves with it. During this time sanitiser was incredibly rare to come by as it was in such high demand by the public. People were so desperate that they began to stockpile sanitisers and other cleaning products. Because of this, a limit was put on the amount of sanitisers people could purchase from shops.

Testing Kits

The testing kit shown was one of many that were purchased by the American government in an attempt to get hold of these rare specimens. This one was part of a large group that were bought and were later proven to be completely ineffective. This led to a number of cases being unrecognised, resulting in an escalation in the number of existing cases.

The Glove

The oddly shaped artefact shown above was called a glove and was worn on the hands of people. During the pandemic, the glove became a symbol of safety and caution. Like other cleaning products, toilet paper and foods, it became increasingly in demand due to its ergonomic design and ultimate germ protection. It became a household necessity and it was sought after by all who lived in 2020.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Clarissa

17 years old

An Empty Roll of Toilet Paper

Fear. This is the epitome of fear. Don't disregard its seeming insignificance, because in the period following COVID19 outbreak from Feb to July 2020, toilet paper truly emerged as one of the most sought-after living essentials, its fame even surpassing that of face masks. The people went wild for toilet paper. The supermarket's ranks were raided and emptied a few minutes after refill. A most memorable piece to be included in this collection.

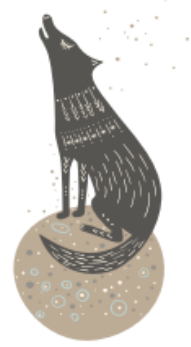
A Teddy Bear

Peeking out of windows, sitting on fences, holding on to balconies, you could spot so many of these teddy bears and their friends around the neighbourhood houses. Empty and quieter now, doors shut and the streets less walked upon, the teddy bears are a reminder that the neighbourhood is together, isolating but together. A morning run, sounds of distant children laughing, the teddy bears bring a smile to your face, no matter the age, no matter the situation, no matter what.

A Package of Sugar

A trip to the grocery store is dangerous now. One stares at the almost empty package of sugar and wonders: should I add sugar to my coffee? It is especially difficult when one likes sweet food, but you will realise it is not the end of the world. You will learn to live with less, live well with less, and be happy with less. You will learn to appreciate what you have, and you will learn to care for others and the problems others face. You will wish for our world to be filled with sweetness, if only for an instance.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anhaar

13 years old

Toastie Maker

This toastie maker is approximately ten years old, the grease stains and dry bits of cheese showing how vital it was in lockdown.

The toastie maker shown can fit up to five sandwiches, and has two modes, sandwich press or grill. Thanks to cutting edge technology, it lights up when green to show that the sandwich is ready, proving to be a very quick and convenient way to make a delicious lunch.

Some favourites in lockdown include simple cheese, classic cheese and tomato and even cheese, sausage and chilli sauce. Creativity in lockdown was abundant and as a result, many got creative with their lunches, even trying to bake for the first time.

Pillow

This pillow is no ordinary pillow as can be seen. It is donut shaped and survived its owner during the COVID-19 crisis. This specific pillow, similar to many others has been scarred.

Uneven and loose stitches can be seen, an attempt by its owner to stop its stuffing from falling and also to keep busy. The sprinkles of the donut are vandalised with pen smudges and the sides sag with the lack of stuffing inside, most likely taken out by the owner and put back in, as a lockdown activity.

This pillow has gone through a lot, but nevertheless is loved by its owner, it has brought its owner company and happiness in some difficult times. Pillows across the nation are thanked for their resilience, compassion and importance during those times.

Naughty Drawer

This is a naughty drawer, although its name differs from household to household, the concept is the same. This drawer, cupboard, stash under the bed or basket holds some of

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



the goodies in the house, chocolates, biscuits, chips, lollies, any treat you can think of.

Although not necessarily invented in lockdown, the naughty drawer had a brand new meaning during the COVID-19 crisis. It was emptied a lot more often, as people wiped out all the contents of their fridges, pantries and naughty drawers.

For people who had their birthday in lockdown, they were likely to be bombarded with gift deliveries, Tim Tams, chocolate bars, snakes and more. These gifts were placed in the naughty drawer but didn't always last there long.

These naughty drawers can also be blamed for the shared experience of putting on weight during lockdown. Some outliers, however, have used this time to try to lose weight, an odd and rare decision, difficult and admirable nonetheless.

Crossword Puzzle

Once neglected, this back page of a magazine suddenly became of importance. Messy red writing and scribbles to indicate mistakes mark the crossword. Question marks dominate the sides of the crossword and the pages of the magazine are tattered and folded. Serving as entertainment along with books, journals and various other objects, crosswords were crucial in the time of the pandemic.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Oysharjo

12 years old

TV Remote

The amazing TV remote, despite going missing a million times, it has never failed to entertain the people in lockdown and the people before that. Sometimes it's under the couch. Sometimes it's under a bed. Sometimes after being dropped, it's disappeared into another dimension. The TV remote goes well with the TV, which goes really well with a Netflix subscription which goes with snacks. This is significant because a lot of people in lockdown watched Netflix, being stuck at home. The home button is slightly faded, mainly because this remote is 10 years old, and nothing like the remotes now in the year 2030.

The Fridge

The magical food box that rids you of your hunger. Sometimes it's full, sometimes it's empty and sometimes you're standing in front of it deciding whether to eat everything or not. It used to hold carrots and more veggies for a nearby hungry rabbit. The fridge comes with a freezer, the back being filled with forgotten and expired ice creams. This is significant because fridges are the answer to hunger and a craving for snacks while you're learning, watching or just plain hungry.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Isabella

15 years old

Slightly Used, Squashed Bean Bag (Navy, with a Star Decal), Paired with a Custom-Made Pine Desk

The creator of this desk took inspiration from traditional Japanese dwellings and furniture, as they were immersed in said culture at the time of creation. The desk was specifically created for the duration of the COVID-caused quarantine, as the creator required a functional workspace. The Japanese influence can be understood to originate from the visual-based art form of anime, an art form which the creator turned to during this lockdown period. The bean bag was an important part of this process, as the desk was created to fit the bean bag as well as functioning as an independent unit.

The creator of this desk based the design on Japanese furniture, making it elegant as well as functional.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Saniah

15 years old

I am...

I am an only child.

I am...

I am a K-pop stan.

I am...

I am 14.

I bring...

I bring creativity to the table when working in group tasks.

I bring...

I bring new perspectives to the table.

I bring...

I bring my great sense of humour when talking to someone.

I'll remember...

I'll remember the Beyond Live concerts that I've missed because I didn't have the funds.

I'll remember...

I'll remember the positive change in our environmental conditions.

I'll remember...

I'll remember the beautiful togetherness that people have shared during this time.

I hope...

I hope I'll be able to meet all my friends at school.

I hope...

I hope this sense of togetherness we've harnessed throughout this experience lasts for a long time.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



I hope...

I hope I can still be as aware of how I feel just as I am now.

I will...

This coronavirus epidemic has really given me a chance to slow down and think about how my actions impact the outside world. After the restrictions are lifted, I will try and call my family overseas and check up on them daily. I will also try and develop myself as a person and improve the core values that define me. My vision for the future is to regularly volunteer at animal shelters, retirement homes, national parks, or anywhere else where I can give back to people and be of help to the underprivileged.

I will always be...

I will always be someone who has dreams and wants to fulfil them for the sake of people.

I will always be grateful for our health workers.

I will always be someone who is there for others.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Mahad

12 years old

I am a weeb, an introvert and a gamer. I love anime and can often put up a good game online. I love casual music, mostly Japanese, and I want more people to watch anime. I feel like people don't have enough time for entertainment, and they could really use a break from work.

This COVID thing has really got on my nerves, I had suddenly so much time to kill and I just can't get a grip of life, it's all slipping away. An aura of uncertainty is around me at all times, "what should I do? What can I do?".

It's just amazing how this virus has changed our lives. What's especially good is that all of the high schools that did not introduce online learning now have. This is great as I think they should continue this because it is easier to learn this way.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jethro

15 years old

I am several people in a trench coat, a different one depending on who I talk to. Sometimes too chatty, sometimes too quiet. Mostly too grumpy, but sometimes way too happy about everything for no reason. Maybe with one person I'll let an issue slide, but with someone else get really angry about it. I am many people. All of my personalities share a few common traits however: slow-moving, hatred of Internet companies, obsessed with guitar and programming.

It's been a week since Isolation started. Or a month. Or a year. I don't know anymore. I have lost my concept of time. I only have a few disjointed memories: My wifi dying, my robotics competition getting cancelled, having youth group online. It's strange. I hope it will all be over soon. I didn't realise how much I missed people.

I never really used to go out with friends much anyway but now that I don't have the opportunity to I have realised how much I miss it. I will definitely spend more time with my friends after this is all over. It has also forced me to face the fact that my grandparents will not be around forever, and I will definitely talk to them more.

I like to think of myself as an introvert, but deep down I'm a social animal. People matter a lot to me. As much as I enjoy time alone, I still need to socialise. I believe I will come out of this quite a different person. My morals and values will have changed significantly after having them checked at every occasion by my family throughout this whole experience.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Eva

16 years old

I am a driven individual who tries to be positive and enthusiastic in situations. I thrive both under pressure and in a calm environment where I can listen to music and be productive. I love the Japanese culture. I am learning Japanese and love the art of origami. When life returns to normal, I will take time to do activities to relax instead of finding something to be busy doing. I have enjoyed doing puzzles, painting and artworks. In the future I want to continue to develop good habits, getting up early in the morning, making my bed and exercising.

I think the greatest outcome from the pandemic is the way in which everyone has banded together. I will remember how people have reached out to relatives and stayed connected with elderly people. Children are at home being schooled and spending time with their parents. Health workers are receiving the appreciation they deserve. The TV is not only filled with facts and news of outbreak but messages of hope. Care and kindness in communities has flourished in these tough times which I hope remains when the world returns to normal.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Isabella

15 years old

Because the thing is, I need people. But more than that, I need my people. If everyone in this world realised how much they needed their people, their friends, that group chat that you vent about your bad day in, their squad, the world would be a better and kinder and stronger place. In this season of bad days after bad days I have learnt about myself and through myself my friends. I have learnt that sometimes they need a hug just as much as I do. I have learnt that they are scared too. And now I'll keep my anxieties and my friends, especially my anxious friends, close because they are important.

I know that I need people. I need friends. But my friends need me too. My friends aren't the ones who believe I have no reason to be scared. My friends are the ones who let me be scared with them. In this season of bad days after bad days we have learnt how to be together and how to be apart.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bettina

14 years old

I am someone who loves a cosy chair yet likes the outdoors. I enjoy my own company but not for too long. I am passionate about the environment and standing up for one's beliefs. A good laugh is always on the agenda and a good book is always a good way to relax.

I'll remember the way that people have shown the ability to look after the most vulnerable in the community and that this shouldn't take a pandemic to happen. I will definitely remember the beauty of slow Internet and laggy zoom conversations with friends. I am trying not to remember the fact that soon I will have to go back to school and commute again, but I am hoping that this will all come to an end, with us being a more connected and considerate global community.

In the future I would like to see the world bond and come together to help solve problems that have been put off for a while such as climate change. On a small personal scale, I would like to smile at passing people.

The vision that I have created relates to the things that I think are important because I believe that making the world a more connected place would greatly help the way that we solve global problems. Doing small things such as smiling at people when passing them can be a start to making this happen. If we can overcome our preconceptions of people, we have more of a chance when it comes to solving problems that threaten our existence such as climate change. Solving climate change is something that is important to me as, if it is not dealt with, it would definitely change the way that we would live and how long we would have to live. The earth is such a unique and diverse place, it would be a shame for our race to destroy it for all those who live here.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Clarissa

17 years old

I am bilingual. I used to feel that I am not fluent in any language - this suffocating feeling of the inability to express oneself. I am both extroverted and introverted- I enjoy spending time with others and also with myself. Still, I am happy where I am and where I am heading in the present moment. I bring dedication to my group works. I bring a little smile to passing strangers. I bring humming/self-made sound effects to random moments.

I'll remember the short days and nights that merged together endlessly. I'll remember my friends driving to see me in front of my house. I'll remember how nice it actually is to spend time with family and deliberate unruly thoughts. Yet through this quarantine I hope we are more prepared for extreme situations in the future and will appreciate seemingly ordinary moments more. I hope the people around the world will care and continue to care for each other deeply. And I hope for everyone the very best through this pandemic and way way after.

In future I will sing a lot more. I will appreciate the outdoors a lot more. I will continue to write regularly and reach out to other writers.

I will always take care of myself and other people.

I will treasure each day and night like never before. I will not be burdened by rest.

I will always be confident in my own ability to create.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Aiza

14 years old

I am the middle child in my family, I play ukulele and love to write! I bring energy into any conversation, singing into almost anything I do, and a conversation with me has to include my love for cats.

During COVID -19, I will remember all the online concerts, the stress that healthcare workers were put through and the overwhelming feeling of online classwork. I hope that when i get my report my grades are higher than a B, but it's highly unlikely because of how I rushed most of it. I'm hoping that people realise the importance of washing their hands. After all these stressful days I want to sleep for 12 hours.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Zahra

17 years old

A mysterious person, no one knows what is going inside her mind. She is a kind and happy person but emotional as well. She loves reading books. That's how she has a whole bookstore from different movies and novels, but she stays home rather than being outside with her talkative friends.

On the other side she loves school as much as she loves reading books and being the smartest person in the class. Everyone is jealous, coming first in her class is her only goal. She is very mysterious and adventurous as well and loves to take challenges.

Get to say that she's into sport and beat all those boys during soccer and basketball games. She is called ACE for a reason, her long grey hair covers her face and the top of her cute school uniform. Sometimes she can be dangerous and play with a knife easily.

No one knows where she lives or who she lives with, and that's why people call her a mysterious girl. But she lives alone in a small apartment with none of her friends, they are all rich, but she stays quiet. He is friendly, loving and sometimes gets too emotional about her loss and she gets affected by it. That's how she gets depressed, but she hides it even from her best friends. But depression is the only way that she can get through all her difficulties.

When she was 2 years old she lost her mom and her dad and was only left with her sister, her depression started to get worse as she grew up. Since then she never talked to people, and kept quiet. People call her names but she ignores it. Basically she has a dark side of her life where she is mysterious, more like a private detective that wants to solve everything by herself. What she wants is revenge for who killed her parents.

To the world she appears to be cheerful, fun and outgoing and tries to forget her depression, mental illness and her memories with her parents. Her life is very different, but she tries to ignore everything and tries to be positive. She never trusts anyone, even her close friends, she always thinks negatively and doesn't want the same thing to happen like 7 years ago. Even her friends are very concerned about her.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Eva

16 years old

Phone buzzes. I roll onto my back, head leaning into the soft plush of my feather pillow. Staring up at the stark white ceiling, slowly lifting my arms up to the sky, stretching my tired muscles. I roll over again onto my side, eyes straining open, and reach for my phone. All to see the notification: 'Breaking News - Open to Learn More'. Well, I'm awake now, so I slip out of bed, walking in a daze towards the kitchen. As I open the door, a sound wave crashes over me throwing me backwards; the TV blaring with the news reporter's stony voice repeating the words, 'disaster!' 'crisis!' and 'pandemic!'

How could this have happened, with all the precautions in place? I remember this happening once long ago; I was only a child. 2020. A year for the history books. I looked out at the bubble that surrounds our city, but still couldn't save us. I flop onto the couch and curl into a ball, sheltering from the frightening words. Only yesterday, life was bland and routine, but at least it was ordinary, expected, and safe!

I am Amber, I live in an apartment block on opposite-left street. My day is dull, I try to extract the best from every day, but this new society of technology is draining for an extrovert like me. Technology is cool, efficient and innovative, but I crave hearing the voice of others instead of hearing my inner voice while reading their texts. I have photographs of my childhood friends hanging on the wall, when we used to play, get muddy and roll around in the grass. How so long ago that was. My chest ached as the memories flooded over me, the sensations returning to my body. I could smell the fresh cut grass, taste the dirt lingering on my lips, feel the sun beating down. I could hear the birds whistling and see my friends jumping in the air. Oh what it was like to live back then.

In the morning I walk to the park, with my oxygen tank lugged over my shoulder. Nobody really walks these days, but I like stretching out my particularly long legs. The park is pleasant to look at and comfortable to be in. The trees have outlets to charge your devices. As well as inbuilt speakers that play bird whistles, but they're not very believable. The benches are divided into individual seats, to limit human interaction and contact. But really I just go to the park to watch people.

People at the park are so interesting. You'll have the people on their devices, I like to call them the techno-heads. The free spirits, who lay on the grass, staring up at the sky. Then the very few people like me, who smile or wave when they pass someone. Sometimes to

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



everyone's amazement they stop to say 'hello'. Technology is such a prominent part of life but everyone uses it in their own unique way which is fascinating. But we all know not everyone uses technology for the benefits it was designed to provide. This is why phone security is essential to life.

I go to work at nine every morning, never a minute early or late. The process of getting to work is exhausting. The first airlock, sterilises clothes and all germs you could have possibly come in contact with. Receiving your clothes back wrapped in clear plastic. The second sanitised room is to collect your white gloves and coat that you are required to wear all the time. These protect you from the sterilised benches and chairs. We're not there yet! The final area is a shower room where a mist of disinfectant is sprayed on and all around you. Finally inside and today is sorting papers, just like it was yesterday and probably tomorrow.

After my days at work, I like to go home and have a bath. Looking out of the window as the sun sets in the east. The crimson rays, highlighting the soft bouncy clouds, that we can only dream to reach. Overlooking the tumbling hills that we once used to roam. The sun has set, the moon and stars looming above. Ready to light up the night sky while everyone slumbers softly.

Now everything will change. That morning I woke up - the flashing headlines - I knew it was bad. People slamming doors shut, already emotionally hiding behind screens, now unreluctantly forced to physically hide as well. Now more than ever I would live without the joys of emotion. The raw human emotions of happiness and joy. Living in a bleak world of automation and desolation.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bettina

14 years old

A small figure fell clumsily through the sky as it plummeted downwards. It hit the ground with a soulless thunk. Its bruised spine cried out in silent agony as it hit the unforgiving harness of the dusty asphalt. The faded cover was the result of decades of neglect. As it hit the ground the book realised that it was joining the piles of deserted corpses that had also shared its fate.

The smoky haze that surrounded “The City” was thicker than ever and the washed up souls of abandoned books choked the streets. Their sad existence plagued the world as they were dumped in large numbers. People seldom ventured outside into the stifling climate and those who did had to wear hazmat suits to act as a shield from the pollution. The dying world was crying out for help yet for decades it had been ignored and rejected. Now, there was no looking back. The point of no return had been reached.

Number 51 lived in The City. This place did not have a formal name so it had been referred to as The City ever since. He was not very good at school, lacked friends and was an introvert. Every day he 'went' to school (Zoom lessons since it was too dangerous to go out) and wished that he could see the world in all its former glory. Every day, he would stare out of his grimy bedroom window, almost hoping that his bleak surroundings had magically changed, but they never did. All around him were the bodies of the dead and discarded. Their pages lay lifeless and their spines were bruised. Although they were looked upon as the rubbish of society, these books were his favourite things. His only ticket to the past world that he so pined for. His only hopes.

Although these books may appear as though they were easy to access, in truth they were not. For starters, the climate outside usually reached a temperature of around 80 degrees on a good day. This meant that it would be far too hot to go outside without sizzling up and dying of the intense heat. As a way to combat this, several companies were trialing special suits, designed to protect from the heat and prevent people from getting severely burnt. These suits were incredibly expensive so naturally, Number 51 did not have one. Another thing that made this difficult was the fact that the government had passed a law saying that books spread dangerous ideas and that anyone caught trying to salvage them from the streets would be prosecuted accordingly.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Clarissa

17 years old

Isle of Euclid

Year 2160. All our senses are overly stimulated, entertainment has now extended way past audio and visual. We are entertained by smells, by taste, by sensation of coolness - even periods of silence are artificially generated by noise cancelling devices. There's no way we could be bored, the retro aesthetic mob longs for the good old bored days. Moments of silence and emptiness. But not now. We are never really alone. Our attention span has shortened to a few milliseconds, hungry, hungry and always hungry for more.

Flushed and shivering, he walked out of his morning bath of hot ice.

It was not painful or even bordering discomfort. He knows that the treatment renews his skin and heals all scars from the day before. It numbs all sensations. But somewhere deep within him there is a rebellion. He wanted to feel. Feel the burn, feel the frost, feel the sun, the wounds, the caress of wind -- 'but oh imagine the damage that will do to your skin!!'

It was the voice of Mother. Telepathically into his ears, ringing like an alarm clock he could not stop and overlapping all his conscious thoughts.

He hurriedly swallowed the Euclid Jelly prepared on the breakfast slot. His mind eased and he felt as if his brain lit up in animation and hunger for knowledge, for new skills, for learning. All other thoughts and intrusions alike receded into shadows. He sat down in front of his hoverdesk and began Production. His mind was then immune.

Temporary immunity. He was numbed to nearly everything, only mentally this time. Everything is focused and clear, filtered and undistracted. No emotions, no fleeting thoughts, no urge to eat. In the far corners of his memory, he remembered the lazy sun in the afternoons, and the smell, the ever present ever sweet smell, that smell of roasted sweet potatoes.

Intruding thoughts. He must be daydreaming again. The session must have come to an end. The Euclid Jelly's 2 Hour function appears shorter and shorter. But time did pass, so very efficient so very productive. Yes, and productive he was. In front of him he had finished 6 essays and 2 lecture preparations, precisely as inputted on his to-do list, and completed to immaculate quality. He was pleased. Yet he wanted to produce more work in

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



an even shorter amount of time, if not for the need to enhance his Quality Productivity level. He dreaded the next schooling session on Productivity.

To be Productive. Our world is obsessed with Productivity.

The release of the Euclid Jelly as the first ever psychological and mind-enhancing product took off with unprecedented success. Humans could reach the peak of productivity. Humans could exceed robotic excellence! The remains of that Celebration continued to this day, his day. His was the Last Generation not to have grown up with the Euclid Jelly since birth. He feels the disadvantage. He knows it. The disadvantage that we won't let him forget. Never.

Standing up, he looked into the full-length mirror, covering the entire east facing wall. It really is just glass. Everyone can see him from the other side. Pretence of privacy. A pretence that he would pretend not to know regardless. Wilful forgetfulness that lures in pure recklessness. When he was moving in, he insisted on installing a one-sided mirror instead of generic glass that is transparent on both sides. The legal documents were hectic. The uproar from Mother was worse.

Now if only Grandpa is here, he thought, remembering. Grandpa was the only one who, smiling apologetically, kindly shielded him from Mother. Grandpa was excused for his dreamy behaviour. But he was not. Our world is no world for dreamers. Grandpa's generation was filled with dreamers, idealists, idlers. Their world died. They died. Our world will not.

His eyes were filling up with tears. Warm tears of old. He hasn't cried in decades. Perhaps he was feeling the side effects of Euclid Jelly overdose. He had added two packs of jelly powders to one portion of evaporated SkyClear water. He knew he needed to make up for his Quality Production level. If only he was born 10 years later, he would have undergone proper training and enrolled in productivity classes earlier. Just like his younger siblings, the pride of his family.

But his siblings did not know Grandpa. They were not able to hear Grandpa's story of the slack days. The yawns and groans of kids in schools, the doodles and tic tacs on the margin of books, the humming and stretching that is mistaken for hands up. And ohhh the lack of Productivity, the demon the drunkard the damned Procrastination. Procrastination was king. Even the Professionals fell under its spell. Back then coffee was thought to be the cure. For Grandpa, it was the roasted sweet potatoes outside work.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



The smell of roasted sweet potato and Grandpa are like two twin stars. Inseparable. He fell on his knees and cried out loud, in front of the Pretence mirror of privacy, in front of us all. His knee fell on hard concrete and his knees did not hurt. Cry on, we say, cry on. He should be ashamed. Even though he is just one Producer in a billion, he should be ashamed. We can still see him, so tiny, so alone, so weak, kneeling in front of his east facing window. One window on the hundredth floor of that apartment block. One apartment block among the hundreds in that complex. One complex among the hundreds in that suburb.

Did he not know that the Euclid Jelly was developed in his suburb, in the very window opposite to him, by the very creature he calls Grandpa? Euclid, his grandpa was called. Hence the name, the Isle of Euclid, the core of Productivity.

Ashamed he should be. He should well be ashamed.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anhaar

13 years old

Counting deaths isn't fun, or easy, but it's the only way I feel like I'm in control of this. I walk around our small slum every day noting the new tombs, grieving families, dead corpses. It's not so accurate, but I count around fifty a day, more or less. I'd say our population is about a thousand; small town, lots of people crammed together. It won't be long until there's no one left. I already feel alone. I can't bear the thought of being one of the last few left.

I walk quickly along the path, kicking pebbles and humming a tune, trying to block out my thoughts. My dream last night. It's the fifth consecutive night that I dream of Poppy. She was taken on the second day, if my memory's right. Today's the seventh day. I dream of her, my sister before she was sick - her short red hair and smooth dark skin, her mismatched earrings and denim blue eyes. It's sad, seeing her right in front of my eyes, smiling and laughing. It fills my heart with joy and relief, only to be replaced with agony the moment. I wake up. But what I find more disturbing is the replay of her sick, her swollen eyes, sickly purple rashes and diminished, gray hair.

I pinch myself. *Sstop.*

The more I pity myself, the less I'm helping. I need to do something. I swing my foot out, ready to kick the next pebble. Instead I kick a dead body.

It's an elderly man. He has wrinkled skin (purple of course) shrivelled arms and milky-white eyes. I stare down at his feet. That's when I realise he's not dead. They're twitching rapidly, my heart starts racing, my breathing raspy and panicked. I have the biggest urge to help, check his heart rate, but what can I do? If he has the disease he'll die sometime anyways. Then I hear the moaning. He's in an excruciating amount of pain. I want to walk away, block it out from my ears and mind. But my hands, without my mind even thinking, reach for the shiny black object in my pocket. I squeeze my eyes shut, face the man and fire twice. The gunshot rings across the stale air.

I'm suddenly afraid of myself, the way I just shot a gun without even thinking it through, what if I shot myself? Endangered someone I loved?

You have no one left. I remind myself.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



I take one final look at the man. He claws at his neck where the first bullet hit, but only for a fleeting moment. He twitches once more then lays still, his fingers resting at his side in a pool of blood that I caused.

I expect to feel guilty, but the pang never comes- it's just fear. The fear suddenly transforms into amusement, when I think of how ironic it is that the government banned vaccinations but not guns.

I dismiss the thoughts from my mind- *you just shot someone.*

People are lurking around the man, but none of them notice or care - if they do, they definitely don't show it. It's a poor town. We've always had it tough, seen hard times, had our naivety and innocence broken at young ages. Maybe that's why I don't have such a 'human' reaction to killing a man. Maybe it's the fact that I did in fact end his suffering. Maybe it's the fact that it's the disease that *really* killed him. I would expect to feel at least some level of shame, but I do not.

It's getting dark. I've counted four hundred and thirty- no the old man - four hundred and thirty one deaths today. An improvement from six hundred yesterday but I don't lift my hopes, this could just be the eye of the storm.

I stumble back home. It's hardly a house, or even a hut. It's small and confined. It's cold and dark but it's all I have and I'm grateful that I'm not like the hundreds living on the streets. When I feel most alone I hug my sheepskin blanket tight. It reminds me of the family I used to have, slowly melting into nothing. I can hardly remember my dad but I can remember my mum. I remember her eyes, like mine, not Poppy's, chocolate brown. I remember her wild orange locks and thin, dry lips. I also remember her, embracing Poppy and I, when Poppy was only three, I would've been four and a bit then. She left us one day, and never came back.

But today, the warm sheepskin doesn't ease my pain. I venture around my little house, searching for something to give me comfort. I see my diary, the last time I wrote in it was when I was twelve, two years ago. I've never opened it since.

I reach out for the thick book, with a velvet cover, one of my limited possessions. I flick to the last entry,

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Dear diary,

Today they confiscated my book, it made me so angry and frustrated. It was my only hope! I know so little about this world, all I wanted to do was find out, but no! Everything is banned.

My mind travels back to that time, I had found a very interesting book in the library, our library is a little crate, with some books.

"Mr Eal? Can I borrow this one?" I asked, excited about my find.

"Sure, darling." He said smiling.

I remember skipping home that day, tracing the title of the book: *Emily, my life in 2023*. I had flicked through in the library, and determined it wasn't just a scam. It was typed and those weird computer things are banned now. Second of all, it had a page written by someone else - handwritten - its title read: *In 2087, all this changed*.

I remember the key words, *vaccinations, doctors, phones, movies, prison, credit cards*. None of those strange things exist now.

I then remember, the officials barging through my frail door, holding shaky Mr Eal.

'Mr Eal over here says you borrowed a restricted book!' The official barked. Poppy hid behind the bed, but I slowly approached, lifting my hands.

'Yes, I did.'

They hit Mr Eal with their baton and threatened to shoot me, but I handed it over quickly, begging with them. I continue with the book, sighing.

Sometimes, I feel like Poppy is the only good thing I have left in the world. I'll make sure I protect her.

Warm tears roll over my cheeks, my heart feels heavy but weak, like a weight is tugging at it.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Damn it, I haven't cried since Poppy died and I promised myself to never cry again, not to pity myself.

I sniff, rubbing away the tears quickly.

There's so much hopelessness, so much darkness, but there's still a peek of light, and I hold on to it with everything I can.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Tomin

12 years old

Timothy held the antique watch cautiously as if it was a treasure. He moved on with his eyes fixed on this valuable thing. He found himself arriving at the 'Creepinical forest', a forest which is thought to be filled with ghosts and other supernatural creatures. Timothy continued walking as if he didn't care.

Timothy roamed around the forest, wondering about the watch. The dark, secretive eyes of animals were visible and were as vivid as the sun. The decaying air and the stifling atmosphere provided the perfect abode for this forest. The spider's web shimmered like thread dipped in silver paint. Ancient trees with sprawling limbs guarded the darkness, blotting out any sunlight. As he walked, the trees stared at him like silent guards with the belief that he committed a crime.

He finally saw light and he moved on like a haggard soldier from a vicious war. 'Finally!' he exclaimed. When he reached the streets there was barely anyone visible. There were many sneezes and coughs. The shops barely contained any appliances or food. There were many to be found in the hospital and many depressed faces. There were many cries and wails. It was all gloomy and sad.

Timothy plodded past the strenuous gale. The trees danced beautifully with the howling wind. "My watch!" yelled Timothy. The precious watch flew up in the air with the vigorous wind. As he ran he saw that many were in their houses having a good time except for him. Many were cutting cakes and many children were working on their devices.

Timothy trudged tirelessly to reach the unique watch. Eventually, the watch got stuck up on a towering oak tree. 'What do I do now?' worried Timothy. Suddenly, the watch beamed, it was as radiant as the sun. The light from the watch blinded Timothy as he fell on the floor.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Evie

14 years old

I sit on the windowsill, the dark cloud coming over the mountains promises rain, which means mud. Mmmmm mud my favourite kind of slush, rolling in the bubbling mess is as good as eating. Actually eating is better. No mud. No eating. Both are great. My stomach grumbles as I smell the baking cookies. I know that none of them are for me, but I can't help hoping that Millie will drop some. She is only 2 after all - she's bound to drop some crumbs. My tail wags as Lilly and John enter the room.

'Lilly! John!' I cry at my humans.

'Who's a good doggy!!' Lilly ruffles my furry head.

'Simba!! Hi!' John scratches my belly. 'That's the stuff 'I think as my tongue drops out of my mouth in full chill mode.

'Sam went to IGA today.' John was saying as he rubbed my fluffy stomach.

'He said that there's still no toilet paper. I think that we've gotta start to use the paper towels Lily.'

'The shower takes too long!' Lily sighs. 'Guess so' she says and starts to cut up the kitchen paper to put in the bathroom.

'Cookies are ready!' Halie, the medium-sized human, comes in carrying a steaming plate of delicious looking brown cookies. I sigh contentedly and close my eyes. After years and years of begging my humans to stay home, they have finally obliged.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anhaar

13 years old

Lockdown is spent mostly on my spinning office chair, or the couch.

The rumble in my stomach, a cry of help and desperation. Empty and painful, sharp and deep.

Either way I'm always bored, hungry and in my most unflattering pyjamas. Since most Australians have lived like this for a while, I'm not the only one ordering food; lunch, dessert and drinks delivered to my door! On my unusually long school breaks, I would sit on the couch, waiting for my sushi, ChaTime or burger and fries, while watching television. Advertisements for contactless pick up and free delivery flashed across the screen, occasionally McDonald's, Domino's, maybe Rashay's, but the one that always dominated the advertisements was Hungry Jack's.

The ding of a doorbell, expected but still harsh. A sense of urgency and excitement runs through my body for a moment, the adrenaline is paralysing. The doorbell rings out. It's time to do something.

Their very untrue but annoyingly catchy slogan imprinted in my brain; 'the burgers are better at Hungry Jack's'. Okay, Hungry Jack's isn't all that horrible, and I must admit they have very good sundaes that are relatively worth the two dollars, but their burgers?

A ping of disappointment, growing to a stab. My stomach sinks and my excitement dies out like an ember muffled with a shoe. Shrivelled and small, nothing like promised; nothing like imagined.

They don't taste horrible or give you food poisoning and they are pretty consistent, but the bread is squashed and soggy, the meat is paper-thin and dry and while they are bearable, they're definitely not the best.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Tomin

12 years old

Grief is a petal running away from a flower

Anxiety is a string that is yet to be broken, when it does, all the strings in the loom, break

Hope is a pearl, in an ocean, filled with rocks

Freedom is a dove that is released from its cage

Peace is a room filled with silence

Everything was a rainbow, 'til, sorrow and panic turned it black and white

Grief is the new page in the chapter to be read

Anxiety is the paper crumpled in the bin, that is reforming

Hope is the endless echo in our mind

Freedom is the cold, metal pin that is yet to be dropped

Peace is the cry of a soldier's death

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Leo

15 years old

Our changed lives

Perseverance is something
that cannot be given, rather
it can only come out
when a person
decides that it's time.

Fascination is a cloud of thoughts
that brings knowledge
and leads to success.

Hope might seem like the key
to everything,
but it can also ruin lives
as harshly as possible.

Relaxation is necessary
for everyone, or else nothing
will go according to plan.

Excitement is too noticeable,
just look at the smiles
and hear the whispers
and you know something's happening.

Dinosaurs were extinct
because of a huge rock,
but now humans are nearing extinction
because of a microscopic particle.

Perseverance mustn't be lost,
it must be kept
'till the end of horror.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Fascination is now blocked
by the Wall;
it's been replaced
by absolute control
and rules that need
to be strictly followed.

Hope is the thing
that will determine our future,
but grasping it,
and using its power
is impossible for now.

Relaxation is
the second most deadly enemy
in the invisible battlefield.
it is slowly
destroying civilisation.

Excitement makes
the population complacent,
and may lead to
the victory of the foe.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Kavya

12 years old

Excitement is hearing whispers of your friends in the bunk beds below and beside you at camp.

Optimism is watching a sunflower grow and emerge from a lackluster, lifeless patch of soil.

Patience is smelling the stringy cheese of fresh pizza coming from the oven and longing for the waiter to reach your table.

Sensation is feeling the earthy, damp scent of soil recently sprinkled on by the rain.

Unity is a colony of ants, collaboratively carrying several crumbs to their home in the local park.

And then the world locked their doors and became blank, muted and lonely.

Excitement is finally seeing the wrinkles, veins and smile on your grandmother's face after 3 months.

Optimism is only having to wash up 3 lonely plates and cutlery in the sink although you secretly wished for more.

Patience is feeling around the inside of the empty chocolate box, trying to find a snickers bar.

Sensation is snuggling up in multiple warm blankets alone, with a hot chocolate, binge watching Netflix movies.

Unity is the overdue joy of connecting with friends and family on FaceTime.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Johnny

14 years old

The Enigma

A scarlet rose blossoms into the autumn chill,
A drop of rainwater drips off the corner of a gutter,
A rogue cat wanders the moonlit streets
The monotony of life inside becomes addicting.

It is in challenging times that the five characters of the self appear; Guilt, Absolution,
Acceptance, Optimism and Freedom

Guilt is a chokingly hot day in a rainforest.
Guilt is a dark cardamine.
He is sly and goes unnoticed.
His long and foul fingers curl ominously around my neck, forcing out the air.
Guilt bounds me in a vicious cycle of prophetic madness.

Guilt is a cigarette burning away in an ashtray.
His smoke of burden curls menacingly through the air.
He craves to venture out into the world.
Guilt is accepting that my actions can kill.
Guilt is accepting I am doing nothing and everything.

Absolution is a long and paced swim in a rock pool.
She is timid and sympathetic.
Absolution approaches me when I least expect it.
She is calm and still, collected.
She is a deep burgundy.

Absolution is a glass shattering on the floor.
She is herself and cuts the ropes off me.
Denying my part in it, realising I didn't do it
It's all absolution's way of life.

Acceptance is a cool summer's breeze from the ocean.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



She is canary yellow, gentle and kind.
Acceptance is moving on from the past,
What is done is done.
Acceptance is solace.

Acceptance is standing in the rain during a storm.
She is the cold water soaking my jacket,
The boom of the thunder above.
Acceptance is smiling as the raindrops run down my face,
Acceptance is not worrying about things out of my control.

Optimism is a sunrise over the mountains.
The promise of a new day beaming across the land,
Optimism is azure blue and tricky,
He evades me often and appears sporadically,
He knows not of the consequences of reality.

Optimism is opening a window on a windy day.
He makes no sense and floods every area he enters,
It's all or nothing for him,
Optimism gives me hope for the future,
Optimism is my torch in the darkness.

Freedom is an eagle soaring above a forest.
She is a shapeshifter, forever fluctuating,
Freedom is indefinite and malleable,
She is cerulean and happy and pleased,
Freedom is success and success is freedom.

Freedom is my parents' smiles.
She adapts to every situation and brings life to the earth,
Freedom is knowing I can do everything and nothing,
She is the satisfaction in being stuck inside with my family,
Freedom is loving others and those closest to me,
Freedom is simply being able to be myself.

And so these five characters combine to create a single being; one complex, peculiar being... the enigma.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Saniah

15 years old

Metanoia is a butterfly discovering metamorphosis

Ego is the shattering of a glass veil

Peculiarity is incessant gaze of a cat in search of a bright light

Fragility is opening of a vault hidden away in an ancient dungeon

Sanity is the swift motion of trees, withholding against a ravaging breeze

I never expected the world to halt and spiral into chaos

Metanoia is a compass pointing to a forest of evergreen trees

Ego is a dark horse radiating a glistening halo

Peculiarity is the luminosity glimmering through the windowpane

Fragility is the translucent shard of glass from a medieval castle

Sanity is the constant ticking of the grandfather clock

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Mahad

12 years old

Solitude is a knight kneeling to the king with his sword

Sadness is a girl looking through a dark glass

Peace is a lizard wearing a warm blanket

Loss is a life respawning

Betrayal is backstab

I can't I go outside, now

Solitude is a bowing man

Sadness is a big boulder

Peace is an animal lost in space

Loss is a life respawning

Betrayal is backstab

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jethro

15 years old

Solitude is a bored teenager in a sunlit room, studying for fun rather than need

Boredom is a crumpled couch that has seen better days

Freedom is... what is freedom?

Peace is a bright but silent morning

Anger is always there, but seldom made time for

A pandemic is a shark wearing a poorly made Labrador disguise

Solitude is a dark room with blinds down, an unmade bed, and a dressing gown long in need of a wash

Boredom is a wound from a cotton dagger, bleeding and ever-present

Freedom is a long run in the forest under freezing downpour

Peace is a long, uneventful but strangely interesting book

Anger is a malicious growth, slowly enveloping its victim until it cannot fight any longer

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Eva

16 years old

Hope is the school bell ringing for lunch

Fear is the unknown result of that last-minute assignment

Freedom is catching the bus to the square with friends on a Friday afternoon

Charity is giving the support of money at school fundraisers

Care is hugs and human interaction

Then everything became uncertain.

Hope is now praying for classes to return

Fear is now the unknown of our changing world

Freedom is now being able to run around outside

Charity is now being aware of those vulnerable in your own community

Care is now the unknown number notification and frequent phone calls.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bettina

14 years old

Solitude is an ancient crumbling fortress braving the harsh, merciless wind, in the middle of nowhere

Freedom is a fresh blue sky crisp with liberation

Peace is a flickering fire in front of a cosy chair

Gratitude is a silent message sent on the wind of your mind

Kindness is a gentle breeze lifting the weary leaves into the air

And then the intricate lining of the world began to fray...now

Solitude is an old, invisible friend who is always watching over you

Freedom is a chance to leave the world behind

Peace is a welcoming place at the end of a long day

Gratitude is a warm hug with words from a safe distance

Kindness is a window that offers a door to the outside world

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Clarissa

17 years old

Love Loving

Thrill, the rush of air on a swing fall falling,
Tranquil, coffee cold, a neglect by chat chatters,
Dream, a temporal pause, to a CD spin spinning,
Melancholy, a grey tinge, in floral flat flatters.
Loneliness, a leaf, tore in tall torrents, a face, faced by fake faces how.

A sudden the sky goes dark, the town goes still, Now

Thrill, the warmth, the morning sun on doorstep stepping,
Tranquil, explosion, of thoughts in mind dance dancing,
Dream, the world, health and rose-cheek repping,
Melancholy, the ache, for many pain felt feel feeling.
Loneliness, a hunger to comfort, of comfort, to love, of love, love loving.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anhaar

13 years old

Loyalty is a dog, who will always return with the bone you threw
Appreciation is a warm shout
Nostalgia is reading an old book
Hope is the smell of rain
Freedom is a map with no key

And then my window stole the only key to the outside world. Now,

Loyalty is knowing
Appreciation is a wave of a thousand silent thank yous
Nostalgia is tracing the patterns on your grandma's china
Hope is the blank space for tomorrow
Freedom is escape

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Aiza

14 years old

Freedom is spreading your wings and feeling the wind blow through them carrying you higher

Loss is letting go of the hand that gave you comfort and hope when you needed it the most

Knowledge is glasses sitting on my bedside table

Love is the hug that overpowers all your emotions and frees you from the cage that you are locked in

Fear is the dark horse that visits at night making your hair stand up and a chill run down your spine

That was all my world seemed to revolve around but, Now

Freedom is being outside in the city

Loss is grieving from home

Knowledge is Whatsapp messages about Covid

Love is getting a call from friends in isolation

Fear is being scared of going outside

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Zahra

17 years old

Freedom and Fear

In her red socks and red shoes, the killer is helpless, freight with pain like a terrified hero. I am helpless. There is a clock again ticking and there is no food to be eaten. Today the woman I named is happy. But the truth is that I believe what people hear. They chant and throw objects but I stand still and don't give up. I feel like I can walk all night for freedom. They say freedom is inside you so you have nothing to fear and faith is always with you. You know you have nothing to fear.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Saniah

15 years old

Nirvana

*Incessant neon lights flicker in reverie
Eyes heavy with the burdened expectations of superficial spontaneity
The galaxy awakes every day;
promising unforeseen liberty
Nebulas explode in my mind
Millenniums of dynamic ambitions float away
Stuck in a timeless loop of the pendulum*

*Merging existence with fantasy
The third eye envisions a surreal fortune
Incandescent hyacinths flourish
Face-to-face with my inner deity
A final transcendence into my mind*

*Drifted into a universe where light and dark collide
Alternate reality far from consciousness
A gleaming supernova glistens before my eyes
Destiny is yin and yang*

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jethro

15 years old

I run under blood-stained sky
Heavy air slowly drawing my breath
One with the forest I pause and think
Perhaps this is a blessing after all

But days go by, and now
I feel different to how I did before
Locked up with nothing but my thoughts to distract me
Lying in bed, longing for the old days

Have I been here for weeks or months
Time is nothing but a construct to me
Groggy and bored I pause and think
How many have we lost to this monster?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Isabella

15 years old

Bleeding strand of white cotton. (my room)

The red line is curled and snarled into knots; a blanket knitted by an eighth grader. It rests with a cold lizard, scaly with uncovered head and tail. If the line was longer; if eighth graders had more patience; but they do not.

The line loosens, leaps, twirls around their periphery. But they don't notice. They have their own bleeding lines. The sharp circle of attention is bleeding; a dry desert cut the line moves on.

Red flails and sprints, screaming skyward; cutting fraying segments behind. Above frantically circling. The white saccharine clouds. Coiling, mosquito-coils above the sun. Above the grit and clouds.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Clarissa

17 years old

A sudden the sky goes dark, the town goes still, Now...

Cold, cold fingers of worry, tarried and hurried, glided on skin,
Warm skins and warm trembles, so close and in-sync, so false and distinct.
They hold and they claw, update for more, more sick, more dead, more doom
More tomb. Worried for her, worried for him, worried for you, for me, for us. Resume.

No? I wondered. Wondered and pondered. In the silence and clamour,
What an easeful defeat, what prolonged retreat. Their talks aren't glamour.
Yet keep fighting, keep healing, keep giving, forgiving
Wondrous wonder they are and they are. Sweet air of true living.

And I found Hope. She waves and calls and smiles and falls,
In love in earnest. Out of the dark she springs, bright luminal.
The last of Pandora's box, the first of Aurora's chalk, full brilliance.
It will be alright. We will be alright. Morning after mourning. Resilience.

Dream, the world, health and rose-cheek rep repping,

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anhaar

13 years old

Grey

Nowhere to look, to find an answer,
The world battered and bruised,
Twisted and locked, a painful click,
Consumed by a dark hole.

Light seeps through a space that once lacked,
Things make sense again;
Connection,
It's not over,
Darkness still lingers, an incessant creak,
But light is pursuing it; enough for now.

They clutched on to a promise,
Sure that it would be fulfilled,
It never came,
A stab of pain.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Olive

14 years old

The World Turns On Without Us

Have you seen the river?
Have you seen the tide?
Have you seen the full moon rising
To the ocean waves, a bride?

For the world turns on without us,
Even when we've shut our doors.
When the sound of voices ringing,
Is drowned by the ocean's roar.

Have you seen the starlight?
Have you seen the sky?
Have you seen the wind in the branches?
The birds who long to fly?

For the world turns on without us,
Even when we've turned our backs,
When the stories told for centuries,
Have been replaced by unwanted facts.

Have you seen the mountains?
Have you seen the trees?
Have you seen the cliff face,
From which the sparrows flee?

For the world turns on without us,
Even when we've closed our eyes,
When all laughter has now left us,
And it hurts to try.

Have you seen the river?
Have you seen the tide?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Have you seen the cities,
Where the last tears have been cried.

For the world turns on without us,
Even when we've lost all hope,
When our song's reduced to ashes,
Will we learn to cope?

For the world turns on without us...
And it will for a thousand years...
So maybe now's the time...
That we learn to face our fears...

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Marianne

11 years old

The Pandemic

The virus turns the life weird
Weird so much that the life itself tired
In life, what rule is effective?
What uncertainty is worrying?
Uncertainty to sense
Uncertainty to fear
Uncertainty to taste
Uncertainty to talk
Uncertainty to see
Uncertainty to new things
People talk about tomorrow
People talk about the unusual
People love to attend, not to comprehend
People work to opposite, not to trust
People take unusual step to turn wheel around
What is the running idea?
To pass or to learn?
To race or to experience?
To oath or to express?
To war or to negotiate?
To sack workers or to stop the virus?
To isolate or to open?
Which one is the better?
When the steer takes control of the tyres
When the tyres take the steer's command
The people will have the best trip
Will you put effort to tackle it?
You trust your way
You trust your say
Talk about the tears
Talk about the eyes
Talk about the sorrow

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Talk about the unseen

Talk about the rusty, torn, well maintained neighbourhood

Talk about the way the traveller wanders

Talk about the turning temptation to be able to live loud and safe

Talk about staying at home.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Oysharjo

12 years old

Fingers sore from doing literally anything.

<>

In five years, World War Three has finished. Buildings are being rebuilt but there are still rusty bunkers scattered across the country. The air is hot and heavy. Ever since people were let out of lockdown, the pollution levels have gone up. The sky is dark and smokey, filled with planes, flying in different directions. Cars disappeared after the petrol shortage in 2023. People have been using public transport to get around. Schools have been discarded, everyone's walking around the city on their iPhone XXs or at their jobs. Everything's quiet, from the factories to the lack of birds and trees.

<>

Empty toilet paper aisle. Empty bottles of hand sanitiser. Empty streets and empty schools. Empty is a weird word, but it isn't a bad way of describing a lot of things in 2020. People don't even remember their reactions when the whole pandemic happened. Nobody does anymore, because the stuff that happened AFTER 2020 was the stuff to remember.

In 2020 schools got shut down. But now there aren't any schools at all. It's all so terrible. What has the world become? Is it all because we came out of isolation before we should've? They don't even remember. A lot of stuff went down in 2021-2025. World War Three was the most recent. It was all so chaotic. Nobody expected it, especially not how most countries got taken over by other countries. It all got to the point where the topic of countries was too hard to understand. So everybody gave up on that. The only thing keeping us from complete chaos is the government, who've become really strict and won't let anyone out of their own specific area.

A lot of other families are living near the city, one family in particular lives in a tall makeshift bunker. It's made mostly of pieces of their old house. Rooms stacked together, with some rusty ladders thrown in. It looks misshapen and odd from the outside, but it's better than living near the factories scattered around town. They live near one too, just an abandoned one so they get it better than a lot of people.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



On TV, the only available channel is the news, which doesn't have as much effort put into it as it should. It doesn't even cover the rest of the world, so who knows what the heck is going on over there. It's surprising how much technology has changed. But nobody is satisfied with their iPhone XXs and their crummy televisions.

All people really want is a way to look into the past, or the feeling of comfort they had when they were living in the 2010s. And there must be a way somehow. Some way to mess with time a little. And there is! Well, it's still in development.

But until then, will everyone remain sane?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Trinity
Year 10

My dogs have sat in the morning sun for hours on end. They might as well be reptilian.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jaime

13 years old

My heart pounds.
My mind plays tricks on me.
I know I am fatigued.
I keep moving.

There's only so much a physical body can take. I run days and nights in a never-ending loop. I ache to lay down and my legs feel like jelly. I was trained to run but even I need rest. I want to stop and cry, curse the world for being so cruel. Anything could be better than this. But I know if I stop, they will catch me. I know if I die, all my efforts would have been for nothing.

I look back into the darkness. My sight has improved, my hearing, alertness. Those are the results of living as prey, I feel primordial.

I collapse on what used to be a park bench. The cheery yellow paint has been partly stripped away and the rotting wood makes home to wild mushrooms. The lights no longer turn on at night and I am thankful. The night will cover me, protect me from the army that seeks me as a survivor, an army that poisoned everyone's brains. *They will not control me*, I say to myself, *I will not give in*. I crawl into an abandoned house and the now abundant flocks of birds announce my arrival. I freeze but it is too late. The bright light of a torch shines into my face and I squint. Torches are valuable now, they can navigate through the darkness. It pinpoints me. I want to give in but I have to save them. I'm their only hope. I remind myself I'm doing this for Ellie. The little girl who never cried or whimpered but did that day. The little girl with her cheeriness sucked out of her when she was taken.

Ellie cries out in agony as the soldier hits her with their baton. 'Ava!' She screams, 'Mama! Papa!' There are tears in my eyes. Ellie pleads with me silently as we hold each other's stares. 'I don't want to go!' She whispers. There are soldiers surrounding me and I know they will take me too if I don't move. 'I will come back.' I say to Ellie and start running out of my home. Away. Away from my sister. Away from my old life. I look back after I'm out. Ellie sits with her head dipped, her blonde hair obscuring her face. I know the night conceals me but I feel her look at me. 'I'm sorry,' I whisper.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'Stop there, girl.' The soldier says, holding out his gun. 'You can't run forever.' The other officers come speeding down the roads in their trucks larger than the sun. They are not smart. Beyond the house is forest, only the small can fit in there.

They used to try and bribe me. Give me fake promises of safety and happiness but I knew it wasn't true. They want to use me. They want to use everyone.

I run.

My legs propel me through the darkness with a trained swiftness. I trip over rocks and tree roots. I stumble over a soft object. I've felt enough to know it was a body. Probably suicide. It's not uncommon these days. I don't look back.

My lungs pump harder than they have before, my calves tighten up. I remember what my running coach taught me and take bigger breaths. My body still screams a warning.

I can't go any further, it pleads. I can hear the careless foot chase behind me. They are slow but they are well rested. I cannot see their torches, nor can I see them. Carefully, I climb up a tree. The foliage is thick and I hide, trying to make my huffing as silent as I can. It's hard.

I sit and wait for the sounds of the officers to pass before my physical body gives up and I faint.

When I wake, I am surprised to find myself not in the tree I passed out in. A campfire crackles and a log hut sits behind it. I freeze and close my eyes again. I try to find information by my other senses. I'm lying on a bamboo bed and what I presume is a blanket lies on me. I can smell food. That's enough, I sit up. What I thought was a blanket jumps up and licks my face. It is a dog, a husky. I smile, it's been so long since I've seen one of those but I back away quickly. It gives me gestures that it is friendly but I have learnt to trust no-one and it's a hard habit to break.

'Ah,' a voice says from the hut. 'You're awake.'

Instinctively, I grab a stick on the floor and hold it up to defend myself despite my shoulders begging me not to.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



'Hey, hey,' the boy says, coming out of his hut and holding his hands up in surrender. 'I'm here to help.'

I hadn't used my voice since I fled and my words came out croaky. 'W-Who ar-e you?'

'My name is Michael. I found you in the tree about a kilometre back. You had passed out hard, so I carried you back. We have a million questions but you look hungry. We also have some soup if you want some.'

Michael gestured back inside his hut and the smell hit me. I could hear other people talking. I longed to be with people but could I trust them? A wave of nausea hit me, I hadn't eaten in days. Salivating, I nodded eagerly.

He laughed, a sound I hadn't heard in a while and it stunned me. He cocked his head to the side. 'You are rather intriguing. What is your name?'

My parents called me Avalon, because that's where I was born, but Ellie called me Ava. It hurt me too much to hear my nickname. 'Avalon.' I say.

'Like the place? Well, okay Avalon, come have some soup and tell me your story.'

I was hesitant and sceptical but my lust for food overpowered everything else so I followed.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jaime

13 years old

I hug my sister, Ellie, as we make our way through another abandoned home. We go through our routine, she searches the kitchen, I search for survivors.

I walk past the master bedroom and look into it. I'm hit with nostalgia so fierce I almost throw up. The necklace that lay on the bedside table is identical to the one I'm wearing. It was a gift given to me by my mother. I don't often let myself think of my family that got taken to the camp. It makes me too sad but this time, I can't help it. Memories flood through my vision. I long for happiness, I long for the safety of my home with my family. But memories will do me no good so I keep on searching.

<>

Time flies when we're at home.

Wearing the same clothes forever now.

Very odd and sad week in America.

I forgot how exciting school is

I can see my friends now

Hugs are given though not encouraged

<>

The trees whisper their worries and the wind carries relief. The world has gotten a break. A break from the hustle and bustle, blinding lights, whizzing cars and the constant smell of car gas.

I come here to rest and remind myself that nature still exists, it's still there. Sometimes I forget what fresh air smells like until I come out to the river that purifies my air. I forget that before us, trees ruled the world with the animals by their side. Everything worked together in harmony.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Out here is a sanctuary. Thriving flocks of birds feast on an abundance of nuts and the bees work together to find nectar and pollen, carrying out their natural roles in the world.

This world was not designed to be single use and yet I see that many treat it like it is.

My world used to go back to destruction and deterioration when I walked back into my concrete jungle but now I find that's not the case. Things have changed and everything around me knows it. The plants look a little healthier, the air seems a little cleaner and my head is a bit clearer.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Evie

14 years old

This Is Our Future

This is my past,
and my present.
But most importantly;
This Is Our Future.
All of us,
every single one of us needs to help
if we are to turn this around.

Discrimination is a waste of time,
time that's running out;
Our future,
that's slipping through our closing hands
like grains of sand,
cascading slowly into the waves
drowning and sinking to the depths.
Never to be seen again.

But out of the blue,
we can catch it
bring to the surface
and turn our mistakes around.
It is said that we have Twelve years
to clean the mess we've made.

And so it's not black against white,
Police against the rest,
Earth against humans.
It's not everyone for themselves.
It's time to put aside differences.
If we are all the same,
what a Boring world we would live in,

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



a Boring world indeed.

But despite discrimination,
War,
hunger,
and broken dreams,
it is still a Beautiful World
Remember that.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Evie

14 years old

2050

Riiing! Riiing! Riiing!!! I stumble as fast as I can to the kitchen tripping on the new robotic mop and vacuum set that Peter installed. Curse him and his need to keep up with society! I get up spitting out my stringy black hair as I sprint faster to the phone. I pick it up and the hologram blurs to life. 'Hey, mum!' Alex cries through her projected image. 'Darling! How was your *inforeet*?' I roll my eyes at the last word. *What happened to good old-fashioned university?* I think, starting to chop the capsicum for dinner. 'Yeah it was great! I learned about the rainforest plants that we lost in the fires of 2020. We are supposed to research more about that year, I mean it was only 30 years ago but no one ever talks about it. Do you think you could tell me some stuff?' I open my mouth, no words come out.

And I'm back,
My feet bare on the ashes of a once solid structure,
Reaching for the stars, it was
Until the fire burned it to the ground
Taking with it
Mother
Father
And Poppy the dog
Sometimes
In the deepest darkest part of my mind
I wish I was in the fire too
With that I never went to the shop
And that I had died alongside my family
But then I look at Alex
And at my newly found family
And I feel the guilt weighing on my chest
Of what I wished to be true.

I try to scream but my vocal cords disagree and all that comes out is 'Aaaah...' 'Mum?' Alex waves her hand through the projection. I snap myself back to reality. 'I think you

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



might have to come over.' My shaky hand drops the knife to the floor. 'I have a lot to explain to you Alex...and none of it is pleasant.'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Elise

12 years old

Long Time in Lockdown

There's an eerie feeling you get every time you wake up in the morning with no memory of the night before. Throwing back my blankets, I shiver as the morning air hits my legs. Hobbling down the stairs, I enter the lounge room and stop to stare at the sleeping body, sprawled out on the couch. My heart thuds and I take in a sharp breath. 'Hello brother,' Milo says, grinning as I embrace him in a warm hug.

'What happened?' I ask.

'You were in a car crash,' he states, pulling away from my embrace. His face now solemn.

'Is anyone hurt?' I ask.

'Mum and dad died.' Milo is staring out the window now, his hands folded in his lap.

'Who was driving?' I choke out.

'Don't do this Gabe,' he whispers, his voice catching as his eyes search my face.

'Who was driving?' I ask more firmly.

Milo stares at me then looks back out the window. 'You,' he mutters. 'You were driving.'

Stumbling into the kitchen, tears leaking out of my eyes, I almost miss the large sheet of paper stuck to the fridge door.

Your Covid-19 test results will arrive on the 22nd of November

YOU MUST SELF ISOLATE UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Under that, a small Post-it note reads:

*I love you, be brave for me. If your test is negative I'll see you on the 23rd.
Kisses, Meg.*

'What's this?' I ask, turning to Milo and pointing at the Post-it.

'That's from your girlfriend,' Milo says.

'My girlfriend?'

'You met her at the hospital. She's a nurse,' Milo snorts, grabs the TV remote and starts flipping through the channels.

I look back at the paper. 'What's the date today?'

'Twenty-third of November. The test results came yesterday. You're free of Covid and Meg is coming around today,' Milo replies.

'How do you know all this?' I ask.

'When the only person you can talk to is your little brother, you do tend to talk a lot,' he jokes.

Flashbacks of driving down a windy road at night suddenly play in my head. The voices of my parents apologising for drinking too much while Milo is asleep in the passenger seat echo around in my head.

'I need a shower,' I say, jumping up and heading to the bathroom slamming the door behind me. I grasp the corners of the sink. Feeling faint and breathing heavily I stare at the man in the mirror, with his wild hair and the crazy brown eyes that stare back at me. I turn on the shower and step in, breathing in the steam.

Milo knocks at the door and asks how long I will be. 'Ten minutes,' I yell, sighing as the hot water pounds against my shoulders. A minute later Milo yells, 'Meg's here!'

Shit. I turn the tap off and step out onto the cool tiles. 'Be out in a second,' I call. Throwing a towel around my waist and running my fingers through my wet hair I glance at my reflection. I furiously rub the dark circles under my eyes. I snatch my

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



jeans off the floor and throw my t-shirt on. I glance one more time in the mirror, my heart pounding, then dart out of the room.

My eyes frantically search the room for Milo. He has disappeared. 'Gabe?' a woman's voice says, I spin around and stare at the sandy blonde standing on the porch. Cautiously I open the screen door and the girl flings herself at me, her arms wrapped around my neck. I stiffen, not sure what to do with my hands so I leave them hanging awkwardly by my side. 'I missed you so much babe,' she whispers gently tugging at my hair.

'Okay,' I answer, unsure of what to say next. The girl (Meg) laughs and walks over to the kitchen, dumping her bag on the counter. 'What have you been doing today?' she asked sweetly, opening the fridge door.

'Uh...I got up, hung out with Milo then had a shower, that's about it.' I stare at the carpet tracing the pattern with my foot. When Meg doesn't answer I look up to see her staring at me, a bottle of water half raised to her lips. She blinks.

'You...you hung out with Milo?' she asked, sounding perplexed.

'Yes...my brother,' I say slowly. Meg puts the bottle down and takes a small tentative step towards me, resting her palm on my chest.

'Gabe,' she starts, 'you know Milo is dead right?'

I stare at her. She continues, 'He was in that car crash that killed both your parents...I'm so sorry.' Her last words are barely a whisper as she rests her cheek against my chest. 'That was seven years ago.'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Zahra

17 years old

My isolation mixtape

- 1) BTS – ON
- 2) Lost Sky – Where We Started
- 3) GOT7 – Hard Carry
- 4) ATEEZ – Sunrise
- 5) BTS – Sea

Most disconcerting activities at home

- 1) The addiction of TikTok
- 2) Sneaking out of the house to get fresh air
- 3) Singing my favourite album everyday

Top bad fads in the world

- 1) Coronavirus ads
- 2) Not being outside for a long time (not seeing friends as well)
- 3) Isolation

Top great fads in the world/at home

- 1) Actually doing schoolwork
- 2) Organising my room
- 3) Cooking and being close to my family

An animal in isolation

As I was walking to school I saw this cute white random rabbit that came towards me as I wanted to touch it, I jumped and I got scared, which made me back away a little bit. But as I wanted to touch it again I smelled something disgusting which was poo. I just ignored and left the rabbit there running as fast as I could.

An inanimate object

I've recently grown my interest in painting and I even bought a large canvas, most of the days I paint instead of doing something else. I should say it's better than skipping YouTube ads.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



An unexpected celebration

My friend was supposed to throw her twentieth birthday party during this month, but instead we did a Zoom call of twenty-two people, it was really unexpected but it was fun, not until I had to give a cake on her mouth but her sister threw all of the cake on her face instead.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Saniah

15 years old

My isolation mixtape

- 1) Sunshine – Hoody
- 2) Tame Impala – The Less I Know the Better
- 3) LOONA – Colors
- 4) NCT 127 – Love Song
- 5) SHINee – Good Evening
- 6) VIXX – Shangri-La
- 7) PENOMEKO – No. 5
- 8) Red Velvet – Butterflies
- 9) NCT 127 – Kick It
- 10) NCT Dream – Ridin’

Most disconcerting activities at home

- 1) My mum cooking 24/7
- 2) My parents sharing photos of them or me from a long time ago
- 3) Me bingeing Netflix for all my time
- 4) Waking up in the afternoon every day

Top bad fads in the world

- 1) People ignoring social distancing rules
- 2) Everyone venting all their frustrations on social media
- 3) News outlets mostly covering news about COVID-19
- 4) An overload of online school work

An animal in isolation

Birds are difficult to own. Mine are energetic and have a strange connection with sounds of water. I turn the tap on, they go bonkers. Shrieks, screams, all sorts of deafening noises. They start frantically flapping their wings and spill their food and water. Guess I have to clean up again.

An inanimate object

In the excuse of productivity, I've started on a new hobby. PhotoShop has always been an interest of mine. The little tools, gadgets and their uses have always intrigued me. The

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



seclusion of quarantine has allowed me to create many graphics. This newfound interest has helped me deal with the monotony.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Mahad

12 years old

My isolation mixtape

- 1) The Oral Cigarettes – Kyouran Hey Kids!!
- 2) Shelter 2 theme song
- 3) Zone – Secret Base
- 4) Redo (theme song from Re:Zero)
- 5) Adventure Club (featuring Delaney Jane) – Limitless
- 6) Peace Sign (theme song from My Hero Academia)
- 7) Stephen Swartz (featuring Joni Fatora) – Bullet Train
- 8) Heavy Pulse – Mortals
- 9) Shawn Mendes and Camila Cabello – I Know What You Did Last Summer

Most disconcerting activities at home

- 1) Playing multiplayer games for single player use
- 2) Bad teammates

Top bad fads in the world

- 1) Coronavirus news everywhere
- 2) Not going to school

Top great fads in the world/at home

- 1) Playing games
- 2) Cooking

An animal in isolation

I was sitting down and thinking about what game to buy and then one game came to mind, 'hmm Subnautica or an animal game?' 'hmm' well technically Subnautica is an ocean animal game but I feel like playing TerraTech... my sister burst in, TerraTech. Stare with intense concentration.

A new interest

Ever since I started online shopping I have been going broke. Soooooo, I needed a solution. How do you make money? By working. How do you help as a kid? Well, it depends. Buuut I will be cooking to make me some dollars. I never thought I would be cooking.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jethro

15 years old

My isolation mixtape

- 1) Polyphia – 40oz
- 2) Archspire – Kairos Chamber
- 3) Obscura – Akroásis
- 4) Dark Tranquillity – Monochromatic Stains
- 5) Myth Of I – Glass Castles
- 6) Obscura – The Seventh Aeon
- 7) Rivers of Nihil – Where Owls Know My Name
- 8) Dethklok – Skyhunter
- 9) August Burns Red – Indonesia

Most disconcerting activities at home

- 1) Dad's obsession with stock market
- 2) Dad's obsession with preparing fish fillets

Top bad fads in the world

- 1) People suddenly care about celebrities
- 2) News won't shut up about virus
- 3) News won't shut up about celebrities

Top great fads in the world/at home

- 1) More of my friends have more time
- 2) My Minecraft server is very populated
- 3) More time with family
- 4) More free time for me

An unexpected celebration

I sat eating breakfast. I heard the doorbell ring. My eyes dilate.

Could it be them?

I bolted to the front door to greet them.

'Mum! Dad! The internet guys are here!'

Grabbing tonnes of food, we threw a party as they fixed the issue. It broke the next day.

54 words oh no.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



An animal in isolation

My cat vomited all over the living room after comfort eating several bowls of dry food. Needless to say the carpet was nasty by the end, and we had to wash it. My mum was furious with the cat, and refused to massage him, to which he took great offence.

A new interest

I have recently taken up modded Minecraft again. I always enjoyed it, but I never really had enough time to commit to it. I am currently renting a server for me, some friends and my brother who, after one friend commented on how 'underwhelming' his shurikens were, he proved wrong.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Eva

16 years old

An unexpected celebration

I didn't have high hopes for my birthday. It was meant to be the last day of term, I was to be surrounded by my friends enjoying another year of life. But social distancing put a stop to the celebrations real quick. Then I got a quick text from one of my friends, 'join Zoom, quick we're waiting.'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Isabella

15 years old

My isolation mixtape

- 1) Sales – Chinese New Year
- 2) Panic! At The Disco – Dying in LA
- 3) gnash – the broken hearts club
- 4) Twenty One Pilots – Taxi Cab
- 5) Fall Out Boy – Irresistible
- 6) Burbank – Sorry, I Like You
- 7) Daft Punk – Veridis Quo
- 8) Panic! At the Disco – Nicotine
- 9) Halsey – Drive
- 10) The Oral Cigarettes – Kyouran Hey Kids!!
- 11) Porter Robinson and Madeon – Shelter

Most disconcerting activities at home

- 1) I haven't left the house in two days
- 2) No set mealtimes
- 3) Continually on the computer
- 4) My parents actually checking the news

Top bad fads in the world

- 1) None of my friends want to call anymore
- 2) Isolation schoolwork not counting towards grades
- 3) No motivation
- 4) No human contact

Top great fads in the world/at home

- 1) More awareness of how quickly we can actually do school if we try
- 2) Better at keeping stuff clean and keeping on top of laundry
- 3) Wearing my own clothes/customising my appearance
- 4) Deep convos with friends online/closeness from distance

An animal in isolation

Lola is white and black and canine and when I woke up she had her head on my shoulder. A Tenterfield, or a Jack Russell – the records were inconsistent. She prefers my room over

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



everyone else's, and my bed over hers. And lately, she's there, even if friends are intangible.

A new interest

Half-learnt, half-remembered – a country skill though I'd rather the city – I rode a motorbike for one, two, four hours then the petrol ran out. Earlier, a kilometre's drive from the campsite to the house, through water, valleys, rocks. I didn't know how to switch gears but only received minor injuries.

An unexpected celebration

Birthdays are low key for Darius, but it's his sixteenth – I couldn't let him do nothing. A socially distant party; anime, I tried mustard powder, Josh got hit with raw egg and then video games – also I did two espresso shots. Despite the absence of two friends, a perfectly imperfect day.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bettina

14 years old

An animal in isolation

When I was looking out of the window I saw a low-hanging power line. I saw a bat that had been electrocuted and it was hanging dead. It had been sitting there and its body had started to decompose. I have never looked away from a window so quickly.

An inanimate object

I have taken up embroidery, although it is time-consuming (perfect when there's twelve hours left in the day and you have nothing to do) it is rewarding when you finish. Although unfortunately it means that we are running out of space for the amount of embroidered cushions that are turning up...

An unexpected celebration

Birthday parties are always pretty good but having them on Zoom certainly gives them a twist. What's there not to love about laggy internet when you're trying to have a conversation. One thing that I miss the most after seeing my friends would definitely be eating the cake!!!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Clarissa

17 years old

My isolation mixtape

1. Seventeen – CLAP (a friend had made a music video for it)
2. Aldo (a really nice little story about an ordinarily extraordinary person)
3. The Driver Era – Afterglow (mood booster with nice beats and melody)
4. Gaho – Start (motivational and makes you want to run/work for a long time)
5. No music (I can't really focus on my thoughts with music playing)
6. Jagwar Twin – Loser (ironic because it suits the occasion with the lyrics 'I am loser/just like you')
7. Lo-fi hip-hop radio (calm and soothing)
8. Day6 – Congratulations (energising until I read the translation of the lyrics...)
9. The Driver Era – Preacher Man (a wild and strangely interesting song)

Most disconcerting activities at home

- 1) Wanting to eat all the time, check fridge ever so often
- 2) Wanting to sleep all the time
- 3) My dad is learning to dance (really do support him though!)
- 4) The amount of push up challenges on Instagram (for someone who can barely do one!)

Top bad fads in the world

- 1) People, such as relatives during video calls, only talking about the virus
- 2) Losing a sense of time
- 3) Tonnes of pressure online for people to all of a sudden be the best version of themselves after this. Good to an extent but bad if taken to extremities
- 4) Not wanting to reach out to people

Top great fads in the world/at home

- 1) Family time! Becoming closer and on better terms with family, a stronger support base
- 2) Time with myself doing what I really like. Finally have time to do everything I 'never have time for' – lots of reading and writing
- 3) Reaching out and reconnecting with friends I have lost touch with

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



- 4) Around the world people are becoming more aware of how a lot of 'other people's issues' could very well become 'our issue'. More internationally minded, hopefully increase in awareness and actions for people in our global community

An animal in isolation

There is this animal that retreats in blankets during the day, and only comes out in the dead of night/or middle of the afternoon since their sense of time is messed up. It is observed that the cold storage place of food is always its target of interest, retreating back to its den as swiftly as it comes. It is a mystery to me how they are still considered as a functional human being.

An inanimate object

During isolation I have been taking better care of myself, combing for one is one such activity. My comb is becoming of more significance to me, as I find our time together to be one of soothing meditation. Together we unravel knots in my hair and knots in my thinking.

An unexpected celebration

Two of my friends turned eighteen in the first official month of isolation, and I really wanted to make their days extra special. A few friends and I were able to mail presents to their house, only fifteen minutes down the road from us! I edited some old videos and our calls were filled with lots of laughs.

A new interest

It started as a few birthday clips for my friends, and now I am really enjoying short editing projects. I have opened a YouTube channel that acts as a portfolio to compile the finished works, some podcasts and audiobooks as well. I think it is nice to record some part of my consciousness (?) on a regular basis, and stop feeling intimidated about sharing my works with others on mildly scary platforms like YouTube.

Sh sh shhhh. It is the sound of the comb running through her hair. ShhhHH – screeched stopped, and a knot barred the smooth journey. It ain't no highway. Gently, don't drag with too much force. Control, keep your emotion under control. Slow and gentle we will go past, slow and gentle we will untangle, resolve, conclude. But face it. Don't skip on this knot, don't skip on this fight, skip on this quiz, skip on this. This problem. Don't let it grow and rot and bloom and faults. Ignore and you might lose more, even more.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jenani
Year 10

Obesity took place in my home.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jenarthanan

Year 10

Started watching books instead of reading.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Angela
Year 10

Is time mending our broken strings?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Abishek
Year 10

Stayed isolated and learnt many things.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anamaria

Year 10

Why can't people meet each other?

It's because of a tiny germ.

And how is it called this tiny thing?

People call it COVID-19.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nisara
Year 10

I spend my time to sleep.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bryce
Year 10

Should I study harder every day?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Malika

Year 10

The lockdown did not affect me.

I am an expert in wasting time

Did I even have a social life?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Agum
Year 10

Happier days are on their way.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Cody
Year 10

Persuading the idea of living life.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Kaysier
Year 10

Expecting the unexpected from Year 7.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Wat

Year 10

Roses are red, violets are blue.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Tomin

12 years old

'We don't have any work, yay.'

I had a lot to do.

No work for today, yay yay.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Sophie

11 years old

Schools are shut, screens are open.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ruya

11 years old

Warm sun glowing on a book.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nawal

14 years old

When will this virus end?

I can't believe I'm saying this but I miss school.

When will we go to school?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Muhammad
14 years old

I might have finished the chocolate.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Naira

13 years old

School was held online for us.

I watched many movies every night.

Stay at home and be safe.

Covid has taken my whole life.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Leo

15 years old

My eyes are accustomed to screens.

Online school? More like chaotic school.

Don't download the Covid safe app!

Sleeping, eating and back to sleeping.

Same routines every day, really boring.

Can't meet people face to face.

Growing fatter instead of growing taller.

Writing poems about Apple is interesting.

Quick! Steal the toilet paper now!

Learn absolutely nothing in online school!

What is wrong with my wifi?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



JJ

14 years old

Stay home all day playing games.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Kavya

12 years old

Family time is very common now!

Lollies have become my go-to food.

Ms, you haven't uploaded the work!

Sleeping, eating, working – my daily schedule.

Cleaning is now an everyday activity.

What happened to midnight Maccas runs?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jiah

13 years old

All I've been doing is eating.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



JC

14 years old

Nothing changed at all in school

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Evie

14 years old

Salty hair, at the beach every day!

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Zimal

13 years old

Where did all the food go?

I am tired of sitting inside.

When will this be all over?

Online lessons are a pain.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Nethrra

12 years old

'STUDYING, BUT I REFUSE, GAMING GAMING!!'

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Rebecca

14 years old

I hope my quarantine never ends.

Introvert problems have been gracefully ended.

My cat is joyful I'm home.

I'm making up for lost time.

I yearn for the easing of stress.

All my anxieties gradually fade away.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Mira

11 years old

I really need to exercise more.

I have been online a lot.

Easter was in our back garden.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Johnny

14 years old

What if things just progressively worsen?

What if the Zoom link doesn't work?

What if my grandparents get it?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ibrahim

17 years old

Don't eat too much Domino's again.

Our civil liberties are increasingly non-existent.

Toilet paper ironically appreciates after sold.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Herman

16 years old

Meditation and running is my jam.

I need to study way more.

Quarantine is much worse than expected.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Ember

11 years old

Being stuck at home isn't that bad.

I'm homeschooled so it's not very different.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Zahra

17 years old

I woke up in the morning feeling the cold weather.

Under my skin, shivering not until I got outside feeling the hot weather instead.

Just opened my favourite snack.

It's my favourite chilli.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Saniah

15 years old

Fingers planted on my keyboard constantly.

My vision hazier than fog outside.

Will this monotony transform into freedom?

I sit blankly in a classroom.

My friends all seem nonchalant.

Why is everything still so boring.

The monotony is fading into normality.

Feels like calmness before the storm.

Does social distancing even exist anymore?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Mahad

12 years old

I cannot eat at all.

I have no anime to watch.

My internet is not good now.

I need new games to play.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Jethro

15 years old

My cats went home last week.

People are a lot less scared.

Ignore the virus maybe it disappears.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Eva

16 years old

New-found interests, hobbies and skills.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Isabella

15 years old

Some friends don't notice your pain.

Thank god, the group dynamic returned.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Bettina

14 years old

Random thoughts, listening to silence, boredom.

Don't want to go to school.

Why do I have to wear a uniform again?

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Clarissa

17 years old

Surprise me emails, laughs with penpals.

Wake up cold in early darkness.

Life back to normal abnormal still.

Overwhelmed by people running as normal.

Ride through morning fog on river.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anhaar

13 years old

I've never been so excited grocery shopping.

Vanilla thick shake for a dollar.

Nearly lost my ukulele on train.

Very odd and sad week in America.

Really fun birthday in lockdown.

Latin makes me want to sleep.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Aiza

14 years old

Why is it so cold today?

Late night binge-watching Marvel movies.

Going back to school frees stress.

Everyone has different hair styles now.

My friend came back with blue hair.

Finally free from Google Classroom emails.

Celebrating Eid this year during Covid.

Catching up on stressful online work.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Anhaar

13 years old

My isolation mixtape

1. Vance Joy – Riptide
2. Harry Styles – Sign of the Times
3. Beyoncé – Halo
4. Gotye featuring Kimbra – Somebody that I used to Know
5. Kesha – Praying
6. PROPAGANDA
7. Don't play much, but it would probably also be 'PROPAGANDA'
8. Lorde – Ribs

Most disconcerting activities at home

- 1) Me trying to bake a cake
- 2) My teacher's daughter screaming in every Zoom meeting
- 3) Good but still concerning; me staying tidy
- 4) Me going on runs

Top bad fads in the world

- 1) Doing tests online
- 2) Having to conserve toilet paper
- 3) Watching scary sci-fi movies about other pandemics
- 4) Doing yoga and fitness at home

Top great fads in the world/at home

- 1) Me becoming organised
- 2) Livestreamed Kahoot!
- 3) Appreciating simple things like going shopping
- 4) Being more connected with people overseas

An animal in isolation

Being stuck at home and finishing every book there is means lying in bed for a really long time. When I have nothing to do and it's dark, I think back to all the creepy, Netflix murder documentaries I've watched and birds suddenly start chirping outside my room, it's horrifying.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



An unexpected celebration

Typical Egyptian weddings consist of at least 300 people but following the announcement of mass gathering restrictions a couple of days before the event, my family friend's wedding was down to seventy people. Trying to stop people hugging the bride was a big challenge and social distancing on the dance floor...

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



Aiza

14 years old

My isolation mixtape

1. DREAMER
2. Illenium – Leaving
3. Seven Lions, Dylan Matthew, SLANDER and Dabin – First Time
4. Marshmello featuring Khalid – Silence
5. Piano
6. Everglow – DUN DUN
7. Everglow – Adios
8. Seungmin – Start
9. GOT7 – Hard Carry

Most disconcerting activities at home

- 1) Not skipping YouTube ads
- 2) My parents becoming clean freaks
- 3) Reading Wattpad again
- 4) Messed up sleep schedule

Top bad fads in the world

- 1) Coronavirus taking over the media
- 2) Conspiracy theorists going crazy
- 3) Being stuck at home with family
- 4) Not being able to eat food that I crave in a restaurant

Top great fads in the world/at home

- 1) Having more time for myself
- 2) Sleeping all day
- 3) Learning new songs on ukulele
- 4) Being more productive

An animal in isolation

I gathered bread to feed the cockatoos, as it was my daily routine, but today was a different story. White and yellow feathers, tainted with red, were scattered across my garden pointing towards my cat and her prey A.K.A the traumatised bird. To say I was shocked was an understatement.

A USER'S GUIDE TO A PANDEMIC



An inanimate object

The weather was freezing and my hands were numb even after gloves. I remembered the heat pack I was given last winter. It was quite plain but the warmth made me fall in love with it. My hands haven't been cold since the arrival of the fluffy grey heat pack.

An unexpected celebration

My sister turned seventeen and we made a red velvet cake but because it was Ramadan we couldn't eat it until after. Once we broke our fast no one had space for the heavy red velvet cake and all the effort put into making the icing and cake was wasted.