

Television as a reprieve in trying times

MADIHA ATHAR KHAN

Watching television is an enjoyable way of winding down after a long day, and experiencing a range of emotions not on offer to us in our mundane lives. There are some actors who leave us in awe of their skills, and there are stories which expose us to unique perspectives or treat us to some lighthearted fun. However, this year, as the pandemic forced us to reassess the structure of our lives, TV shows and movies turned out to be very real coping mechanisms.

For many, avoiding the grim reality of the ensuing worldwide chaos became a priority. It seemed like a good idea to completely immerse ourselves in make-believe worlds, while running the marathon of self-isolation without any perceivable finish line.

This year provided the perfect time for Leeyana, a BRAC University Engineering student, to pick up "Friends", a show that many of her friends had raved about. Given that the show has 10 seasons, the task of getting through them all had seemed daunting before. But when the months of isolation rolled around, Leeyana, along with her sisters, relied on the show for a comforting pastime. "Friends is special for me because it was the last show I got to watch with my sisters before my older sister left for Australia," Leeyana says. "As much as I enjoyed watching it, I felt that it is an overhyped show. I also didn't get why people like Ross and Rachel as a couple so much!"

On the other hand, Sayaka, a master's student in Australia and a long-time fan of "Friends", shared that watching the show brought back memories. "I watched the show repeatedly for the first few months of the pandemic because I only wanted to watch fun and lighthearted things after all the demotivating news," she says. "I needed a guaranteed laugh and the show always feels familiar—I have great memories of watching it with my friends, whom I haven't met in a while. Plus, this time, I got my housemate to start watching it with me, and we bonded over it."

A "guaranteed laugh" is the exact reason why many also turned to other popular comedy shows like "The Office" and "Modern Family" to deal with these difficult times.

The freedom to watch a considerably sized series of movies or TV shows seemed to be a common factor behind people's choices. Picking up a series even if it is for pure enjoyment can often feel like a pending list of tasks that we need to check off. Usually, under the pressure of deadlines and commutes, finding enough time and incentive to commit to a new series is rare. This proved to be true for Mubashshira, a London-based data analyst currently working from home here in Dhaka, who found comfort in the



ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD

fantasy realm of the "Star Wars" movies, none of which she had seen before. As chaos ensued worldwide, the movies cushioned her into a protective bubble, where she was able to look forward to exciting adventures, while having none of her own.

When it became clear that we are living in unprecedented times, many searched for a reflection of reality and what was to come, through fiction. The nine-year old thriller, "Contagion" quickly rose in popularity among watchers globally, as people desperately searched for clues as to how to deal with such an invisible disease that was claiming so many lives. Needless to say, this movie left people in chilling fear. With so little knowledge and awareness on hand about the coronavirus, people were quick to assume the worst. Though concepts such as "social distancing" were introduced in this movie and the fictional virus seemed to have much in common with Covid-19, most of what "Contagion" portrayed has long since been debunked on various media outlets.

For Ramisa, an artist and a journalist, "The Undoing", a murder mystery starring Hugh Grant and Nicole Kidman, was a great watch. Each episode of the miniseries leaves watchers with a lot to discuss, which gave Ramisa's family a

much-needed escape from their repetitive conversations about the state of the world. "The plot was not remarkable, but each episode ended on a cliffhanger. The mystery kept us glued to our seats, and we came up with all kinds of theories. The anticipation was a useful distraction," Ramisa says.

Films and TV shows often offer an escape from the fear and anxiety of dealing with reality. For me however, the anxiety about the state of the world makes it impossible to sit by myself in front of a screen for too long. Nonetheless, I watch plenty of movies with my family. A Hindi movie marathon of our childhood favourites with my cousin is the perfect form of escapism and relaxation. On many nights, after dinner, my father picks a movie at random and we all watch it together. I accompanied my mother when she watched "A Shutter Island" for the first time. Lighthearted romantic comedies are also a favourite in my family.

My mother and I also watched a Bangla family drama, called "Rupali Josnay" written and directed by Tauquir Ahmed. The show depicted very real family dynamics, and gave us a lot to reflect on.

As months passed, I was able to return to my favourite hobby of watching popular shows of the year. "Normal People", an Irish drama based on a book

I had read is something I deeply enjoyed. It especially impressed me as a book adaptation, since while not much was changed with the plot, the many nuances that were not explored as deeply in the novel were in fact, elaborated on in the 12-episode series. Paul Mescal, who played the protagonist Connell, gave a heartfelt performance.

In this difficult year, most of us are going back to our old favourites and re-watching movies and shows that we truly love. However, amidst it all, it is important to monitor the amount of time we are spending in front of a screen.

Given that we are inevitably having to spend more time on our devices than usual, placing a limit on screen time is advisable. Playing board games, following home workouts and reading books are some other good ways to get through the day productively. Movies and TV shows will always provide much-needed entertainment and meaning to our lives. But just as with anything, measures should be taken to ensure that we are not over-reliant on them for our comfort.

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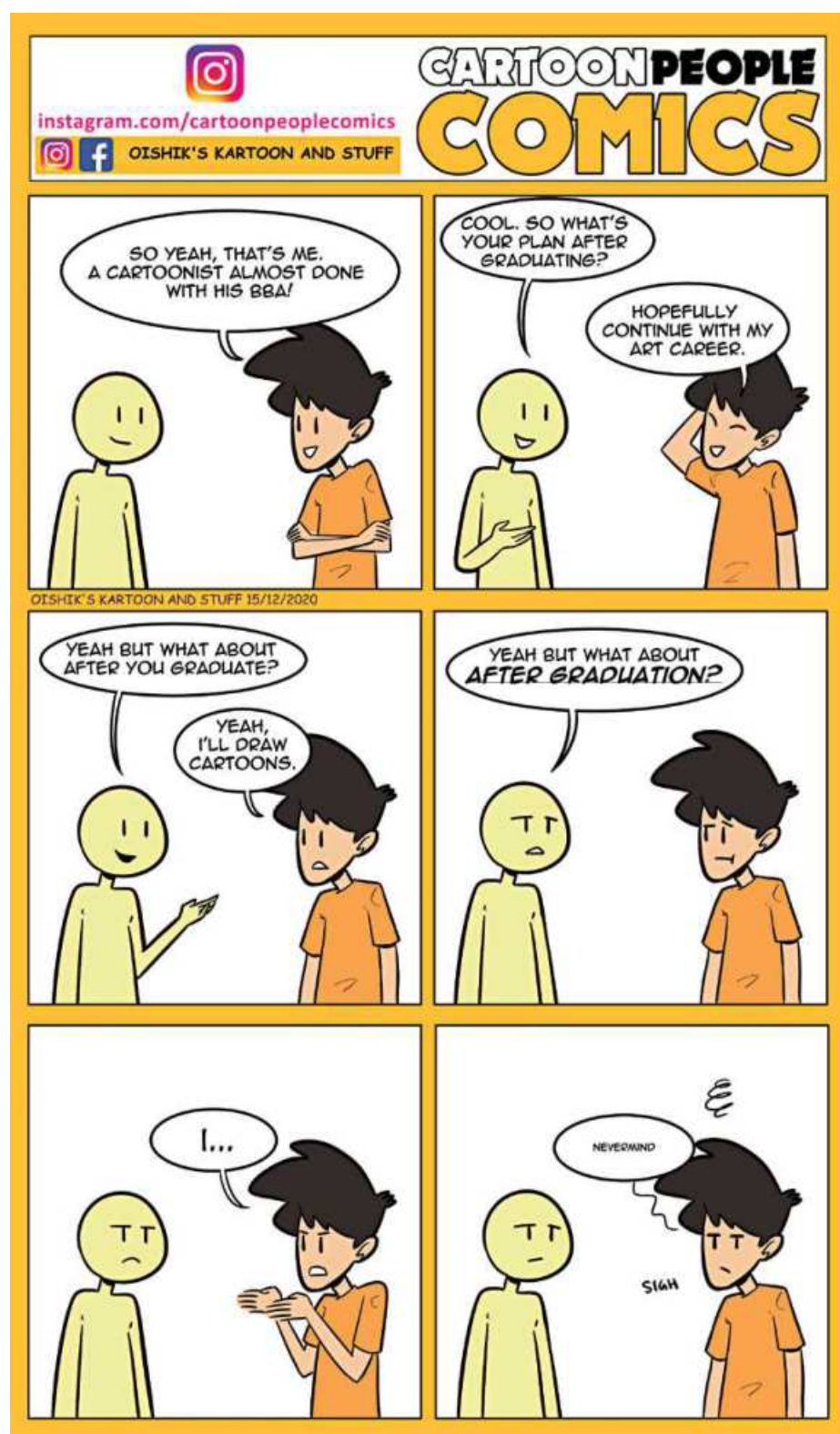
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DEADLINE: January 8, 2021 | Awards



A volunteer of World Youth Army gives a face mask to a rickshaw puller during 'Mask Up Bangladesh'.

World Youth Army combats the pandemic earnestly

ZAREEN NAWAR

Ayesha Akther Eti, a student of Jahangirnagar University and Founder of Worth Youth Army, formed the non-profit organisation in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Ayesha went back to her hometown Noakhali in March, where she realised that too many people in her neighborhood were facing challenges, because they were either laid off or short on food. Ayesha was advised to start a non-profit organisation to be able to help these people in the long run. World Youth Army is a recipient of the Joy Bangla Youth Award 2020.

"I am grateful for the advice from my seniors and peers. With their help, I was able to begin my journey with World Youth Army," says Ayesha.

Their target from the start was to help the needy outside of the capital. "Dhaka may have had help from various NGOs during the pandemic, but the areas outside the city were

worse off," adds Ayesha.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, only one or two volunteers of the organisation visit neighbouring households to inquire about their problems. Under the project, 'Rapid Response Relief' volunteers of the organisation distribute essential food supplies and money, based on the needs of the various families. Monetary help is provided particularly to families in need of medicine or baby food.

World Youth Army began receiving funds from the public initially, and gradually gained support from the NGO, World Vision. With 25 active volunteers, they raised awareness on Covid-19 across different regions in the country. The organisation continues to collect funds from the public.

During Eid-ul-Fitr 2020, volunteers of World Youth Army distributed traditional food in different regions, including Noakhali, Laxmipur, Dinaipur, Khagrachari, Barishal, Narayanganj, Feni, Dhaka, Jamalpur, Kishorganj, Madaripur,

Khulna, Jhenaidah, Panchgarh, Sylhet and Manikganj. They also organised a campaign, called 'Mask Up Bangladesh', during which they distributed free masks and raised awareness on the second wave of Covid-19 in different areas. So far, World Youth Army has helped more than 700 families.

Moving forward, the organisation intends to successfully help families that may have financial problems during winter, under their project 'Gift of Winter'. They also plan to reach out to women, particularly widows and single mothers, who may need financial help. "These women are pointlessly looked down upon, so we will do as much as we can to help them. We also plan to provide school supplies to children whose parents may be unable to pay for their education, under the current circumstances," concludes Ayesha.

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