

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE
SHOUT

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SHOUT'S BIG GRAND
ULTIMATE TOTALLY REAL
HOROSCOPE FOR 2021

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NEW YEAR'S
CELEBRATIONS

PG 4

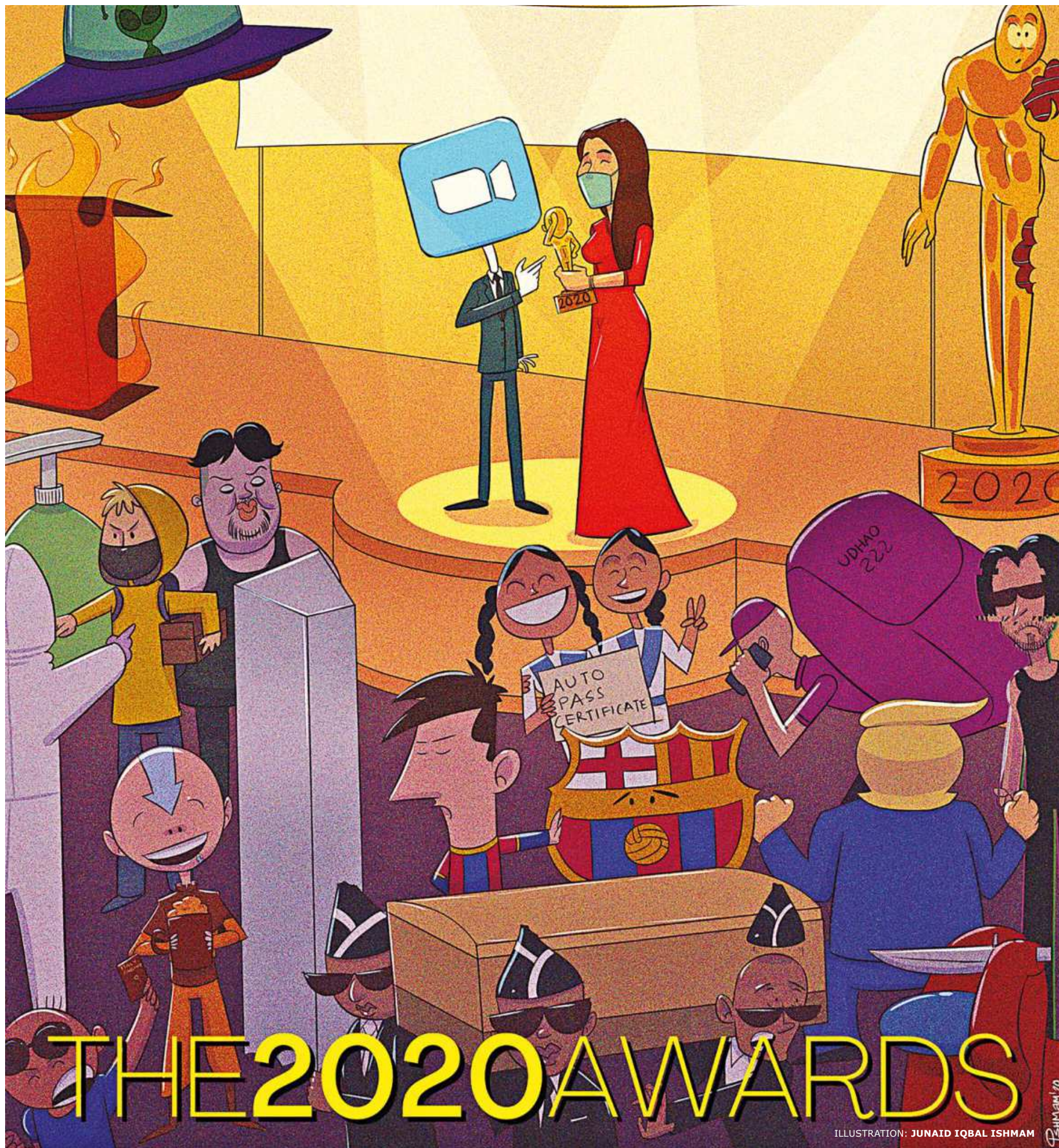


ILLUSTRATION: JUNAID IQBAL ISHMAM

PSHMAM/20

EDITORIAL

As a weekly publication, we always have opinions about the dates on which our magazine comes out. This week's SHOUT gives us the opportunity to celebrate with our readers the end of 2020, a year that is unique in so many ways. I consider this to be a privilege.

2020 has been hard to summarise. In this week's issue, we went with an approach that's not serious, because taking 2020 seriously would open up a can of worms that could easily eat up 8 pages. This week's SHOUT attempts to do a rewind of the whirlwind that this year has been, and hopes to spread some laughter along the way.

The worst thing 2020 did was to make us choose between the basic necessities of good health and being close to the people we love. It hasn't been fair, but it has been a wake up call for us, the young generation, to a world that is increasingly less fair. We always knew things would get bad, but being denied the love of close ones is not something anyone can work with. I wish you a happy new year, dear reader, and hope that the future does bring a world that we can work with.

— Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



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PLAYWATCH

ANIME REVIEW



Fruits Basket

The slice of life you need

SYEDA TASNIM ISLAM

Fruits Basket, released in 2019, is the anime adaptation of a shoujo manga written by Natsuki Takaya. It already had a very successful series run back in 2001, but the storyline strayed from the original plot. The revival aims to stick to the plot of the manga entirely, and is supposed to be spanning three seasons. So far with two completed seasons out, it has, once again, become a fan favourite — and understandably so.

It's a feel-good comedy with romance, friendship and love in all forms, wrapped within the darkness that looms around in the characters' lives. The story revolves around the life of a high school girl, Tohru Honda whose mother recently passed away, and due to her family (or lack thereof) and their financial issues, she is living in a tent on the outskirts of the huge Soma estate.

She is then discovered by the two Soma family members that live nearby, one of whom is her very own classmate Yuki Soma, who also happens to be the school heartthrob. They make a deal for Tohru to live with them, in exchange for her doing all the housework. However, she discovers their bizarre yet adorable family secret — they are all members of the Chinese zodiac and transform into their respective zodiac animal whenever they make contact with members of the opposite gender.

At first glance you would expect this anime to be just another rom-com/slice of life anime, where a love triangle is

mindlessly thrown in to complete the formula. However, Tohru Honda is the epitome of kindness. That kindness, although may come off as clichéd to some, can also be inspiring. Her warmth and ability to love is a major factor in the development of the characters and ultimately the plot itself.

Even beyond that, as a viewer, her personality inspired me to be kinder and thankful for the people I have in my life. I found myself deeply invested in the story and genuinely interested in the characters themselves. Almost every character has a solid backstory tied to a common denominator (no spoilers) and actively tries to become a better version of themselves.

To be more specific, Tohru's two best friends are one of the main reasons the anime is so dear to me now. They are not only absolutely hilarious, but also are incredibly loving and protective of Tohru, basically being the maternal figures in her life. Despite being supporting characters, their strong personalities make you want to know more about them. Again, proof of good storytelling. They reminded me of the kind of friends I have in my life and it was heart-warming to be able to relate.

Fruits Basket is the perfect anime to watch if you are in the mood for something light-hearted with good storytelling. It indulges you in all the warm, fuzzy feels with the perfect balance of drama and suspense. It shows you love that is beyond romantic, highlighting friendships, familial bonds, and even toxic attachment at times.

SHOUT'S BIG GRAND ULTIMATE TOTALLY REAL HOROSCOPE FOR 2021

STAR BOY

For a wonderful stretch of over 5 years, SHOUT published a weekly "horoscope" every week. It was hard work here at the office as we pored through the ancient star charts, spent hours on the numerology, and used complex AI to predict the possible birth years of our future readers and used their birth charts to come up with highly reliable advice, warnings, and premonition.

But with the advent of modern science and the horrendous waste of print space that is Playwatch, SHOUT has not featured horoscopes for about a year. Yet, like Ali in the jungle, like Nelson in jail, like Simpson in the mountains, SHOUT Horoscopes have been down but never out. By popular demand, we are BACK. And we know exactly what you need to hear for a start to 2021 that is not objectively good, but still better than the fecal masterpiece that was 2020!

ARIES

High atop a mountain, a bird nests. It's a beautiful bird, with golden feathers, a hooked beak, and a head that looks like a backwards beret. You are the bird, dear reader. And the nest, your *lep*.

TAURUS

Attila could scarcely believe his eyes as Rome loomed before him, its military might matched if not overshadowed by the weight of its history. He cowered. He looked to the East and saw Constantinople, and it gave him a nosebleed so powerful, he died.

GEMINI

Peace can be achieved in the Middle East only if you put your hand inside a random pocket of a random pair of pants in your closet and find a 5 taka note that is damaged on three corners. Three, not four.



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

CANCER

Posh (!) kids of Dhanmondi laugh at Mohammadpur kids, posh kids of Gulshan laugh at Dhanmondi. Baridhara laughs at Gulshan and it goes on and on until there are only tears, and no more kids.

LEO

Yodelling is not real. I refuse to believe that a human being can produce such noises from the epiglottal vicinity of their mouth cavities, it is a computer trick! Kishore Kumar was a computer!

VIRGO

Niagara falls because it's low in confidence. Give him some words of encouragement, show him that failure is not the be all and end all that everyone says it is. Niagara doesn't need medication, it needs love.

LIBRA

English, as a language, has run its course. You need to come up with a simple mode of universal communication made up

only of sighs, groans, moans and gasps. Consonants are old news. Vowels – that's where the money's at.

SCORPIO

Water will be what causes the third world war. It is why I have been hoarding water, it is also why I have a urine infection and also the reason why I should have graduated. Kids, go to university. Maybe look at the bottom part of this page.

SAGITTARIUS

"Youth is a state of mind" is something that only old people say and if you're old, I feel sorry for you because you are the reason we have climate change. Can you just retire and let 20-year olds do things?

CAPRICORN

Enraged at the suggestion that tit might be a bit too much for tat, he launched himself into a vicious attack of quid, only to be matched by quo. That's when the eyes looked at each other and shut their lids for the night.

AQUARIUS

Annie threw an apple at the doctor every day until he left their neighbourhood and now every time someone has diarrhoea in Proverbland, they die. Is this the future you wanted, (ask Siri who comes up with proverbs)?

PISCES

Raw strength, practiced intellect, and a well calibrated emotional barometer can combine to create a wonderful person. Unless you put in chemical X. Then you have the best cartoon in the world!

Light and air pollution over the Dhaka sky has made it difficult for star boys such as myself to accurately horoscope, but it has not stopped us. Let this be your inspiration, dear reader. You are me, and 2020, your starless sky.

2021 may turn out to be much of the same, but at least you'll be prepared.



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ECHOES BY
ASRAR CHOWDHURY

NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATIONS

Should we make a resolution?

I The celebration of a new year in ancient times would be either at the beginning of a crop season or during harvest. It would welcome spring or autumn. Later, when calendars came into use, a new year would be marked by either a lunar or a solar calendar.

4,000 years ago, the ancient Babylonians were the first to formally celebrate a new year. This was in mid-March during the spring solstice when the crops were planted. It was a 12-day festival known as Akitu. During this time, the Babylonians would welcome a new king or place their loyalty to the existing king. They would repay loans, return things they took from others. This tradition found its way when Emperor Akbar made *Pahela Baishakh* the New Year's Day through which *hal khata* would be opened to mark a "Black Friday".

New Year's celebrations of the ancient Egyptians pre-dates Akitu. It was celebrated when the River Nile was at its peak, blessing the Nile delta with silt that gave birth to the land and the crops. The ancient Persians celebrated the New Year, greeting spring during the spring solstice. It was called Nowruz (new day). The celebration exists till this day in Iran and many parts of Central Asia. The Chinese New Year that



originated during the Shang Dynasty, 3,000 years ago, also greeted spring. The Bengali New Year, *Nobanno*, greeted late autumn when the Aman crops would be harvested.

Julius Caesar marked January 1 as the New Year in honour of the god, Janus who had two heads. One head would look back in the past and one into the future. December 31 and January 1 have become the universal New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, respectively.

II Making a new year's resolution is the

second part of the festivity. The tradition is as old as the Akitu of the Babylonians. Like previous years, you and I will be making resolutions. In recent times, the most popular New Year's resolutions have been to exercise more, lose weight, learn a new skill or hobby, save money, quit a bad habit etc. Maybe you and I made a similar resolution last year.

Nine out of ten people who make resolutions on December 31 in the United States fail to keep them within one or two months into the New Year. Maybe you

and I have also experienced the same. Why could this be happening?

Think carefully. Human emotions and habits aren't like light bulbs you can turn on and they'll remain on for a whole year. To change habits, one needs mental stamina. How much stamina do you have? Only you know the answer to this question. Once you know the answer, then you can realistically set a resolution that you'll be able to keep.

III Let's do a "backward induction". Today is December 31, 2020. Go back one year to December 31, 2019. Remember the promises you made that day? In hindsight, reflect on the entire of 2020. Where and how did you make a mistake such that you couldn't keep your resolution? Only you know the true story. Fast forward to today. Make a realistic pledge to a new year's resolution.

Trying to be happy is the prayer this Echoes makes for you in the coming year and beyond. Happiness is more important than many things in life.

Asrar Chowdhury teaches Economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music and radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

Unwind with Meme Rewind 2020

ABHOY HRIDDO

This year took away a lot from us but do you know what it couldn't stop? Memes. It's the only thing keeping me blessed while being locked in my house. What would we do without memes? Socialise? Connect with our family? Wow, cringe. Here are some of the dankest memes from this cursed year. Gen-Z humour makes no sense, so expect weird things from here on out.

IGHT IMMA HEAD OUT

SpongeBob is one of the greatest cartoons that mankind has ever gifted us with. Now take the concept of SpongeBob and just imagine him getting off a chair while saying, "Ight Imma head out". This achieves the true level of dankness any meme could this year. Combine it with a blurry orange background and ta da, you have achieved comedy.

SMUDGE THE CAT

Cats are funny but do you know what is funnier? A cat staring at two humans confused while one of them is crying and screaming at them. Smudge the cat became really famous this year and unlike most memes, people recreated the emotional versions of these ranging from the death of the cat to the girl going missing. However, this meme does not achieve the intended dankness a funny meme should achieve.



ARE YA WINNING SON?

The meme is simply a dad walking into his son's room while he is playing a video game. You might be asking yourself, how is this exactly funny? Imagine the same but the son is instead hovering in the air and

selling his soul. Now that's pretty dank. **COFFIN DANCE** It's a video that follows pallbearers dancing to Astronomia as they carry a coffin. The meme is exactly what the heading says it is. Unlike most of the other memes on this

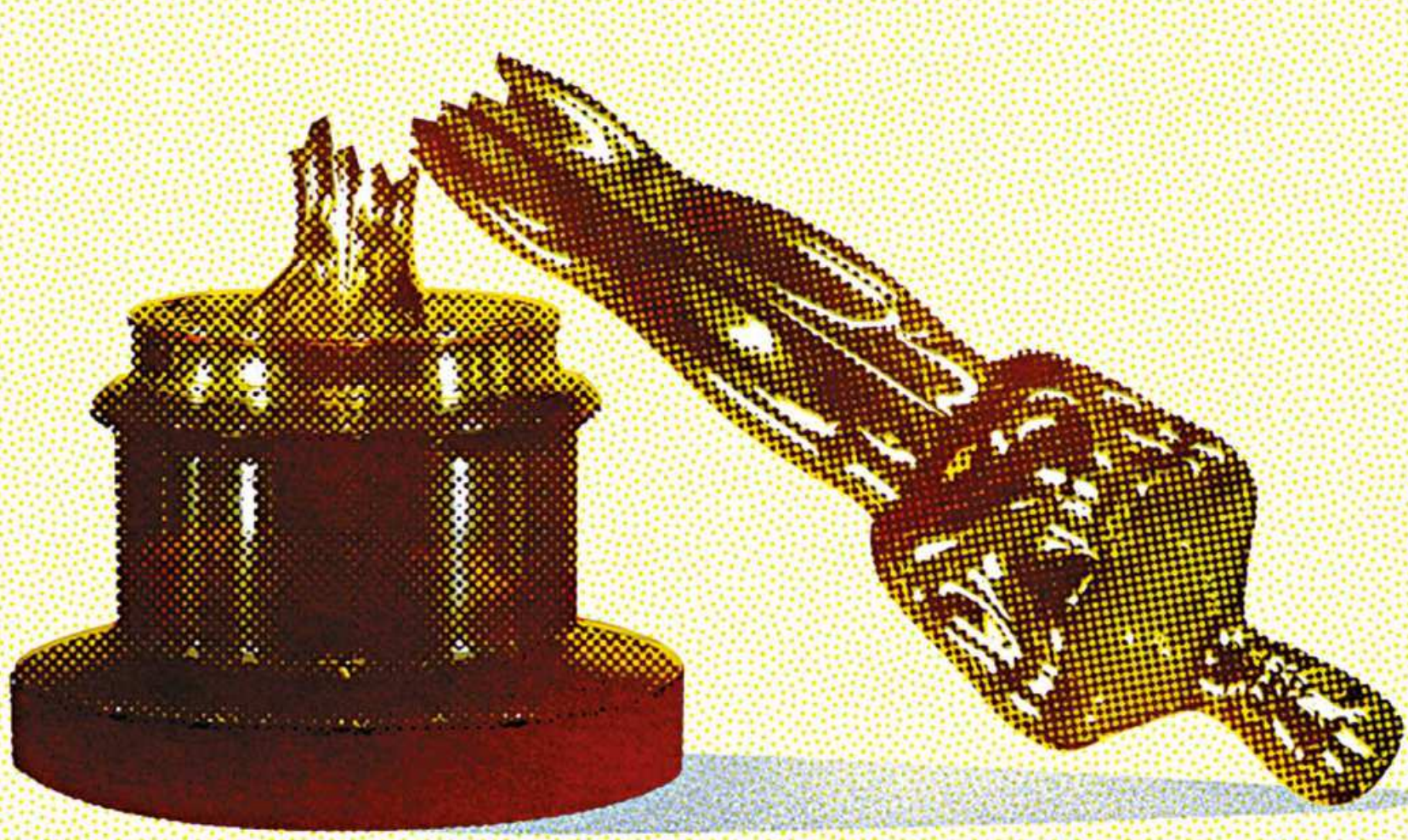
list, this makes sense why it is funny. Just imagine four men dancing with a dead guy on their shoulder. It is a matter of concern how dark humour nowadays is the best kind of humour to Gen-Z but hey, a dank meme is a dank meme.

UNSETTLED TOM

I mean who hasn't watched *Tom and Jerry*. This TV show is a classic which already gives this meme recognition. Someone in Reddit found the perfect picture of Tom and took it right out of context. The beauty of unsettled Tom is that you can always get the readers in the first half. At one point you will think it is just a guy turning off the fan but he actually turns off the helicopter rotors. This truly is high tier dankness. The meme also had quite a long life cycle compared to the others.

Well 2020 is over. Granted you didn't go anywhere or make many memories while sitting home but hey you grew older, that's good news right? Don't worry much, 2021 is here, even though 2020 wasn't dank, keep your heads up and hope for maximum dankness for memes and for your life. Happy new year everyone!

Abhoy Hriddo is a boy who locks himself in his dungeon and stares at his phone all day. Free him from this eternal damnation at abhoyhriddo@gmail.com



THE 2020 AWARDS

MRITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

2020 has been the longest ride — the ride on the bumpiest roller coaster in the amusement park that is our planet. The line was too long and the safety belt not tight at all, and the ride paused for a suspicious amount of time at the top when you were nauseous and you're not quite sure that that was planned. It sure was fun but then you saw the world around you collapsing like New York in Marvel movies and I don't need to go any further. Please take me home.

It's been a long year for everyone and so today, on the last day of the most forgettable year, I want to present my 2020 awards to help me unpack the year that I experienced.

Disclaimer: These are my personal opinions. I'm too tired to think about yours. Feel free to present your own 2020 awards.

BIGGEST PLOT TWIST

The new strain of Covid. This is like when Marv and Harry carefully dodged the buckets of paint Kevin threw at them in *Home Alone 2*, only to be bludgeoned completely by a giant pipe and thrown two storeys down into the basement. We are now living in the basement.

Sima Taparia's not so successful efforts at matchmaking. This lady — yes, from Mumbai, we know — had all that swag for someone who couldn't keep even one couple together after the duration of the show? Also I thought *Indian Matchmaking* would be a story about cricket?

My internet service providers not being the cause of my misery for once. My nagging them for ten minutes straight before realising Messenger was down is going to be

an integral part of my character development for later. And then Google came to play as well. What even?

Winner:

Seeing traffic after going out for the first time in seven months. I genuinely thought everyone else was going to be at home. **BREAKTHROUGH STAR OF THE YEAR** *WhatsApp forwards.* I never realised the power of embarrassingly edited infographics in 72 dpi quality in making our parents believe that if you can hold your breath for 10 seconds without choking, you are Covid-free. Breathlessly amazing.

Scented glitter hand sanitizers. To the people who used to think I was high maintenance for using jasmine and pine cone scented sparkly sanitizer before eating roadside *fuchka*, who's looking stupid now?

Dalgona coffee. Whisk whisk whisk for 15 minutes only to take 256 photos from different angles before you take a sip and realise it's too sweet for you? Fair enough.

Winner:

Zoom meetings. I battle my anxiety to speak only for my voice to be cut off while the screen freezes while I sneeze. Zoom, welcome to your tape. Pay 12.5 dollars a month for a longer acceptance speech.

BIGGEST LET-DOWN

Mermaids. For appearing on the beaches at Cox's Bazar for three whole seconds during lockdown before being driven away by tourists again.

Tourists. Why did you all have to vacation during lockdown and drive the mermaids away?

Online stores selling fancy designer masks. Your masks don't even look like they work. That fabric looks too thin to

be able to hold the amount of dust all those sequins is bound to accumulate.

Winner:

World War III. I was ready; you never came. Next time around it just won't be the same.

MY 2020 HERO

The delivery man. For finding his way to my house with no guidance when I napped for five hours straight and didn't pick up his calls. What technology are they even using?

My mom. For keeping me in the house during my Covid scare despite my risk of infecting her other kids who I think she loves more. Hah.

The teacher of my 8 AM Sociology class. For not reporting me even though I accidentally left the video on when changing my clothes.

Winner:

Frontline workers. Thank you for all your hard work and sacrifice. We would've been in a much scarier place without your actions and efforts. You da real MVP.

BEST DISTRACTION

Joe Exotic's hair in "Tiger King". Someone gave him that haircut and Carole Baskin let them get away with it? I have a headache. Someone get me a Tiger Balm.

"Folklore" and "Evermore". These were my 2020 soundtracks even though I still can't tell any track apart from the next.

The Crown, Season 4. Thank you for telling me exactly how dysfunctional Prince Charles and Princess Diana's marriage was. Now I finally know why my mom sheds a tear every time Princess Di is mentioned.

Winner:

The US Presidential Elections. Boy, what an epic. Figuring out who's winning which state? I haven't done that much math in years. My new alarm tone is CNN's "Key Race Alert" sound.

CLIFFHANGER OF THE YEAR

Performance of the Bangladesh national cricket team. The last time I saw them play... Never mind, I can't remember the last time I saw them play. They did do some Bangladeshi matchmaking.

Finding out who VARs give penalties to. Snakes and ladders is a game of talent according to those who win, one of pure chance to those who lose. Make of that what you will.

My weight. Initially, it was anyone's guess if after binge-eating and doing midnight exercise marathons I'll gain or lose weight. But now I've discovered that the best way to lose weight during the pandemic is to--

Winner:

My education. I have no clue when I'm going to go back to normal classes and I've lost almost all sources of income. Tune in next year to see if I've made progress on my degree. My HSC 2020 candidate brother is happy, though.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The environment. Sorry, we just didn't think of you enough this year.

And now a special performance by Pandemic at the Disco before we show you the trailer of 2021's biggest release, *Harry Potter and the Virus of Corona*.

Mrittika Anan Rahman is a daydreamer trying hard not to run into things while walking. Find her at mrittika.anan@gmail.com

Reimagining business competitions through Battle of Minds 2020



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

When the world as we know it came to a standstill, there came drastic changes in lives, and people were left with no choice but to adapt to the new normal. Campuses were closed physically and schools and universities worldwide shifted to a virtual modality. British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BAT Bangladesh) tackled the challenges head on and began to reimagine tomorrow, re-calibrating to the new normal.

Saad Jashim, Head of HR, BAT Bangladesh said, "Battle of Minds has stood the test of time as the most coveted talent competition in Bangladesh. For over 17 years, the platform has been constantly evolving to make the participant experience contemporary and unique. 2020 was an exceptional year where we had to evolve by a quantum leap in terms of the competition by making it completely virtual while enhancing the participant experience. My congratulations to all the participants and finalists in forging through these unprecedented times. The future indeed holds bright for our resilient and innovative next generation"

The launch of the 17th edition of Battle of Minds was elevated with the theme to "Reimagine Tomorrow". A brainchild of BAT Bangladesh, this competition has been adopted globally in 2018. Every year, Battle of Minds aims to enable potential graduates to prepare for the extremely competitive job market and give them a holistic view of the corporate world. This year, despite the countless adversities, was no different.

The participants and organisers rose to the challenge to do things differently. It started with the first-ever website for Battle

of Minds (battleofminds.org), which houses its rich legacy. Next began the one-of-a-kind virtual roadshows, where participants could virtually interact with peers and BAT managers indulging in a truly virtual experience. More than 20 universities around the country were invited to engage in this virtual platform where they could meet with alumni from their respective universities virtually. On top of that, an alumni connect session was hosted on Facebook, connecting alumni across multiple countries and industries speaking on the impact of Battle of Minds on their professional and personal lives. The team also partnered with SMEs to guide participants with video submission through topics on case solving, industry insights from e-commerce, ride-sharing, skill-building, agriculture, etc. A leadership symposium was conducted with representatives from government, academia, youth development, and corporate -- on shaping leaders for a better tomorrow. This was followed by 2800+ registrations this year and a record number of video submissions to kickstart the competition.

Top 300 participants were chosen to take part in one of a kind virtual boot camp, where a simulation of a virtual field that embodied the BAT premises enabled participants to get the full experience of Battle of Minds' signature boot camp filled with interactive features that allowed them to engage with fellow participants and BAT managers, participate in team-building games, attend virtual speeches from senior managers and grooming sessions from global leaders hailing from Bangladesh. The day-long boot camp also consisted of opportunities that allowed the participants to discover themselves through two-way interactive games and ended with a competi-

tive round of group discussions that paved the way for the most competitive individuals to make their way into the semi-finals. While conducting the whole deal virtually was itself a marvel, BAT also engaged mid to senior-level managers to assess these bright young talents on their journey to corporate grooming through the Battle of Minds platform.

The top 30 that proved themselves after rigorous assessments went forward to the semi-finals where there were two broad cases of reimagining the possibilities in Moringa commercialisation and bridging the skills gap amongst the marginalised communities in Bangladesh. The semi-finalist teams were assigned mentors to best guide them on this journey and set them up on a path to success. Industry experts took virtual sessions to aid the teams with industry-specific know-how to crack the cases.

After the semi-finalist teams pitched their solutions, the top six teams were chosen to execute their ideas on the grand finale. The finalists brought forward ground-breaking ideas and some even more intriguing activations. The finalists representing Institute of Business Administration - University of Dhaka (IBA-DU), Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Islamic University of Technology (IUT), University of Dhaka (DU), Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) and North South University (NSU) showed commendable showmanship and tremendous agility. After an intense and highly competitive race, the very first composite team in the 17 years of Battle of Minds history were crowned the champions.

"Over the past four years of my undergraduate life, I have fostered a love-hate relationship with business competitions and faced numerous marginal heartbreaks. Winning Battle of Minds 2020, the grandest of the lot, at the very end of my journey is as poetic as it can ever get," said Abtahi Iptesam, member of the Champion Team, Battle of Minds 2020.

Another winning member, Fariza Rahman, added, "Winning, in general, is amazing but beating the odds and becoming the first-ever composite team to achieve the feat in Battle of Mind's 17 years of legacy is something else. I will cherish this year forever."

"Breaking the record as the first composite team winning Battle of Minds is something that I will cherish forever. I am glad to represent IUB at this level and hope that it inspires the next generation to do the same," expressed Tazwar Bin Saleh, third winning member of the Champion team.

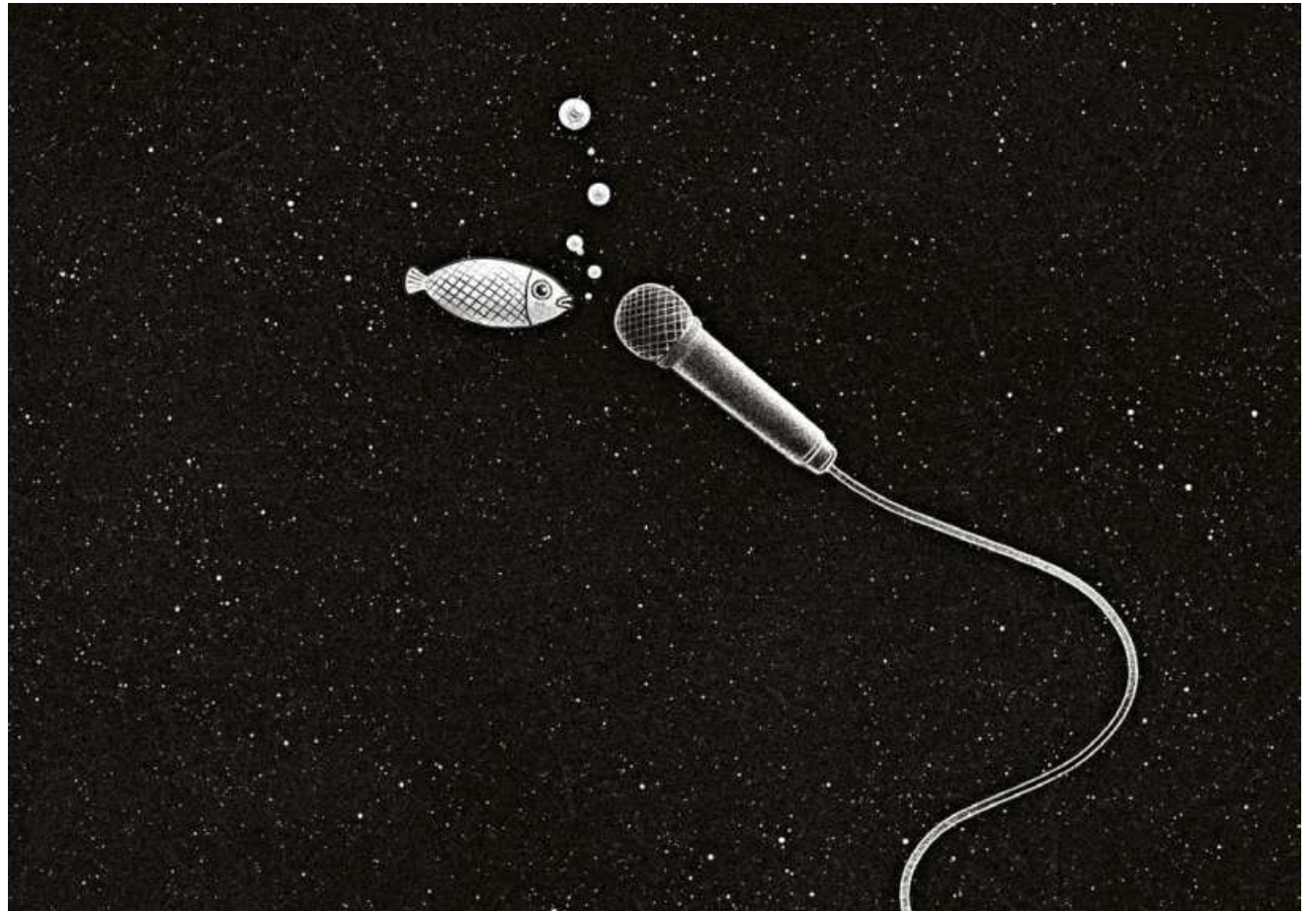
This year was a completely different year for Battle of Minds, and for the aspiring graduates who participated this year. Adrita Datta, Senior HR Business Partner - Operations and Talent, and Captain of the Battle of Minds ship this year, said, "What began as a passion project has definitely grown over the last 17 years, reaching new milestones along the way. We raise the bar for ourselves every time, and this edition of the Battle of Minds is a testament to that. In the face of adversity, the team has reimagined possibilities that gives me confidence that we can embrace any kind of uncertainty with open arms. My heartfelt thanks go to our enthusiastic participants for fuelling our passion and inspiring us to rethink and reimagine how we can craft a unique experience for them every single time."

Did You Sing?

FYROZE SHAFIQUE

Do hearts have strings?
For, Lord! They can play!
At the jazz of the neurons
And at the scent of wet clay.
My sense is just a feather
When it pretends to quote the symphony.
The realities penetrating truths
As fresh as a wound from agony.
Lord, my beats do flow, with every
Leap of faith on the reed flute,
The harp, the tune, the center of the moon
The earth is the tree, lullaby is her fruit.
My soul, its case and everything that accompanies,
Dream in golden when hums come true
Befitting raindrops shatter on the notes
The universe is singing and so are you.

The writer is a freshman at the University of Toronto.



Memories

AFSARA KHAN

"How long will the whole procedure take, doctor?"

"A couple of hours or so, depends on how your brain responds to the treatment."

"It's painless, right?"

"Yes of course, you won't feel a thing."

I reassure myself that everything will be okay. Technology is so much more advanced now, how bad could it be? Anything is better than having to live like this; being chased by those awful memories all the time. I know memories make us who we are and erasing them completely might have repercussions but it's a risk I'm willing to

take. If this operation is successful, I can finally be free. No more staying up all night, playing those memories over and over in my head. I just want it to stop. I just want peace.

"Ma'am? Come with me, we'll need to get you on the chair," a nurse calls me. I follow her into the quiet, cold room full of machines, the smell of disinfectants is nauseating.

"Okay, we're all set. You ready?" the nurse asks. My miserable life flashes before my eyes once again, a sense of nostalgia washes over me. *Am I really ready?*

Afsara Khan studies Architecture at North South University.



THE INTANGIBLE CEILING

ANANDITA HUSSAIN

The most wicked standards are the ones we create for ourselves. With every step, the ceiling gains altitude, I am left reaching higher.

Making up the old excuse,
Someone may be better.

A dream to live, my years to give
Towards a timeless cause.
To make myself more worthy,
A minute can't be lost.

The leaders, artists, teachers,
All have *their* goals in sight
And work so hard to reach them,
While trapped in their own plight.

For people are rather strange
In the way we view ourselves,
A win may no longer apply if
Another acquires a trophy as well.

I wonder if the day will come,
When I choose not to compare
My work and my whole life to those
With an experience I do not share.

Until then I will keep working,
To raise the roof so high –

And hope that I do not end up dead,
With a heart that sighs in discontent.

The most wicked standards are the ones we apply to ourselves.

The writer is a student at Battlefield High School, Virginia, USA.



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

We asked our writers at SHOUT what was the best thing they read this year. Here are the top picks, curated for you.

The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue by V.E. Schwab

"Schwab pens an amazing story about life, love and remembering. Addie, doomed by the gods of old to be forgotten, is one of the most unforgettable characters I've ever come across. Hard recommendation for any fans of Neil Gaiman." – Aaqib Hasib

The Parisian by Isabella Hammad

"The Parisian follows the life of a Palestinian youth who travels to France to study medicine during WWII. His experience of adjusting to a new culture and host family, the joys of learning a subject that intrigues him, and the micro aggressions of racism that he faces from locals resonated deeply with me." – Sarah Bari

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong

"The way Vuong captures every moment and memory, with such raw,

captive prose, a reader is bound to feel deeply connected to his story. He treads carefully on issues of race, gender, masculinity, and identity and it is hard to believe it is a work of fiction as it holds such power and truth. It is truly at once brief and gorgeous." – Nafisa Afsara Chowdhury

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga

"This book doesn't try to romanticise India; a lot of authors have done that in the past. It's very raw. But even within his criticism of Indian life, Adiga depicts the story of class struggles through a guy who escaped the life he was born into, even if it was through unconventional ways. It's very *Slumdog Millionaire*-y and I liked that." – Fariha S Khan

Milkman by Anna Burns

"There's an unsettling feeling conveyed through the protagonist's paranoia at being stalked. The tension gradually grows on you as you're eventually left wondering about the consequences of being the centre of attention in a totalitarian community. But you'll probably have to wrap your head around the colourful Irish vocabulary first." – Rasha Jameel

Submarine by Joe Dunthorne

"Submarine is one of the few coming of age stories where you're not meant to relate to the character. Laughing along to his extremely flawed views is almost as amazing as the movie adaptation's soundtrack." – Wasique Hasan

The Ballad of Songbirds and

Snakes by Suzanne Collins

"Narrated from a different perspective than the original *Hunger Games* series, this book is a much required addition to the saga. It answers some old questions and raises a few new ones. It has suspense and mastery of storytelling, and a good plot." – Upoma Aziz

Gun Island by Amitav Ghosh

"It's not only a very engaging read, but also a relevant one for the twenty-first century. On one hand, there's the climate emergency looming over us. On the other, the plight of Bengali migrants in Italy. Linking the two is a mysterious folktale from the Sundarbans." – Adhora Ahmed

The Molecule of More by Daniel Lieberman and Michael Long

"This is a must read for everyone since products are now designed to cater to people's dopamine systems. The book expands on how everyday things become addictive and how dopamine works as motivation. It really helps to understand how our brain can get hijacked with technology and the consumerism of modern times. I can't recommend this book enough." – Rumman R Kalam

Quiet by Susan Cain

"If you're introverted and feel as though it's a negative trait, please read this book. I hope it helps you identify your strengths in what you believe are your faults due to your quiet nature. Reading it feels like looking into a mirror and being at peace with what you see." – Bushra Zaman

A Special New Year's Eve Just for You

ADHORA AHMED

The Cambridge Dictionary definition of the word "party" is as follows: a social event at which a group of people meet to talk, eat, drink, dance, etc., often in order to celebrate a special occasion.

That's so 2019.

This New Year's Eve, redefine parties. Who says you can only have fun in the presence of people? If you're an introvert, you're probably nodding in affirmative. If you're an extrovert, allow me to prove to you that yes, it's possible to throw a party for a single person.

GUEST LIST

Since the host and the guest of the party is the same person, you can cross this one out. Of course, your annoying siblings will try to freeload. Your challenge will be to make sure that this is *your* party, thrown *only* for yourself. One successful tactic is to lock yourself up in your room. People will obviously knock insistently and try to ruin the mood, but they'll get bored soon and give up.

DECOR

The ideal location for your party is your own room or anywhere you like to spend time alone, preferably indoors. The theme and decoration is entirely up to you, but please, do the bare minimum of cleaning the area. If you want to be basic, just blow a leftover balloon from a previous birthday and have it floating around. If you want to go the extra mile, any kind of fancy lighting will come in handy, whether it's a strobe light or fairy lights. While you're at it, add confetti and streamers too.

FOOD AND DRINKS

This quarantine should have given you ample opportunities to experiment with recipes, or at least the chance to develop your culinary skills. If not, now is the time to try! Remember, since you're the host, you're also in charge of the food. Instead of whole three-course meals, prepare some snacks to munch on through the night. These might include popcorn, chicken nuggets or brownies. If you can't go into the kitchen without risking burning down the house, choose any dry snacks of your liking, such as store-bought cookies, puffed rice or *chanachur*. Make sure you have a few options for soft drinks, because what's a party without them?

ENTERTAINMENT

Don't use this as an excuse to set up a group call with all your friends. You can do this the next day. If you have a Bluetooth speaker, turn it up to dance or to curl up in the corner to your favourite tunes, provided it's not "The Final Countdown". No need to play that song, because your neighbours will do it for you when the clock strikes midnight. If you're not in the mood for music, you can always start bingeing that Netflix series you've been putting off for months. Before you know it, you'll start off another year in the sole company of your own self.

Whatever you choose to do, wish others with caution when the time comes because you know where the overly optimistic wishes got us after last December 31st.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

TONIGHT. 11.59 PM.

Nobody:
Me: **plays Final Countdown**

