

The COVID-19 pandemic really put a damper on a lot of everyday leisure activities. Most of the ones I've seen have been smaller pleasures like their local coffee shops or restaurants closing, casually spending time at their friends' places, going to the cinema, and so on. As an online student of over 5 years, I've been holed up at home the whole time. However, that isn't to say the people I know haven't been affected by the pandemic. We went through it together all the same. Here are 5 of my favorite things that have helped me through the pandemic.

## 1. Visual novels

These are story-driven games that some may argue aren't games at all. However, they're typically interactive to the point where the player gets to choose their own canon endings. Sometimes, it's the same ending as per the writers' wishes, but it's all about the experience the story and characters give you. They've been a big part of my life for as long as I can remember, which makes visual novels akin to my "comfort food."

In 2020 in particular, there was this bundle on a game website "itch.io" that doubled as a fundraiser. It was called "Visual Novel Romance Collection for Black Trans Lives." In the end, they raised more than their goal. Other than that, I'm just super happy to find more LGBTQ+ friendly games.



It took me a bit to finally start one of the games that caught my fancy, "Arcade Spirits," but once I did? It easily became my favorite visual novels of all time. Then I played "When The Night Comes" and **that** easily became a favorite, too. We don't have the typical 4 seasons here in Indonesia, but I essentially played those games for the rest of the Summer (US).



**Arcade Spirits  
on itch.io**

**When The  
Night Comes  
on itch.io**



Like many of my interests, they tend to come and go. This bundle really pulled me back into visual novels, and I kept looking for more amazing ones to get into.

*Please note that the two pictures were taken from their respective itch.io pages.*

## 2. Roleplaying

Now this might be a bit confusing. I doubt many of the ones I roleplay with would reveal that they do to those outside of our interest circle. However, it's basically acting but with words. We play a character (or multiple), come up with plots like your typical novel, and write them amongst ourselves. It's a collaboration between writers. I've been doing this since before I started online schooling, so surely I've written quite a number of novels' worth by now.

A lot of people have different reasons for roleplaying, like all hobbies. Though the exact reasons have changed since I started it, the core reason remains: to escape. I've always used this hobby to live vicariously through the characters I write. I can't go anywhere I want to go, so I write that my characters would be able to.

Early in the pandemic, I found many friends who wanted to write with me and I learned a lot. It was a struggle for multiple reasons, but I think through all that, I learned a lot about relationships and myself. I still tend to think about people and myself as characters who need character development and struggles to grow. Despite a school counselor telling me not to, I still do. It's how I'm able to make sense of things, and roleplaying helps me with that.

## 3. Music

This has been a big part of my life as well. I remember when I didn't even know music could be a career, yet I loved it all the same. I'm the type to listen to the same song on repeat all day for several days if I love it enough. For this reason, playing a certain song can feel like I'm being transported to a different period of my life.

A friend of mine who also roleplayed introduced me to music association for our characters. So, looking back at my favorite songs seem to be telling of the kind of characters I had. However, the songs that I personally had those "character defining moment" vibes you'd see in movies would be: Wannabe by ITZY, Be Kind by Marshmello & Halsey, Wonder by Shawn Mendes, and Achilles Come Down by Gang of Youths. Listening to these songs again in even a few months time will surely get me emotional as I remember what I'd been through in 2020.

#### 4. Animanga (Anime & Manga)

Anime (Japanese cartoons) and manga (Japanese comics) are quite the cultural phenomenon. Like my other hobbies, I've been interested in both for a long time. Every time I come back to them, I end up having a marathon of whatever anime I find myself obsessed with. Manga is the same way with me. They're quite influential.

One anime in particular became an instant favorite of mine—making me cry and feel touched on a constant basis. It's called "Violet Evergarden" and honestly, I would love to get as many people as possible to watch it. It has fantastic writing, characters, and art. It also got me into writing letters (not that I wasn't before, but it strengthened my resolve). As it stands, I hadn't sent out any of them yet, but they're all to be sent together anyway; an accumulation of diary-like letters for a friend of mine.

Similar to my roleplaying reason, these stories allow me to live vicariously through the characters. It's surprisingly easy for me to put myself in their shoes, so to speak. I suppose I'm just surrounded by stories. That seems to make sense for a history major such as myself.

#### 5. Among Us

Last but not least, Among Us. This is a social-deduction game that took the world by storm. I've always loved the mafia game, so this was practically a done-deal for me. Not only would I play it everyday (not anymore but when it first rose in popularity), but I also found a lot of content creators playing it, too. It was really great how even some of the influencers I loved for a long time would come and play it with the newer ones I've come to love.



Creators like PewDiePie and Jacksepticeye on YouTube would play with CorpseHusband, DisguisedToast, and so on. It was essentially one huge collaboration, and I'm quite certain that YouTube's algorithm ate it up.

I got into a group some of my friends created of Among Us players they liked in public lobbies. I didn't get to play with them that much, but I still watch Twitch streamers play it on the daily. Some favorites include 5up, DumbDog, SteveSuptic, and more. They all seemed to rise in popularity due to the game as well, and they're all a joy to watch.

*Please note that the picture was taken from the Innersloth website.*