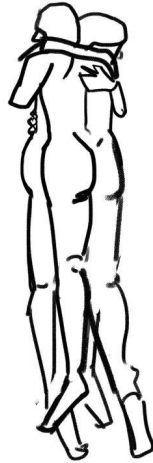


# ISOLATION



A short film project by  
Simon Jenner

In the event of a global pandemic, a young couple move to the UK to start a new life for themselves. Yet when faced with the pressing complications of life in lockdown, it seems the cracks in their relationship might be too much to bear.

Led by a rich coupling of characters, *Isolation* is a suffocating drama set against the backdrop of Covid-19.

## Synopsis

Oxford, present day. After cutting ties with their separate lives in Munich, young couple, MICHELLE and RYAN, are excited to start their new adventure, cohabitating in the midst of a global pandemic.

In a hurried effort to avoid lockdown in Germany, and desperate to avoid separation, our couple make the rash decision to move into a tiny flat owned by Ryan's mother. With barely enough space for one, the couple is forced to share every minute of every day together, creating an echo chamber of anxieties intensified by the intolerable monotony of isolation. Told out of time over the course of a year, with moments of joy contrasted by pain, the couple begins to realise cracks in their relationship; cracks that expose the hard truths of living with loved ones in lockdown.

Ryan struggles to get a job, even after interning for over a year, the Covid crisis has put an immovable blockade on young people in the UK jobs market. While, Michelle, fresh from her degree, pursues a living as a freelance graphic designer. Maintaining a semblance of her career by working for the Instagram magazine she part-timed at during her studies in Munich. She can work from anywhere, while Ryan can find work nowhere.

As the monotony becomes too much to bear, Ryan begins to crack, breaking lockdown restrictions and spending time with his friends, leaving Michelle to fester in the confines of their tiny home.

Michelle misses her friends, her life before the pandemic, her freedom of movement and the early years of her relationship with Ryan. Ryan misses her too but fades it all out in dope smoke and discontent, while Michelle scrolls through Instagram, trying desperately to combat her swelling need for connection through other people's lives.

Ryan falls into a deep pit of depression, leaning heavily on Michelle to help him through his lowest moments. He begins to associate their sex life with his self-worth, barraging Michelle with sexual advances; advances which she cannot reciprocate due to her incapacitating health problems. Ryan begins to yearn for past freedom, lust over his past, resulting in a moment of fallibility when he masterbates to photos of his ex-girlfriend.

Michelle also yearns for her freedom, encouraging their escape, pleading with Ryan to move away from Oxford, away from his home, and towards a future together. But Ryan is stuck, comfortable within his depression. He sees no reason to move out so rashly, promising that as soon as he finds a job, they'll find somewhere to start a new life.

As time moves by, prolonged by the endless nothingness of lockdown, Ryan begins to pull away, placing his own needs above Michelle's and ignoring her growing desperation. He begins to feel that their relationship is pulling him down, that his depression is somehow brought on by Michelle's niggling commitment to their future, to him.

Michelle putrefies within the confines of their apartment. With no friends, no family and only an increasingly absent Ryan to keep her afloat, Michelle borders on the edge of her sanity... and yet, she boulders on, securing a job that will take her away from it all, away from Ryan and out of her toxic environment. Culminating in a final moment, in which Ryan's skewed concerns are brought to the surface, Michelle moves out, taking her life back and leaving him to rot in his disengagement.

## Themes

Over the past few years, young people have been curtailed by impenetrable job markets, depression and the debilitating effects of a world made stagnant by the Covid-19 pandemic. *Isolation* is a distilled version of this story. Brimming with themes of disillusionment, discontent, and, above all else, the hard truth of living in such close proximity with the ones you love; the film will explore the nuances of living so close together, while drifting slowly apart.

Battling their anxieties about the world, their worth and their relationship in tandem, our characters will fall into conflict with one another. Social media plays a huge role in how young people consume news, opinions and lifestyles, presenting a hyperreal perception of reality that, through the commercial tendrils of algorithms, clicks, and likes, is marketed to latch on to an individual's particular insecurities and anxieties. In *Isolation*, Michelle yearns for a sense of normality, scrolling endlessly through Instagram photos - friends, family, influencers, celebrities - as a way to consume life while her's remains unmoving. Similarly, Ryan lusts for the past, perusing photos of his ex, his life before covid, before Michelle. Each of the characters struggle with the monotony of their life in lockdown, and each consumes media as a way to combat the existential feeling of nothingness.

Sexuality plays a key role in *Isolation*, with Ryan and Michelle struggling to manage the ebb and flow of their intimacy while being forced to spend each and every day together. Ryan wants more from Michelle, but due to her anxiety and inescapable gastrointestinal problems, she is unable to reciprocate. Falling into a pit of toxicity and resentment Ryan resorts to weed and alcohol; breaking lockdown restrictions to see friends and stay out late, leaving Michelle to suffer alone, in silence.

As the characters reach their crisis points, provoked by a complete lapse in communication, the film ends with a climactic breakdown in which Michelle finally leaves Ryan who has become inert within his own depression.



## Tone

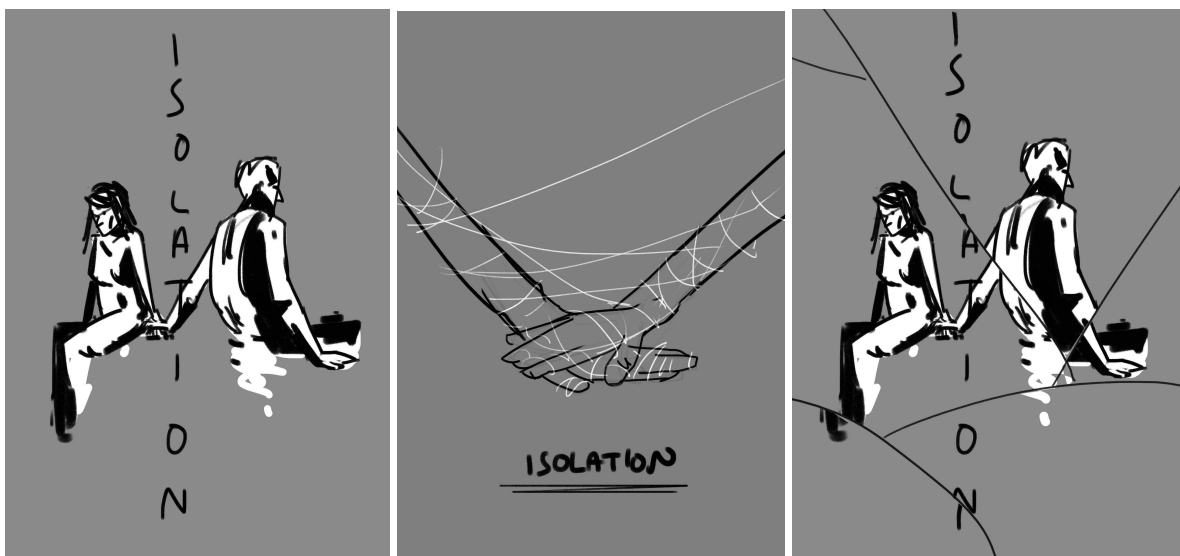
Pregnant silences. Fragmentation. A complete relinquishing of normality as our characters drift through lockdown, unable to move, to experience life, to grow. In keeping with the all-consuming lack that the world has suffered during the Covid pandemic, the tone of *Isolation* will fester along with its characters.

Music will be sparse, and when present, will imbue a feeling of disarray as time moves by, painstakingly slowly, and without rhythm.

The cinematography will be stunted, drifting slowly into the confines of the tiny apartment, and watching, like a fly on the wall, as the characters wrestle with the unmoving nature of life in lockdown. Shots will be minimal, with scenes playing out, sometimes without dialogue, in order to accentuate the silence, the lingering dread that something ugly is broiling under the surface.

There will be moments of joy amid torment as the characters grasp desperately to their relationship - the last remaining aspect of normality before Covid. The story will be told out of time, depicting a year in isolation, with moments arranged in juxtaposition with each other, in order to establish a sense of distortion. It will begin with the break up accompanied by the complete departure of Covid restrictions across the UK, and end with the couple's initial plunge into locked-down cohabitation, excited and nervous to begin a life together; a life which we know will inevitably fall apart.

We will see the most pressing moments in the isolation of the characters, piecing together the nuances of love and codependency, and experiencing how stagnancy can lead to emotional, and mental crisis.



## Visuals

The film must drown in desaturation. From the colours to the lighting to the costumes, *Isolation* is about the all-consuming void of lockdown. Shot in long, lingering takes, in which the camera shall creep into the lives of our characters, the slow and intrusive cinematography will endeavour to invade the lives of our characters, creating a voyeuristic perspective as we witness the complete breakdown of a relationship.

Shot completely within a tiny, ground floor apartment, the setting and aspect ratio (1.33:1) will create a claustrophobic effect, forcing our characters to share every moment of their lives together, and magnifying the cracks in their elongated cohabitation. With hints towards the wider world through social media, television and electronic communication, the world of *Isolation* will feel closed off, imprisoning, informing our characters' descent into despondency and miscommunication.

The dialogue and jokes will be minimal, unexpressive, strewn with hidden meanings and a total lack of complete truth. Yet, through action and body language the actors will hint at the growing tension between our couple, speaking volumes while saying nothing at all, leading to an emotional crisis in which nothing is left unsaid.

Imagine *Scenes From a Marriage* meets season three of *Master of None*, crossed with *Marriage Story* and with a sprinkling of *Limbo*.







## Casting

**Michelle, 20s**, a talented but troubled artist who has spent the majority of her adult life trying to escape the toxicity of her mother. Slicing a life out for herself while studying abroad in Munich, she has hustled herself through years of freelance experience working as a graphic designer for a culture magazine, all the while struggling to maintain her mental health. Plagued by issues of anxiety brought on by toxic relationships and traumatic experiences, Michelle was once closed off; the world and its tumour on her shoulders and no one to share it with. That is, until she met Ryan...

**Ryan, 20s**, a hesitant writer with a heap of anxieties of his own. After excelling in University, and discovering his passion for film, Ryan struggles to find work that suits his dreams. At a chance interview brought about by the tailend of a previous relationship, Ryan gets the opportunity to work as an intern in television production in Munich. Finally believing that he's found his calling, Ryan moves to stay in Munich, cementing that fact when he meets Michelle, who he ends up falling in love with, and eventually, extends his stay for.



## The Couple

After quitting their jobs to go travelling, our couple are curtailed by the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing them to take on lockdown together or apart. They return to England, and move into Ryan's mother's spare flat with the intention of only staying there a week. Sadly, as with all Covid stories, a week turns into a month, a month turns into a year and our couple will never see the life they once yearned for.

**Ryan** loves to laugh, to make fun, to act a fool. A manchild in all the right senses, until those senses become morose and ill-tempered. Constantly unsatisfied with his achievements, Ryan can fall into pits of despair, becoming silent and inert, blaming himself and the world for his torment. Unfortunately, Michelle is part of that world. **Michelle** is a nervous Nellie; kind hearted and gentle to a tee. A soft-spoken soul who finds solace in orchestrating her life by the details. Excels when she feels in control, spirals when she doesn't. Brimming with familial complexities, Michelle feels at home with Ryan, but struggles to face it when that home becomes uninhabitable.

Both strewn with fallibilities, and both as desperate as the other, our couple once excelled together - a propulsive power couple looking to conquer the world with their love. Yet, when restrained by the forces of a global lockdown, it seems our couple's patience is put to the test, projecting the cracks in a relationship - a relationship once strong, now burdened with life in isolation.



## Marketing

*Isolation* will resonate with people whose lives have been affected by Covid. Careers and ambitions left to the wayside, lives upturned by joblessness and separation, relationships with cracks made unavoidable by the microscopic pressure of living and working from home. It will encapsulate that familiar sense of dread which we've all felt over the past few years. Yet, more pertinently, the film will provide a glimpse at a shared life uprooted by lockdown, elucidating on the experience of millions of young people around the world. That at the cusp of monumental life changes, at the onset of exciting new relationships, younger generations have been forced to enter a voluntary deep freeze, one which may affect their lives forever. A societal long-Covid, in which time is lost and livelihoods disfigured.

All of this, along with social media and the effects of supping from the smorgasbord of lifestyles on Instagram and Facebook, make *Isolation* the perfect depiction of how lives are led and subsequently consumed in the digital age. It will present a realistic look at the domestic effect of the pandemic, and through an intimate lens, will provide poignant moments of desperation and true-to-life humanity.



Much like Marc Mundan's *Help* (2021), the Jack Thorne-penned Covid-19 drama produced by Channel 4, *Isolation* will endeavour to depict a moment of crisis in lockdown. With record-breaking viewing figures, pulling in an unprecedented 1.1 million on Channel 4's streaming service, All 4, only four days after becoming available, *Help* proved that Covid stories are relevant; Covid stories are revealing; Covid stories are healing and need to be told.

Our film will present adult themes via a duo of young characters, providing a mature outlook through a maturing perspective. It will carry the weight of both Ingmar Bergman's 1974 televisual tour-de-force, *Scenes from a Marriage*, and HBO's 2021 remake, as a thematic launching pad and visual twin. Both versions of Bergman's drama, about a husband and wife whose relationship begins to fall apart at the seams, have enjoyed largescale success. The original was nominated for a Bafta in 1976, and the remake, a Primetime Emmy, in 2022.



While *Isolation* is our first attempt at dealing with the emotionally complexity seen in these productions, we believe a little ambition goes a long way in narrative storytelling. Told through the naive viewpoint of a young couple at the dawn of adulthood, our film will find its footing through the UK's short film festival route, with the aim of adhering to the commissioning guidelines of Film4.

## Filmmaker Profiles



### **Simon Jenner: Director, Writer, Producer**

For the past two years, Simon has worked as a senior writer for the magazines, Sabukaru Online, Japan Nakama and Beneficial Shock!, producing articles that aspire to bring underrepresented art to a fast-growing readership. Currently studying for an MA in Screen Production (Screenwriting) at the University of the West of England, and with a First Class Honours degree in English from Falmouth University, Simon is passionate storyteller with a dream of film.



### **Tani Toluwa: Actor**

With notable roles such as Nakiru, a social justice teen from Uganda, in a series of short films for BBC Bitesize and the supporting role of Ursula - a bubbly, mischievous uni student in the award-winning, modern day feature adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado* (2022), Tani is an emerging star in the UK film and TV industry. With a passion for character and a penchant for comedy, she is currently pursuing an MA in Screen Production (Screenwriting) at the University of the West of England.



**Alec Cook: Actor**

A budding thespian throughout his teenage years who went on to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Alec has starred in multiple student productions. Most recently as Dan, the lead role in Patrick Marber’s *Closer*, and as Enobarbus in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. A dramaturgist with an eye for nuance and a dedication to dialogue, Alec is excited to take the leap into the sea of screen acting once more.



**Carson Brynie: Cinematographer**

A film graduate of the University of Glasgow, with a First-Class Honours degree in English Literature and Film/TV Studies, Carson is currently studying for an MA in Screen Production (Documentary) at The University of the West of England. Excelling creatively in various production roles, such as the boom operator for the award-nominated student short, *Pink Violet* (2020), and as a post-production runner at Films at 59, Carson has also directed, shot and produced a number of his own documentary short films.