

Fairytale family feel the effects

The tentacles of COVID-19 have moved quickly to get a grasp on the world and slow a lot of everyday life to a halt.

One boarding house that has felt the impact as much if not more than many is the small hostelry run by Ms Snow White in Fairytown. This used to be an idyllic rural village, lying in Enchanted Forest, a large conservation estate in Dreamworld. But the march of time and progress has brought considerable change to Ms White's world. Much of the forest has been converted to high-intensity pastoral land, with occasional lifestyle blocks for city-dwellers seeking a quieter life.

Ms White's tenants are a small group of staturely challenged men who have been boarding with her for many years. In the past, the seven men have been heavily involved in the extractive industries, particularly gold mining but a downturn in that sector has forced them to diversify their employment in recent times.

COVID-19 has affected them in a number of different ways.

Doc, the oldest of the seven, has returned to his former calling and is working long shifts for the local DHB testing for the virus and supporting the health responses.

Sneezy has been forced to self-isolate in Ms White's garden shed, while his mucal matter is tested for the virus – there's a slight chance he may have it following his recent excursion overseas on the budget AN Tour travel package (takes in WuhAN, TeherAN and MilAN). He is regularly susceptible to such ailments, however, and if it's not COVID-19 this time round he'll be first in line for a vaccine once it emerges.

Like his fellow boarders (Doc aside), **Grumpy** has struggled with the government requirement to work from home. Following the mining decline, he found a new calling as a consumer advocate, arguing cases for disgruntled purchasers at a corporate level and regularly leading picket lines. Such work has since dried up. He has kept busy, however, following and creating conspiracy theories on line.

Sleepy has probably coped best with the stay at home rule. Already on a benefit for his persistent narcolepsy, he tends to stay in bed contentedly tuning into his easy-listening playlists on spotify and chugging regular amounts of chamomile tea.

One of the more entrepreneurial boarders, **Happy** was thriving till the crisis, running his craft-brewing business out of a Fairytown café. The home enforcement rules and obligatory café shutdown has meant a temporary halt on his growth plans but he has taken advantage of Sneezy's enforced exile to set up a small micro-brewing machine in the vacant bedroom along with an experimental medicinal cannabis plot in the wardrobe.

Assisting him in the enterprise is **Dopey**, who has struggled for many years to find employment post the mining slow but has built up considerable informal knowledge around the marketing and distribution of medicinal products.

Finally, there's **Bashful**, another for whom self-isolation holds few fears. While still quite shy, he's made great strides through Tinder and regularly communicates online with a young Nigerian girl he sends a small amount of money to from time to time to support her education – and post the crisis has plans to pay for her to fly to NZ to marry him.

It may not be widely known but there are three others from the group who went overseas very early in the piece. When the crisis hit, they did plan to return but those plans are up in the air. **Trippy**, who went to India to find enlightenment, actually founded an ashram that specialised in helping young women discover themselves and manufacture clothing. **Earnest**, the most scholarly of the original group, got to England and gained several degrees in Ancient Psychology and Forensic Sociology, achieving an associate professorship at a university in the Outer Hebrides. Finally, **Murky**, who struggled with life in a country that has laws and police, found a fulfilling role as an IT call centre specialist and marketer and bitcoin trader in the Ukraine.

Unfortunately, getting the 10-some back together has been frustrated by rules disallowing gatherings of 10 or more people; Murky also has several warrants out from Interpol while three British families are currently trying to locate Trippy for information on their daughters.

Ms White says for all the uncertainty her boarders do remain relatively positive about the future. "They enjoy each other's company and often break into song, though it's sad not to hear that refrain of 'Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go...' when they'd head off in the morning. Now it's more likely to be 'Lie low, lie low, we're out of work you know...'" Still, she says, she's looking forward to sampling Happy's new avocado cider and Bashful has apparently found a match for her online – an airline pilot who's looking for new horizons.