

Blue Whale: The Game

What is it?

'Blue whale' is pro-suicide group which psychologically provokes children to take on the 'blue whale game'. After extensive Open Source research, it has been found that the game is in fact a secretive suicide challenge, otherwise known as a 'group of death' or 'cult' which encourages players to take part in self-destructive tasks, and eventually commit suicide.

The name is derived from the phenomenon that blue whales beach themselves to die in an act of suicide (beaching).

It may also be known as СИНИЙ КИТ (Russian), Ballena Azul (Spanish) or 'F57' or 'F58' – its original name.

The game originated from Russia in 2015, and has since been trending in central Asian countries like India, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, with cases also in the USA and Brazil.

How is it accessed?

It is accessed through social media sites by players reaching out to administrators, who are also known as 'curators'. These administrators and curators are supposedly the 'brains' behind the game, and are also the prime suspects in encouraging suicides and self-harm.

Budding players must request to 'play' or 'take on the blue whale' – it has been reported on Russian site 'VKontakte' players post "I want to play a game" as their status in order to be contacted by administrators. Players are supposedly told to download an app which is the game itself – there are conspiracies that once the app is downloaded, it cannot be deleted and because it's downloaded from the internet, it contains malware viruses which can hack personal data and steal information about the players.

It has been reported that curators are contacting players through Facebook groups where they can target several, if not hundreds of people at once. These groups are private communities which express depressive content, mainly self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Major-General Alexey Moshkov, head of anti-computer crime K department in the Russian Interior Ministry, said that there were a total 1,339 suicide groups, which combined, have an audience of 12,000 with over 2000,000 posts (dated December 2017).

When searching blue whale on sites such as YouTube, numerous people had created videos of their experiences of the game. It is unknown as to whether these are legitimate sources of people of have played the game.

What does it involve?

A group administrator (curator) instructs players to follow a series of daily tasks in order to complete the game, brainwashing vulnerable children into fulfilling tasks over a period of 50 days.

Tasks could be as simple as watching a horror film or waking up in the early hours of the morning. As time goes on, the game gradually takes an extremely dark turn, encouraging members to self-harm, more specifically to carve the 'blue whale' into their skin.

Some of the reported tasks range from waking up specifically at 04:20am to watch psychedelic videos sent by the curator, drawing pictures of whales, then the tasks escalate to carving symbols into skin, standing on the edge of roofs, going to railways, and killing animals. The player must evidence their tasks by sending a photo to the curator to prove that they have completed it. Some of the stranger tasks include being told to talk with a 'cipher', and meetings to talk with a 'whale'. There is no confirmation to what actually is meant by a 'cipher' or 'whale' and what these meetings consist of.

From online sources, it has been uncovered that from days 30 to 49, players are told to wake up at 04:20am every day and watch scary videos, which accumulates tiredness and decreased ability to make clear decisions.

On the 50th day, players are instructed to commit suicide.

Jumping off a building or in front of a train have been common specified causes of death in suspected cases. Before this one final step, players are told to delete all correspondence between themselves and the curator.

Players are reportedly told they are not allowed to speak of the game to the outside world or 'someone will come after them' which is explained through direct messages between the player and administrator. This is because when players sign up to the game, personal information has to be entered to sign up. This then imposes a level of threat to the players, because if they do not follow the tasks set, this information is used against them. Some players have reported threats against their families for discontinuing the game. Players are told that once they begin the game, they cannot leave. During the tasks, the curator bullies the player by putting them down, telling them that their 'life is awful' and it 'would never get better', 'their parents didn't care about them' and so on.

The issues

Children and teenagers are drawn to playing the game when they may be experiencing known mental health symptoms such as feeling low, depression, anxiety,

lack of focus/interest and self-esteem issues. Their simple curiosity lures them to take on challenges, having been psychologically manipulated by the curators.

Children are more vulnerable online as the virtual world allows them to act freely without the restrictions of the real world. Players are said to be seeking validation from curators and other players and made to feel that they are a part of something big and given a sense of purpose.

There is the worry that younger children will access the content, not understanding the horrific nature of the game and what the consequences are.

There is also the issues that children find it difficult to stand up to peer pressure, especially when threats are being made against them.

On behalf of the Government and the Police, there is no control over admins of the platform – where it came from and who created it.

For children who have become a part of the game and since withdrew from its dark challenges; there is fear of judgement and lack of support.

Related deaths and cases

As of yet, blue whale has not been proven to be 'directly responsible' for any suicides – although there is speculation around this.

The closest to home is a suspected death in Ireland – Conor Wilmot, 13, of Co Clare, was believed to have taken part in the challenge and consequently committed suicide on the 11th of May 2017. His family and school dismisses claims he was bullied.

Investigative Russian newspaper 'Novaya Gazeta' reported a count of 130 child/teen suicides over a period of 6 months between November 2015 and April 2016. The game is said to be responsible for the deaths of 16 schoolgirls.

Below details suicides and attempted suicides with a suspected link to the game.

Russia:

- Infamous cases of Russian schoolgirls, Yulia Konstantinova, 15, and Veronika Volkova, 16, who reportedly fell to their deaths from the roof of a 14-storey apartment. Yulia left a note saying 'end' with a picture of a blue whale on her social media account on 'Instagram'. Two teenage boys were arrested after the event, having been found filming the double suicide.
- Anna K was found hanged after an obsession with the game.
- Diane Kuznetsova, 16, died after falling from a 9-storey building, although her father believes she was pushed. It is known she was involved with the game.
- Angelina Davydova, 12, fell to her death from 14th floor block of flats on

Christmas day in 2015, after logging onto a user group called 'Wake me up at 4.20' which had a million subscribers. She had posted on her social media sites '*The quest is over. There's just one step to be made*', and '*I did not think it would be so scary to jump. Just one step forward and everything is done. But this very step is so difficult to make*'.

- Kristina K, 15, tried to overdose on drugs and then was found hanged 5 days later in Russia.
- 15 year old girl Ekaterina, critically injured after falling from a fifth floor flat in Siberia.
- 14 year old girl tried to throw herself under a commuter train in Chita.
- Two Russian half-sisters, Maria Vinogradova, 12, and Anastasia Svetozarova, 15, reportedly jumped to their deaths after playing the game. They were both found dead on the ground below a 10-storey apartment block where they lived. It is reported that Maria was 'upset and depressed' after her mother took to a gynaecologist after starting a relationship with a boy. Before she died, she supposedly posted a picture of the boy saying "*Forgive me, please. I love you so much. I know you will find somebody better than me.*" Anastasia also sent a message saying "*Goodbye to everyone! I love you all! This is true. Love you very very much.*"

Europe:

- 13 year old boy saved from killing himself after being found on the edge of a roof in Ukraine.
- 15 year old Vilena Piven jumped from the 13th floor of a building in Mariupol, Ukraine. Classmates stated she was shy and was seen with cuts on her arm.
- 15 year old girl in Barcelona.

India:

- Karan Thakur found hanging from a ceiling fan in his sector-4 house on Saturday 23rd September. Panchkula police confirmed he was playing the Blue Whale game.
- Jharsugada: A nursing girl student was rescued while she tried to kill herself as she had been allegedly playing the Blue Whale game. She had cut her wrists in a blade after consuming sedatives. First suspected blue whale game related incident in Jharsugada district.
- Kendriya Vidyalaya of Belagave, Karnatake – 20 students, 16 boys and 4 girls, found with cuts to their hands which is being seen on line with blue whale. They

eventually said they had deliberately cut themselves so that they could claim to be playing the online game.

- Madhya Pradesh Raigarh district – Wrote in his class 10 exams that he was afraid to end his life as part of the final task of the game.
- Satvik Pandey, 17, was killed when struck by train on Saturday 3rd September. Police waiting for his phone to be unlocked.
- Manpreet Sahans, 14, jumped of a roof terrace at his home in Andheri East, Mumbai.
- 35 year old married woman and 20 year old college student claimed that they are addicted to blue whale and have approached doctors at general hospital, sector 6, seeking immediate treatment.
- Nishant, 13, committed suicide by banging his head against a moving train. Coaxed his friend Anant however he didn't have a smart phone which was apparently a saviour.
- 17 year old girl in India tried to kill herself twice over two days – jumped into a lake after taking a near fatal drug overdose in Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

North and South America:

- 16 year old in Georgia, USA.
- 14 year old boy in Argentina.

According to 'The Daily Mail', there have been 3 cases in the USA, 5 in India, around a dozen in Brazil and 20 suicides in Russia which have been 'officially linked to the game'.

Suspects

The game is said to have been created by a group of people aiming to increase suicide rates in several places.

21 year old male Philipp Budeikin, who also goes by the second name Lis and Fox, is said to be the designer of the game. He has since been charged with organising 8 groups between 2013 and 2016 which promote suicide. He was reportedly a psychology student who was expelled from university.

He has now confessed to the offences and had told Russian investigators that the female victims were 'happy to die' and were 'biological waste' who would cause harm to society, and that he was 'cleansing society'. He has stated that there are 17 suicides he knew of, which related to the game, but claimed another 28 were ready to commit suicide. It is reported that young girls have most likely 'fallen in love' with the creator of the game, Budeikin, who showed them attention and a very concerning

type of 'love'. He was jailed for 3 years for inciting young people to kill themselves, which officially includes 2 girls who played the game, despite confessing to 17 known suicides.

After the death of Kristina K in July 2017, a 26 year old postman Ilya Sidorov/Spartak was arrested and confessed to being the 'online coach' who brainwashed her to commit suicide. Amidst this report, the suspect was apparently in prison when she died.

On the 30th August 2017, it has been reported that a 17 year old Russian girl has been arrested accused of being the 'mastermind' behind the game. The Sun newspaper reports children as young as 14 are behind the so called 'death groups'.

Major-General Alexey Moshkov, mentioned earlier, estimates that there are 230 criminal cases, with 19 'masterminds' detained so far.

Preventative measures

Searching the hashtag on Instagram (#bluewhale) will bring up a notification pop up, warning users of pictures. The downfall to this is that it allows users 'to see posts anyway' if they click accept. The same situation occurs with Tumblr.

A school in Basildon alerted Essex Police.

Alert parents to monitor their children's social media accounts. Instruct social media users to turn their profiles to private and not to download any strange links or apps from people they don't know.

Keep an eye on children's behaviour and their routines – make them aware of the dangers online. Check their social media for unusual post – it's reported players of the game may post pictures of their legs dangling over a roof or building, train tracks, cuts to skin and most evidential, a blue whale.

Promote support – children need to know that people are there if they feel lost, lonely or depressed, who will provide support in a non-judgemental way.

The British version - 'Anonymous Feedback' apps and sites – Ask.fm

Online bullying has contributed massively to the causes of suicides in young teenagers. With a range of platforms to target victims, bullies can hide behind a screen and be virtually unknown to their victim – and what makes it worse is that they made not even know who they're attacking. One of the most unforgettable cases of online bullying was that of Canadian teen **Amanda Todd**. She received numerous amounts of abuse and harassment online, and was even a victim of revenge porn. Her response was a YouTube video, with her story written on flashcards, of how she'd been blackmailed and bullied, how she had no support or friends, how her anxiety and depression got so bad she drank bleach in a bid to kill herself. After her death, her video went viral to the point it reached more than 17 million views. In 2016, the

Dutch courts approved the extradition of Dutchman Aydin C to stand trial in Canada, after he published photos of her breasts online and blackmailed her.

Children and parents need to be vigilant about the use of 'honesty' sites which allow anonymous feedback and in many cases 'hate'. 'Anonymous feedback' sites are designed to allow question and answer based communication with options of anonymity.

Sarahah is a new app which allows people to leave anonymous comments on your profile which you **CAN'T** reply to. The homepage of the website states that it allows you to 'get honest feedback from your co-workers and friends'. It was created by Computer Scientist Zainanlabdin Tawif of Saudi Arabia, and already has 90 million registered users.

It says 'At Work' you can 'enhance your areas of strength' and 'strengthen areas for improvement'. 'With Your Friends' you can 'improve your friendship by discovering your strengths and areas for improvements' and 'let your friends be honest with you'.

This opens a whole new portal for cyber-bullying where the victim is potentially bombarded with abusive content from anonymous unknown sources with no right to defend themselves and no way of knowing who sent the messages.

In its defence, the app is classified as '17+' therefore users must be over the age of 17 to download the app; however there is no age verification measures.

The app currently has a 2.5 star rating from 390 reviews on iTunes App Store as of the 28th September 2017. Many users have expressed concerns of hateful messages that 'upset people or make them feel worthless' and the need that the app should require a valid email address when posting anonymously so hateful comments by users can be traced and blocked. The same general opinion is shown through various comments that this app is a gateway for cyber bullying and should be removed immediately. Others oppose the end of the app stating that 'you shouldn't download it if you don't expect to be bullied', 'if you don't like it, delete it' and the commonly used example 'no-one's got a gun to your head'.

Other anonymous feedback sites such as **Ask.fm**, **formspring** or **spring.me**, or **Sayat.me**, allow named and anonymous users to ask questions. These apps allow users to respond to questions and comment and can also be linked to social network sites such as Facebook.

Sayat.me which briefly went viral early 2017, has been taken offline by its Estonian administrators as it is in the centre of a police investigation in East Yorkshire, regarding the death of a teenage boy. The app is linked to the death of **George Hessay**, 15, who committed suicide after receiving abuse from peers via the app.

Ask.fm is an 'question and answer' based website which allows users to ask each other questions and answers, anonymously if they want. The Latvian based site was founded in 2010 by Russian brothers Ilja and Mark Terebin and has 65 million users. The site was originally set up to allow friends find out more about each other, asking questions such as '*If you could be invisible for a day, what would you do?*' or '*What's the most embarrassing thing you've done?*' The innocent intentions of the website

have since been twisted by the use of anonymous questioning to bully others online and send sexual and insulting messages. Experts have described the site as a 'Stalker's paradise'. The issue with these sites is that there are no real identity controls unlike sites like Facebook and Twitter; you don't have to connect your account to any other media and it even allows unregistered users to ask a questions. Bullying without a trace. Websites like these have sparked a new concern of 'bullycide' – a term to identify those who commit suicide as a result of bullying.

There have been several linked suicides to **Ask.fm** – 3 cases in Italy, 2 in Croatia, 2 cases of suicides in Florida, USA, 2 in Canada, and more worryingly the remaining 7 cases have been closer to home, in England, Scotland and Ireland.

- **Hannah Smith**, of Leicestershire, was 14 when she hanged herself after being bullied through the site in August 2013. What's worse is that the bullying continued even after her death. Her father has campaigned to ban anonymity on these types of website to stop bullies hiding their true identities. She had posted a picture holding a notebook with a quote saying "*You think you want to die, but in reality you just want to be saved*" days before her death. An inquest into her death had heard that Leicestershire Police found 'no evidence' of bullying and on the 'balance of probabilities', Hannah had probably sent the abusive messages herself which included "*drink bleach*" and "*go get cancer*". However, Hannah's father argued saying she used to be a 'bubbly, happy' person until she was attacked at a party by a former friend, who 'smashed' her head against a wall. Since Hannah's death, the site has added a reporting button which generates a response to online harassment within 24 hours.
- **Joshua Unsworth**, 15, hanged himself in his garden in Lancashire in 2013 after complaining of online bullying through **Ask.fm**. His father had looked into his account and posted a message demanding an apology and threatening to report the abuse to the police.
- **Anthony Stubbs** was a school prefect and had just become a young dad to a little girl. However late 2012, he went missing after telling his girlfriend he was going to his mum's house. 7 weeks later in January 2013, he was found hanged in woodlands nearby, at only 16 years old. Anthony and his girlfriend received abuse over their relationship and he was believed to be continually bullied by girls over his sexuality as a bisexual.
- **Izzy Dix**, 14, was found hanged in her room in September 2013 after a spate of face-to-face and online bullying from boys and girls at school because of her Australian accent, her ambitions to go to Oxford and the fact she refused to wear short skirts unlike other girls. Her mother and her friends blamed online sites for bullying, despite Devon & Cornwall police finding 'no evidence of cyber-bullying'. Even after her death, her mother became a victim of trolls who taunted her about her daughter's suicide. Izzy had written a poem titled 'I Give Up', about her experience of bullying which was released after her death.
- **Daniel Perry**, 17, died in July 2013 when he jumped from the Forth Road Bridge in Scotland. Daniel was involved in a 'sextortion' scam (sexual

blackmail) with a 'girl' who he believed he was having an online relationship with via Skype. The BBC traced the blackmail to two Filipino men online who recorded sexual encounters online and threatened to make them public unless he paid money. Although this is a separate event to the anonymous feedback site, Daniel had previously been urged to kill himself through **Ask.fm** with people telling him "*kill yourself mate*" and "*you need to let a blade meet your throat*".

- **Ciara Pugsley** was just 15 when she was found dead in woodlands in County Leitrim in September 2012. Ciara had been receiving numerous abusive comments through **Ask.fm**.
- A month later, **Erin Gallagher**, 13, took her life in her home in Co Donegal, Ireland, after personally naming **Ask.fm** as a reason for her death in a suicide note found by her mother. Erin had previously complained to her school regarding comments posted on the site, followed by several arguments and altercations at school between Erin, her sister and other pupils, and even a parent. This saw Erin and 2 other pupils suspended from school. Investigators had been granted a DDP request which gave full access to Erin's account, however no IP addresses could be obtained from the messages as the internet service providers had deleted the data. 45 days later, Erin's older sister, **Shannon Gallagher**, 15, took her own because she couldn't bear to live without her sister. It is believed Shannon tried to take her life four days prior to Erin's suicide.

Also on these sites, '**suicide lists**' are being promoted – users write a list of things that they've done to themselves or had done to them, and ask other users to 'like' if they have felt or done the same. For example:

- Been bullied
- Disliked yourself
- Thought about suicide

The content posted onto a user's personal page is not monitored, but there is disclaimer issued to say "*if you receive a question that makes you uncomfortable for any reason, do not respond to the question*". The websites are also not covered by British online safety guidelines as Ask.fm is based in Latvia. Founder Mark Terebin, claimed that 90% of the cyber-bullying cases had arisen from children posting nasty comments to themselves as a means to get attention and appeared to suggest that British children were to blame for the tragedies as they were 'more cruel' than teenagers from other countries.

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