

october 2002 vol.15

# hype change

I saw a dog the other day.

There was no way I could've missed it. My family and I were turning off the road into a petrol station along Dunearn Road some months ago.

And there it stood - a miniature collie, with soft brown-and-white fur and gentle brown eyes, effortlessly graceful and elegant, as collies usually are.

Except that there was something different about this one.

As the car turned in, I remember looking back at the collie, watching as that graceful head constantly shifted left, then right, and then left again. It couldn't keep still, taking a few steps in one direction, then back again as cars sped past constantly.

Our car pulled up to one of the pumps. I got out. The collie was now walking back towards the station, but swerved away as we tried to get close to check for a collar. Undeterred, we tried again, but the agitated dog kept its distance.

That was when I found out what had happened. Noticing our interest in the dog, one of the station attendants came up and shared his story. Not too long ago, a woman had driven up, stopping beside the station. The passenger side door opened, the collie was unceremoniously dumped on the road. The door closed. The car drove off.

I made a decision - that collie would not be unwanted. Taking my Jack Russell's crate out from the car, we approached the dog, hoping to pen it in and get it into the crate. The dog freaked, dashing across the busy road, disappearing into the bushes along the divider. It was only by sheer luck or divine intervention that it wasn't knocked down.

We drove around for a while after that, circling both sides of the road in the hope of spotting that collie.

I never saw the dog again.

The events that transpired that Sunday morning have been ingrained in my memory since, and left me feeling very bitter at the callous way these things happen. It's one thing to read about animal abandonment in the papers, but to actually witness it happening - it changes you.

Now, I see my Jack Russell lying on its back, legs up in the air as though asking for a quick belly scratch. I think of the collie and those which share its fate. I wonder what happened to it, hoping that somehow it managed to get across the other side of the road safely. I hope that some kind soul living in the lush condominiums there would find it in his or her heart to do what I wanted to do for that dog.

Most of all, I hope that people realise,

And once they realise... that they can change.

aaron lye

## Changing Hearts

sue-ann woo

A friend of mine harbours a great distaste for coins. Apparently the jingling, jangling metal discs that seem to have inspired many a "Sole!" and "Save!" advertisement hold no such charms for him. "Heavy, cumbersome and ever so noisy" is a part of the litany oft heard from him.

Unfortunately, he's quite the spendthrift - with a penchant for little things. A pencil here, a pen there, need that notebook, one more pen couldn't hurt. And thus he actually attracts small change like a magnet.

He then desperately tries to foist his one and five cent coins onto the unsuspecting public, none too subtly by offering to change someone's two or five dollars with the very same. Not surprisingly the fish don't bite.

Heart heavy and pockets jangling a mocking merry, he returns home and dumps all his coins into a bowl sitting on his table.

Day after day. Week after week.

A week before end-month, he looks into his wallet, like most spendthrift students, finds it dimly empty. Sighing he shuffles over to his table and the afore-mentioned bowl hoping against hope to find enough money to see him comfortably to the end of the month.

What had started out as a small pile of jingling jangling nuisance with minimal value seemed to have miraculously grown into a heap of wealth.

Everything starts small.

syeda sana rahman

## Small Change

## Moving On

I am not one of the most resilient people. In fact, I shudder at the thought of anything upsetting my fixed and stable neuron state of being. By some (mis)fortune however, I often find myself plucked out of the comfort zone that I wished I could dwell in forever.

I think it hits you round about when you're sixteen. That's when you first feel that pit in your tummy, the sudden realisation that you cannot control everything, the start of a ride that will take you to places that will shape you.

My best friend packed her bags and travelled half the globe to become a white-coated, molecule-probing scientist. I was upset. For the fussy and over-suspicious character that I was and probably still am, a good friend is a rare commodity. What would happen to the endless phone calls, daily friendly bickering and coffee talk?

Poof,

I was devastated.

That was four years ago. Today, Melissa and I are still meeting for coffee when she's in town, still talking on the phone, and yes, still bickering. We have grown, evolved and adapted.

I am a product of my circumstances. When change happens, it happens. Like *Felicity*, I say, "Things happen, you can't control it. But it's how you deal with it that really matter."

Enjoy the ride.

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Are our days numbered when a corporation tries to re-number our days?

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## WWW

By its weaving together of various elements from popular culture, current affairs, controversy and just a touch of "Asian-ness", WWW pretty much boasts all the earmarks of a typical production borne from the minds at The Necessary Stage (TNS).

This time, TNS takes one of pop culture's most cherished icons – the superhero – and places it in Thailand, where a former beggar is holding an American child hostage. His parents cry foul, and Thailand's superheroes scramble...except that Thailand's superheroes are "not Clark Kents, Bruce Waynes or Diana Princes"...but are "gigolos, hookers and drags".

Said playwright-director Chong Tze Chien, "WWW is neither conventional costume caper comic, nor social theatre. It's between the two genres – a naturalistic comic book fantasy, if I may coin a new term. It's dark, edgy, gritty and perhaps surreal at bits, but the situations are realistic and identifiable."

5 to 8 December, 8pm, 7 to 8 December, 3pm, Victoria Theatre, \$36, \$31, \$26, \$21 from SISTIC.

Aaron Lye



## The Red Shoes – One woman. Two loves.

Inspired by the original Hans Christian Andersen tale of *The Red Shoes* and based on Michael Powell's film shot in 1948, this performance by the Singapore Dance Theatre is a soul-provoking one which tells the story through ballet. *The Red Shoes* first premiered in Singapore in 2000 and has since been re-staged due to popular demand. A young ballerina finds herself romantically involved with her choreographer, but her dream of success as a ballerina lies in the hands of yet another man who loves her – the owner of the ballet company. A touching love story that promises grace and poise, this is one for the romantics.

12 to 15 December, 8pm, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, \$59, \$49, \$39, \$29, \$21 from SISTIC.



PICTURE COURTESY OF SDT AND MR AARON KHEK

Chen Zilin

## Singin' in the Rain

To create the perfect rain for the backdrop for the scenes, each performance of this musical requires 5,000 litres of water, treated to the right temperature of 45°C to 48°C. Anything off that scale, and the cast might end up falling ill. And that is not the only exorbitant necessity to keep the show going. *Singin' In The Rain* also needs 2,529 light bulbs for the costumes of its 'Beautiful Girls'. Behind all the singing and tapping feet, the cast will have to go through about 318 costume changes altogether. And at the end of each week, 15 litres of liquid laundry detergent would have been used.

That is just how extensive *Singin' In The Rain* is. Timeless music, beautiful costumes, crisp dancing and laughter await at the musical that made Gene Kelly famous. Be prepared to give your ovation, as a *crème de la crème* cast led by Dale Pengetly dazzles you with an extraordinary performance of song and dance.



13 to 24 November, Tuesdays through Sundays, 8pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 2.30pm, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, \$125, \$95, \$70, \$50, \$105, \$85, \$60, \$45 for matinee shows from SISTIC.

Debra Wong

## Igor's HellFest 2002: 5 Days of Sheer Terror

Prepare to be scared silly at Igor's this Halloween when the (in)famous horror-themed dinner theatre celebrates five days of sheer terror. Every evening offers a different assortment of terrifying apparitions, along with the 6000 square foot Demon's Dungeon. The Halloween musical comedy show is accompanied by a three-course menu that includes freakish food items like Decomposed Jellyfish and

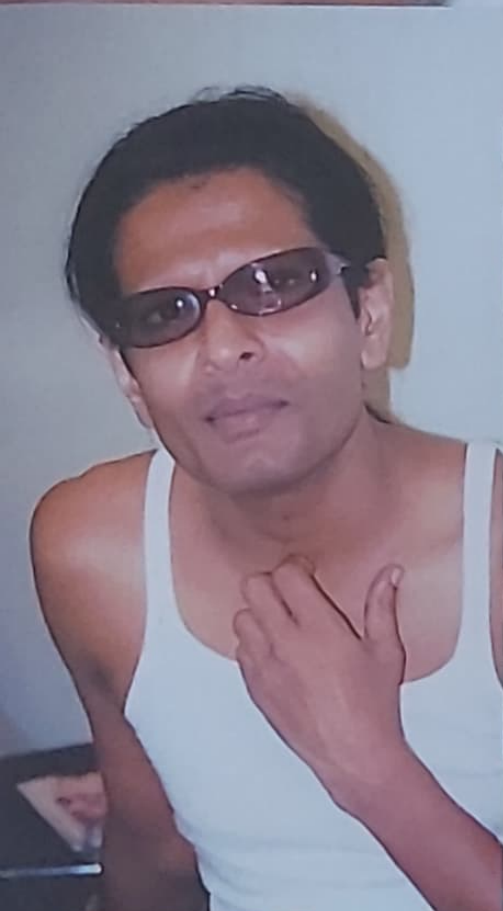
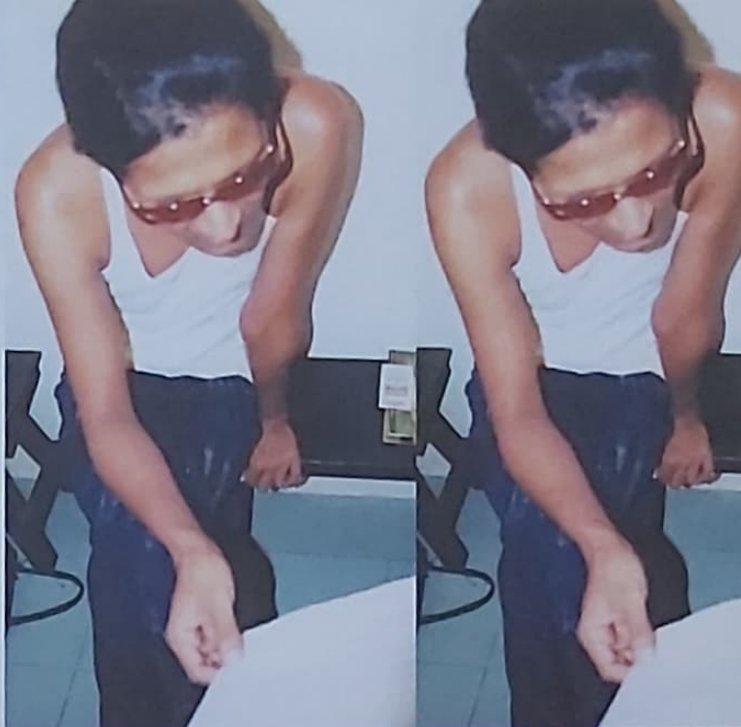
Bloody Sticky Mousse, making for a morbid experience from the inside as well as out. Games and contests will be held from October 31, so dress to out-do Igor's inhouse and you may just walk away with a macabre memento of the occasion.

29 October to 2 November, 7pm, Igor's (next to the Singapore Indoor Stadium) \$76 & \$61 (29 October to 30 October); \$121 & \$101 (31 October to 2 November) from SISTIC.

Germaine Ong







# 2-in-1

She is Boom Boom Room's glamorous headliner. He is the actor with dreams of a directorial debut. They are two people in one - Kumar. **hype** splits him down the middle and tells you two sides of the same story.





Talking to Kumar about being Kumar, sitting at the bottom of a smoky stairwell in *The Necessary Stage*, where he spent around six months ending September rehearsing his latest play, *Close In My Face*. Kumar could well be any other guy, except for the past-shoulder-length hair, sunglasses and the tie-dyed sarong.

Sure, his on-stage persona has left a whole city wondering about his sexuality, but the man personally thinks there are bigger fish to fry in life.

#### I know I'm a man

"I think I really don't mind what people think of me. It's not that I don't care - I think that's becoming too insensitive. It doesn't matter. If you think I'm straight, or if you think I'm gay, or if I go for anything that moves, it doesn't matter."

Kumar is used to being stared at, addressed as "Miss" on the streets, and having his sexuality put under the microscope.

"It happens all the time; it doesn't affect me. Maybe when I was younger it really did affect me. When I was in school, because I was a bit feminine, people did call me *a-gua*, *a-gua* (effeminate). It really did affect me. I asked, 'My god, am I abnormal? What am I supposed to be?' Then I realised, so what! Use it to your advantage, lah! Because at the end of it all, it's my life. I pay the bills."

"I know what I am, people can call me gender bender, people can call me transvestite, transsexual, but I really don't care. I'm not transvestite, because I don't lead a drag life. I know I'm a man; I'm supposed to be that. But people see me in many, many things."

#### And the good son

Family is still important to him, though, and the life of a drag performer does not seem to have ruined his perspective on life, nor displaced his ability to be the good son.

"I have to be there at least once a week, because I don't live with them any more. So I've got to be there once a week, or [my mother] freaks out. She calls me to threaten me, 'I'm going to commit suicide if you don't come over'", he says with a laugh that echoes up the cramped stairwell.

Traditional values are not lost on him either; the private side of the showman is not an echo of a childish scream for attention.

"I don't believe in exhibiting myself. I don't believe in 'going around' in the day. Couple of years ago, this Israeli paper asked me, 'Why doesn't Singapore have a Mardi Gras? A gay festival?' And I told him that I don't see the point why we should have one. He said, 'Why not? Australia has it.' I said, 'You don't have to have a gay festival to show that they exist.' He was quite upset with what I said, because he felt that it shouldn't be coming out from me. And I feel that I'm more grounded than that."

"Even if I see screaming queens, it irritates me. I can imagine the Mr & Miss Tan, they would get totally, totally irritated. And when [gays] say, 'We should be accepted, we should be accepted. We should be tolerated.' - how to tolerate, when you just stand there and exhibit yourself? So I believe in that."

For real? All this sobriety is hardly what we expect from Singapore's number one drag performer. Could this be the same fellow who was just seen screeching on stage in the Boom Boom Room last Friday night? Which side of this metamorphic change is the real act?

#### It's not arrogance

"I'm always quite serious. When people are not looking." He says with a laugh. "When I'm at home I'm actually very quiet. I'm very serious. I'm not hyper at all. I'm always quiet, serious. People take that as arrogance. But actually it's not."

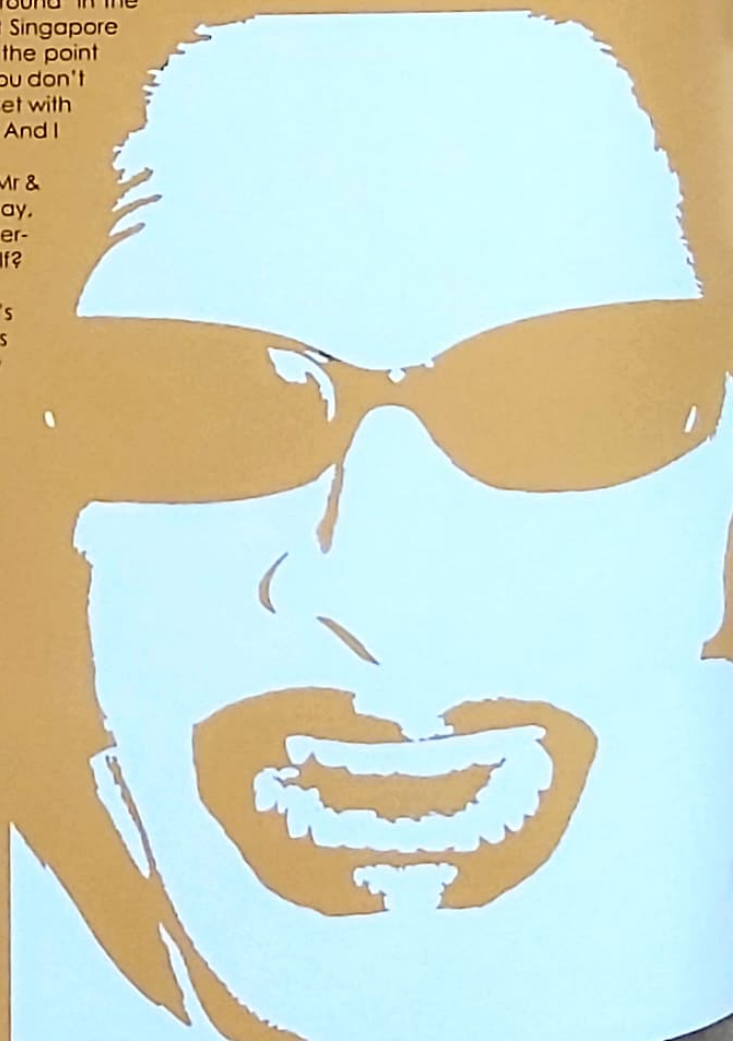
"Everything is perfect. I've got friends. I've got work. I've got career, I've got fame. I've got money. I don't have one million in my bank and stress the whole day. I just have enough."

Hesitate, looking for a crack in the suspected façade. In walks playwright Haresh Sharma. I dangle a carrot and try to draw out the showman from the man - ego. The question - "On a scale of 10, how 'fabulous' are you?" Haresh gives him 11. Kumar insists on an 8.

"Who's a 10?" I ask.

"My friends. Who's always there for you. That's fabulous. When you're down and out, then you exactly know who your friends are." Through his fashionable sunglasses, he looks you in the eye. His voice drops to something just above a whisper, and takes on an occlusive tone. "I'm fabulous because I'm... me. And not a lot of people are who they are."

## A New Age Man Breaks Out Of Her Shell





# Model Woman In Total Control Of Himself

What you see is what you get. But when Kumar turns up dressed in a white tank and a dark green sarong skirt, with stubble peppering his chin and Adam's apple, you get one very confusing picture. Christine Yee tries clearing the air.

rics make him high. "I enjoy making people laugh, I enjoy the moment, I enjoy the limelight. It's like having your own party!"

## Don't Call Me Queenie

Mystery is the spice of life and Kumar has made an art out of keeping people guessing. "I represent controversy," he declares. "Everything that the norm is not." Kumar's controversial element is his ambiguous sexual orientation and he often plays the gender-bender card to his advantage. Think *Oh! Carol*, where his character Sam laments about breaking up with his girlfriend in one scene and then casually mentions plucking his eyebrows in another. And remember him sporting a skirt and bosom in a shopping ad campaign? Who else but Kumar could do all this?

Since ambiguity only enhances his popularity and charm, it's doubtful Kumar will ever tell all. Firstly, it would kill all the fun. Secondly, it's nobody's business. "I don't think I have to stand there and say 'Hi! I'm gay, I'm straight, I'm bi', or whatever," he asserts. "It doesn't matter." Besides, he asks, "What's new?" But back in the days when guessing Kumar's sexuality was news, *The New Paper* (TNP) ran a cover story quoting him saying, "I'm not gay because I don't shave my legs."

Since he still sports hairy legs, was the story true? Side-stepping the question, Kumar jumped into spilling the back-story.

"That article was not even supposed to be there!" he disclosed. "They (TNP) abused the whole interview. It was just a normal interview for Boom Boom Room, but then they just glamorised the whole thing ... to attract readers."

But he laughed it off with a tinge of cynicism, saying, "Bad or good, it's still publicity!"

While he won't say what he is, Kumar will specify what he's not. "I'm not transvestite ... so I wouldn't say I'm homosexual." And while his gender will most certainly remain male, Kumar says he's got both the "girl point of view [and] man point of view" in him. "So what if [I am] in a dress?" he retorts. "The dress becomes secondary. I can walk out in a dress and people are like, 'Oh, that's him.'"

But one thing Kumar does make very clear is that he is a drag performer, not a drag queen. "The drag is work, it's a talent... A drag queen, eventually, wants a sex change. But a drag performer doesn't want to do that. It's just for performance." Insisting that he's never considered a sex change, Kumar crossed his legs and declared, "I love my genitals."

## Coming Out... of the Dress

The story of Kumar's illustrious career began with nasty school friends teasing him for being effeminate. But Kumar has turned the tables on them, making gender-bending an art form, without apologies.

He does admit, however, that performing drag is something that "not everybody in society looks up to" and something that "a lot of parents would not want their children to be doing" - his own father included.

At the end of the show, minus the gowns, sequins and make-up, Kumar's Boom Boom Room act is pure stand-up comedy. So why should his act be any less celebrated than any other show? "Don't say that just because I'm straight, you'll respect me more," a dignified Kumar says. "That's not what I want."

What he does want is for people "to respect the art", because drag performing, Kumar says, is a talent. "I don't want to just do drag all the time," he explains. "you have to move on and do other things, so people see you at a different angle."

Kumar has indeed exposed his "different angle" to the public in the play *Hot Pants*, when he "acted as a straight man, really, really straight." "Man, Man, Man," he emphasised. "No feminism, no camp, not even a twitch."

Although the experience was "very interesting" it was also "boring"! The role did, however, put his drag queen dress out to hang for a while. "A lot of people saw a different side and from there, a lot of things changed, because people said, 'He's a performer, he's not just every other drag queen that we see'."

## Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend

"I should, however, have a stage name. So that people can separate the drag Kumar [and] the Kumar Kumar. Now, if you say Kumar, people immediately associate it with the drag Kumar." Adding with regret, "Coming into a society like this, I should have thought of it."

Because people can't separate his stage persona from the real Kumar, they only want the drag. "Some people have said, 'What else?' Like [the drag] is the only thing!"

So, what name? And Kumar answers dramatically, "I would have called myself Diamond!"

He's a guy, playing a girl, making it big in a gay world. Life just doesn't get more extreme than that. But if you think Kumar's life is one chaotic OTT mess, you're wrong. He manages his life by staying in control and, boy, is he good at it.

Kumar is in control when he arrives, fashionably late, and decides that you (a non-smoker with a sore throat) can interview him in a "comfortable" place - an unventilated stairwell, cordoned off for smokers only.

He is also in control whenever he jabs his "On" button to camp it up at the Boom Boom Room and when he switches it "Off" after every performance.

The high-strung and energetic acts that audiences relish every weekend are only possible because Kumar says, "I love what I do." Like most entertainers, theatrical-





what is the time?

1000 @

# Making Time

Swatch drew attention in 1998 when it unveiled "a new way of measuring time". Four years on, Daniel Yap takes a look at whether this novel concept is a flop or an idea before its time.

On 23 October 1998, along Jakob-Staempfli Street in Biel, Switzerland, Swatch invited Nicholas Negroponte, founder and director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Laboratory to unveil Internet Time, measured by the Swatch "beat", a standard that divided up each day into 1000 "beats".

One Swatch beat is the equivalent of 1 minute 26.4 seconds and is represented with the now ubiquitous "@". This alone should make it apparent to anyone that Swatch is hoping to do away with the old mode of the measurement of the day – there is no practical way that Internet Time can be converted to minutes and seconds without a calculator.

Ms Evelyn Chiang, Product Manager of The Swatch Group, SEA, reassured **hype** that minutes and seconds are not on the cards for extinction. "I'm sure we could never make minutes and seconds disappear; it is just too common in our society at this point."

"Our concept is sound; there is a market out there for it," she continued. "Swatch has always been in the forefront, spearheading new things, but it will probably start with those tech-savvy people first, and businessmen who travel very often will find it useful."

Swatch believed that this was the way to the future, the next step in collapsing the already disappearing global boundaries by giving the world a single standard of time. Biel Mean Time (BMT), they called it, after the city in which the Swatch headquarters is located. Presumptuous? Perhaps, but nobody seems to take offence at our time zones being tuned to Greenwich Mean Time.

So, with or without the permission of the world, Swatch made watches that carried their new concept of time. Watches that needed no adjusting by the international jet set or the global webcrawler. Watches that read the same numbers whether in New York or London. Watches that were seen as little more than fashion accessories.

Four years have passed since then, and Singapore, at least, has not seen much of a change in the way time is read. Perhaps the last we even remember of the beat was when they erected a large clock display on Orchard Road at the end of 1999. The techno-savvy product caught our attention for a while, but it did not change our lives.

Local sales of watches telling Internet Time have been comparatively low, hanging somewhere in the 4000 to 5000 range since its launch, but Ms Chiang attributes this to the design of the watches, which were made for larger European wrists and did not suit Asian wearers quite as well.

"We are coming up with a new range of beat watches that will appeal more to Asian buyers," added Ms Chiang. "The changes will not only be in the design, but with the technology as well."

Ms Chiang did mention that the plans were private and confidential for the moment, and that there was no scheduled launch for the new range of Swatch beat watch designs.

Possibly many are of the mind that Swatch should just stick to what it is good at – designing watches.

But the truth is that good design stems from innovative minds. Leonardo da Vinci, both an eminent inventor and celebrated designer, gave the world the concepts of the parachute and the helicopter, giving us confidence that the world may yet see some concepts of global benefit coming from eminent designers.

Swatch is certainly not the first to realise how a technological breakthrough can change the way we look at time. The

perception of world time as we know it did not always exist. Canadian railway planner and engineer Sir Sanford Fleming proposed the idea to divide the Earth into time

zones in the late 1870s. This was in response to rapid development of railways across the North American continent. This made travel between cities fast, but caused operators and commuters to be confused because each town and city had its own "local time".

Instead of having to adjust minute by minute on the fly, world time zones were determined in 1884 at an international conference in Washington, D.C. Each of the 24 world time zones is about 15 degrees wide and differs by one hour, with Greenwich as the base reference point.

Swatch sees the Internet making a similar impact on the world and hopes to be the one to set the standard and lead the way. Unfortunately, while it appears to offer a degree of convenience, there seems to be little in the way of necessity and people are still comfortable with the 24 time zone concept. Moreover, some believe that the new reference point just means that everything else will have to be adjusted to accommodate it.

Still another big problem with the acceptance of Internet Time is the fact that it has done away with hours, minutes and seconds – those ticks and tocks that we have become so familiar with in our time-crazed modern society. Need we measure everything in beats when we have been counting our lives in multiples of 12 since Christiaan Huygens built the first pendulum clock in 1656?

Perhaps it is high time another bastion of the old world fell, at least in part, in many areas of civilisation, we have more or less abandoned older systems of measurement for the decimal system – grams instead of ounces, metres in place of yards, shillings giving way to dollars and cents. Same day, 24 hours a day and 60 minutes to the hour may well become dated.

One is reminded of the failure of the Jacobin calendar during the French revolution, however, and the associated implications of instituting a new world order.

The Jacobin calendar was conceptualised by Fabre d'Églantine, and adopted by the French Convention in October of 1793. According to this calendar, the year began on September 22, and was divided into twelve months of thirty days each, leaving five days, six in leap years, over at the end of the last month. These five or six days were to be known as the *sans-culattides*, and were to be a series of national holidays.

These holidays were dedicated respectively to Genius, Labour, Noble Actions, Awards, and Opinion. The sixth *sans-culattide*, every four years, was dedicated to the Revolution.

Each month was divided into three weeks, called *décades*, the last day of each *décade* being set aside as a day of rest corresponding to the old Sunday. The months were poetically renamed and the year was reset to zero, with its counting beginning on the day of the French Revolution.

Romantic as it was, it had little popularity, and in spite of its ten-day week, or perhaps because of it, Napoleon abandoned the Jacobin Calendar in the year XII (1804).

It then remains to be seen if the Swatch beat will go the way of the Jacobin calendar or receive the support of the international community and become a new way of looking at our world. At this point, uptake does not seem very encouraging and going in the face of, well, time is not an easy task.

Still, Swatch doggedly holds fast to its dream, and perhaps that tenacity, some luck and a little bit of time will be what it takes to get the world moving to another beat.





# Restless

Singaporeans are easily gripped by the world of the supernatural. From the realm of ghost stories to horror movies, we are a society that thrives on the unknown. Sue-Ann Woo meets the stars of MediaCorp TV's latest addition to the genre, *Restless*.

The first thing that strikes you about Carol is her diminutive frame. In that lithe body however, is a stamina that lasted her running, abseiling, trail biking and a host of other activities in the 2001 AXN Challenge.

Now back in *Restless*, a supernatural drama on Channel 5, Carol is Ying, a "reformed juvenile delinquent who discovers she has the power to communicate with the spirits of deceased individuals". When asked if the notion of playing such a character gave her the creeps, Carol responded with a firm, "No".

"I actually feel like I can relate to Ying, the characterisation, in terms of the spiritual aspect where she's able to 'see' things," she explains. Has she had any such encounters? "Not really," she laughed, "but I know of many friends who have had these experiences... I had this friend who would duck when she was walking. She would say that she didn't feel comfortable walking through 'them'. In actual fact, we couldn't see anyone."

So far, the role has been enjoyable, "I was able to feel her when I was reading the script." In each episode, Ying is drawn to helping the restless ones seek resolution on earth, and uncovers a secret from her own grandmother.

Carol also admitted that acting in English is a relief. "When I act in the Mandarin serials, I translate what I read from English to Cantonese to Mandarin. Sometimes," she said with a giggle, "there're breakdowns when I try to translate accurately. So with this role, things are much simpler."

Lead actress  
**Carol Tham** as  
Ling Shi-Ying



Jean Danker does not take comfort in getting spooked, and her role in *Restless* reflects this. Her character, Ellison, is "the light element to the show of a very serious cast". And in real life, Jean is, likewise, also a reflection of the chirpy, excited voice we hear on Perfect Ten.

In an almost conspiratorial whisper, she recounted her frightful experience when she first watched an episode alone in the studios. "I gotta tell you, it's completely different when you're shooting and when you watch the edited episode proper. I think it's because we don't shoot in sequence. And we don't get all the special effects or spooky music that really freaks me out." Most of the shooting was a breeze for Jean, except maybe for the scenes at the old, dilapidated and abandoned school. "It was eerie, and really dark. You basically couldn't see anything that was two metres away from you." The fact that the scenes could only be shot at night when it was pitch black did not do anything to soothe her frayed nerves. "I was a little spooked. I carried my cross with me, so that helped me lots."

She explains, however, that the thing about Ellison is that she's trying to be a friend to Ying. She knows that Ying is different, and that other people stay away from her. But she remains loyal to this friendship nonetheless, and there is this chemistry between these two friends.

Crossing over from radio to television is clearly not a problem for Jean. "It's a very good experience, and if it comes my way again, why not?" she mused, with her winning smile.

Supporting actress  
**Jean Danker** as  
Ellison May Pereira



"I loved it, I loved every minute of it," relates Keagan Kang as he smiles gleefully. "That's the whole point, to scare people and to capture your audience, especially people who don't dare to know the truth."

Though a theatre person by profession, Keagan is also no stranger to the goggle box. He has starred in *Spin*, *Triple Nine*, *War Diary* and even *Under One Roof*. Compared to his other love, theatre, Keagan shared that, on television, his acting has to be more pronounced, more precise. "With theatre, it's not about big movements, it's about intensity. Your projection has to be more clear. With television, however, you gotta remember that you can't lie to the camera. Every movement, every expression is captured. It's intense."

On *Restless*, Keagan explained that his character is "driven by justice and by science", which, however, does not help to explain why Ying's tale holds such fascination for him. "Logically, he should not believe Ying and her encounters. He's a man of science. To him, the evidence, forensic testing is the main source of truth. But there's something about Ying that just draws him to her."

Speaking of his co-star, he goes on to say, "Carol has given Ying a lost innocence." He feels the show will be well received, because he is convinced people will want to know. "I think the winning formula for these thriller shows is that it's based on true stories. It's real."

Supporting actor  
**Keagan Kang** as  
Ian Ryan Logan







# All Changed

Hers is a face we all recognise now. Seven months down the road from her life-threatening operation, Andrea de Cruz talks to **hype** on her changed outlook on life.

PICTURE COURTESY OF MEDIACORP TV

Andrea de Cruz cannot eat chocolates for the rest of her life. "It's one of my favourite food! I can't eat it because of the cocoa content," she tells **hype**. "But it's a small price to pay. Nothing beats having your life." Such are the words from someone whose life has been spectacularly changed.

In April, the high-spirited and lively television actress lay dying in hospital because of acute liver failure. The situation was dire. Andrea needed a liver transplant. The slimming pills she'd taken were named as the cause. Cue the hero in shining armour, Pierre Png. In an act that touched many, Pierre became Singapore's first living donor to give part of his liver to an unrelated patient, his girlfriend, Andrea.

Seven months on, Andrea is ready to move on from that chapter in her life. The issue of slimming pills and becoming thin still hits a raw nerve, but Andrea is more forthcoming now. "I feel that by looking at me and using me as an example, wouldn't that be a scary thought enough? If you were just going to get some slimming pills off the rack or something, just use me as a living example."

However, she willingly shares that she wished she had emphasised the importance of exercise to people. Andrea also admits that her perspective of things around her has changed. "You always take for granted that your loved ones will always be there for you... but sometimes, you may not be there for them. They were there for me day and night by my side but I couldn't assure them that I would live, for them."

Small things like going out have become a luxury to her. Because of her weakened immune system, Andrea cannot go out to crowded places. A psychologist by profession, Andrea stepped into the limelight in 1999 when she made appearances in the sitcom, *Under One Roof*. She was first most recognisable, however, in her hosting stint on *Showbuzz*. Since then, Andrea has silenced her critics with her portfolio of work that includes both television acting and live theatre. Her fans were duly impressed by her characterisation of a *lai tai* in the Mandarin drama series, *No Problem*.

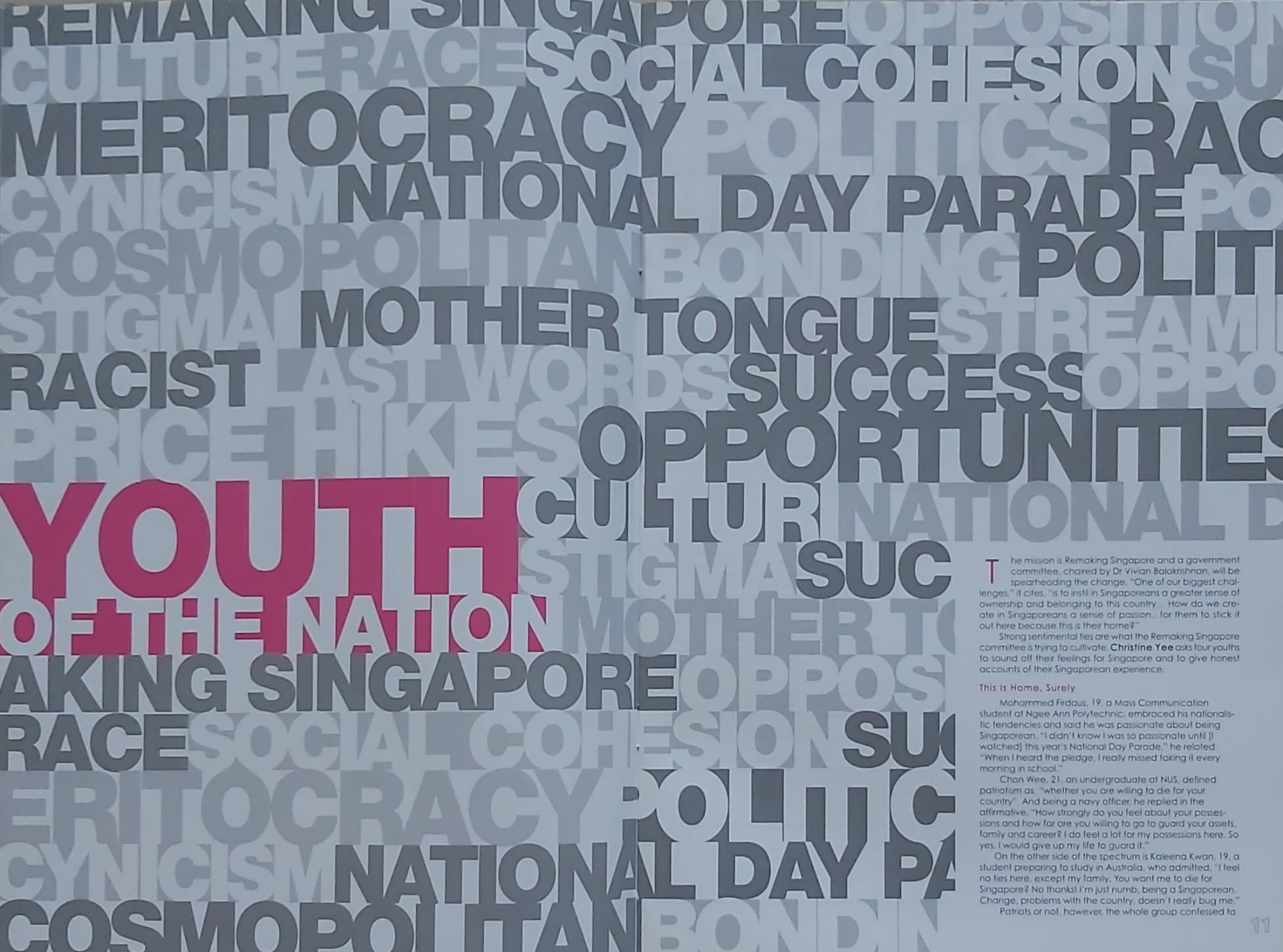
Andrea's bubbly personality is evident even as she narrates her efforts at persuading her doctors to let her walk about. "In the end, we could only walk around our ward, which was a very tiny ward. And I just couldn't stay still - couldn't lay in bed. So I don't know if it's a good thing, but for me, I think it's... good. Life is always so busy."

Yet despite all that, Andrea admits to embracing life more now. "One thing that I've always wanted to change or if I could turn back time, was to remain with my father in Chicago. He was suffering from pancreatic cancer and I wished I had stayed with him until he passed on." Surviving an ordeal like this, she shares, "I feel that because I've been given a second chance, I know that I shouldn't take them for granted. I know that if every day it makes them feel happy to say, 'You know, Mommy, I love you so much', I would do it every day."

And her immediate priorities would be? "The sad thing is, in my first year after the transplant, it's the highest chance of liver rejection. And then, for the next five years, there's another hurdle... So now, I just tend not to think too much about the future." With the holiday season coming up, the actress is however, anxious to begin planning for her yearly Christmas drive for the Cheshire Home. Together with other volunteers, Andrea collects wish lists, wraps the gifts and organises the buffet spread for the party. With resounding conviction, she says, "I truly believe in charity. I truly believe it changes people."

With determination, Andrea has emerged from her adversity with a stronger spirit. "I'm blessed," she acknowledges, and one gets the feeling that this is one person who understands the true essence of overcoming the odds.





# YOUTH OF THE NATION

The mission is Remaking Singapore and a government committee, chaired by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, will be spearheading the change. "One of our biggest challenges," it cites, "is to instill in Singaporeans a greater sense of ownership and belonging to this country... How do we create in Singaporeans a sense of passion... for them to stick it out here because this is their home?"

Strong sentimental ties are what the Remaking Singapore committee is trying to cultivate. **Christine Yee** asks four youths to sound off their feelings for Singapore and to give honest accounts of their Singaporean experience.

## This Is Home, Surely

Mohammed Firdaus, 19, a Mass Communication student at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, embraced his nationalistic tendencies and said he was passionate about being Singaporean. "I didn't know I was so passionate until [I watched] this year's National Day Parade," he related. "When I heard the pledge, I really missed taking it every morning in school."

Chan Wee, 21, an undergraduate at NUS, defined patriotism as: "whether you are willing to die for your country". And being a navy officer, he replied in the affirmative. "How strongly do you feel about your possessions and how far are you willing to go to guard your assets, family and career? I do feel a lot for my possessions here. So yes, I would give up my life to guard it."

On the other side of the spectrum is Kaleena Kwan, 19, a student preparing to study in Australia, who admitted, "I feel no lies here, except my family. You want me to die for Singapore? No thanks! I'm just numb, being a Singaporean. Change, problems with the country, doesn't really bug me."

Patriots or not, however, the whole group confessed to



# REMAKING SINGAPORE CULTURE RACES MERITocracy CYNICISM OF THE COSMOPOLITAN

wanting to leave Singapore. Each of them had different reasons why.

"Because I don't quite enjoy the fast pace of life here," Chon Wee replied. "And for the amount of effort put in Singapore, you'll probably get better returns overseas."

Najibah Abdat, 19, an A-level student at a private college, said she too would leave as she feels being an Arab in Singapore is a disadvantage. "Compared to Malays and Chinese and Indians, I don't really get much benefits. Every month, my parents' pay gets cut to go to a Malay fund, that doesn't support other races except the Malays! My mom is not Malay, she is Pakistani!"

"I pay for it but I don't get the benefits," Najibah criticised. "My mother wanted to sign me up for Malay lessons at Mendaki, but they refuse to let me in because I was Arab!"

Both Kaleena and Firdaus would consider leaving Singapore to pursue career opportunities abroad. However, only Firdaus would definitely return home. "You go sleep over at your friend's house, someday you will want to go home and sleep on your own bed," he said.

As an indigenous Malay, Firdaus offered a very interesting perspective. He mused that other races, coming from migrant ancestry, might not see Singapore as home and those who do, have not actually had the time to feel as deeply "rooted" to Singapore as the indigenous people have.

Najibah feels more of a "global citizen" and she believes the term "reflects the ideology of my generation. A lot of my friends don't want to work or stay here. It is too restrictive, too competitive".

**"My mother wanted to sign me up for Malay lessons at Mendaki, but they refuse to let me in because I was Arab!"**

- Najibah Abdat, 19, an A-level student at a private college

## Change "out of reach"

Earlier the group had discussed the implications of being the voice of opposition and lobbyist for change in Singapore. The sentiment expressed by all four was that of resignation.

"You're crashing into a brick wall labelled PAP," Kaleena said cynically. "There's no point trying." The opposition in Singapore, she felt, was analogous to being Humpty Dumpty, where you sat in a precarious situation and made yourself an easy target to be shot down.

Undergrad Chon Wee felt the same. "They [the opposition] have been treated very unfairly. Look at the elections- [the Government] draws all the boundaries for the districts. They can just draw up one big district and the opposition won't have enough candidates to make up for the group constituency elections."

"I think it's taken for granted that you don't have much of a say," Chon Wee remarked. Citing the recent bus fare hike as an example, he pointed out that a decision had already been made before the debate was brought up in parliament and that protesting would not have changed the outcome. "Firstly it will be an embarrassment to the policy makers," he reasoned. "And it gives people the impression that if we are not happy with things, we can just protest and change them. Our iron-hand government won't allow such things to happen."

It seems, within the group at least, that resignation and cynicism have been translated into apathy. As Najibah, remarked nonchalantly, "Our voting system, no matter what, PAP will still win. I wouldn't join [the opposition], I can't be bothered with Singapore politics!"

They believe that change is out of their reach.

## The Bonding Experience

As much as their perspectives and opinions differ, Najibah, Firdaus, Chon Wee and Kaleena all agree on one thing— that being Singaporean means being able to interact with, understand and appreciate each other's races. Everyone has made friends and acquaintances without "making decisions based on race", as Firdaus and Chon Wee put it. Racism and discrimination do exist, but Najibah observed, "It's not really done in public."

Firdaus, begged to differ. "In school, that's where I get the most racist remarks. In a project, some people think all Malay boys are slackers."

Firdaus also believes Malay Muslims are discriminated against in the armed forces. He questioned, "Why still see us as Malay? After all, we are all Singaporeans."



# PORE DEVELOPMENT POSITION SIAL COHESION SU HOLISTICS RAC NATION ARADE PO BONDING DON IT

Chon Wee, on the other hand, declared, "To me, race is not very significant. It is not indicative of your ability, it is not indicative of your status. Singaporean is Singaporean; it's not Malay or Chinese."

Still no matter how respectful we are of each other's races, social cohesion should not be taken for granted. Firdaus feels educating the younger generation is society's responsibility, "just in case they don't know that it's important to stick together and mix well with other races."

## School Blues

Many Singaporeans feel ambivalent toward the system of meritocracy in education. While some applaud its ability to reward and identify those who can perform well, others feel the system exerts too pressure and doesn't tolerate failure.

"If I have kids I will send them abroad to study," Najibah said. "The standards here are too high and in the future it will be worse!"

"The government sets the standard and if you meet the standard, you're known as the elite, you can move on and you'd probably get your desired path," Chon Wee pointed out.

"But for Singapore to be a success, you have to have people at different levels, you have to have different people managing the different levels," he reasoned further. "Of course every one wants to make it but, by the standards set by the government, if they don't make it, they probably have to settle for lower levels."

Planning for a multi-level workforce is one thing, but Firdaus argued that the education system lacks the element of the "second chance". "There are opportunities to succeed," he agreed, "But opportunities to fail, no." Citing the example of EM3 students not being able to take the O-Levels, he contended, "They [the Government] think that these kids can't make it through the O-levels, at ten years old! It's the basic form of education that you need in Singapore. It's a bit too young to decide a person's future, to chart his path for him."

Weighing the merits of the Primary Four streaming system, Firdaus felt that in principle it had positive connotations. "But even if you want the fast ones to get further," he maintained, "I don't think the slow ones should be allowed to get even slower."

Chon Wee also felt the streaming system was flawed. "I feel it's like a bottle neck. You will want to go into the better streams and as you move up, the streams become narrower. So you find it pretty hard and along the way, some of your friends with common aspirations will fall away."

The stigma of not doing well in your second language was a sore point with Kaleena, who complained, "If you do well in Chinese you get a lot of perks like bonus points. I get an A in English also no use! I don't mind taking a second language, but I don't want to sit for an exam and then because of it, lose a place in NUS!"

Using the voice of reason, Chon Wee pointed out, "Our country set the dual language policy so that all the other races can interact. But I believe mother tongue is important as well, so you can interact among your community. If you have it as an elective, then no one would want to be proficient in it and that can really cause a problem."

"I know Mandarin is my mother tongue," Kaleena went on, "but I'd rather learn it as a culture, not as a language." Chon Wee agreed. "They are getting very technical about language; I feel they should embrace the entire culture."

"If you have a very deep understanding of your culture," he added, "There will be more interaction between the races. If you don't have much to share, it kind of minimises the interaction."

## Last Sips

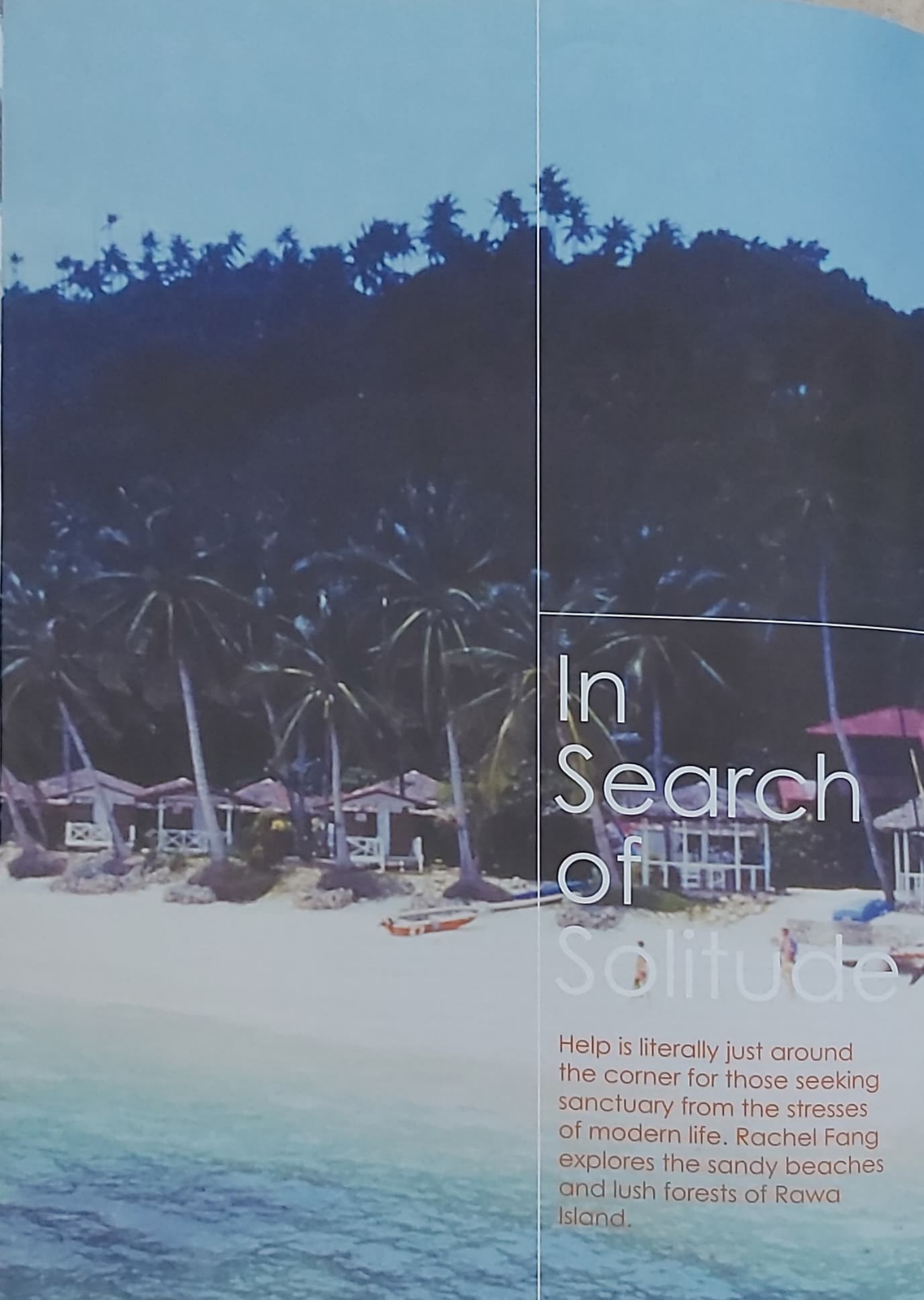
As Najibah, Kaleena, Firdaus and Chon Wee finish up their cappuccinos, one thing is clear—that they have given honest and direct accounts of their relationships with the Singaporean system.

And for once, they've been heard.

"To me, race is not very significant. It is not indicative of your ability, it is not indicative of your status."

- Chon Wee, 21, an undergraduate at NUS



A photograph of a tropical beach. In the foreground, there is a sandy beach and clear turquoise water. In the middle ground, several small huts with thatched roofs are nestled among tall palm trees. A small wooden boat is pulled up on the sand. In the background, a dense forest of palm trees covers a hillside under a clear blue sky. The title 'In Search of Solitude' is overlaid on the right side of the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

# In Search of Solitude

Help is literally just around the corner for those seeking sanctuary from the stresses of modern life. Rachel Fang explores the sandy beaches and lush forests of Rawa Island.





There is something quite magical about being lulled into deep slumber by sweet lullabies of the whispering breeze and waking to the sound of the tide rising, arching and crashing against the rocks. And it is pure relief when you realise that you can indulge in such pleasures without having to spend that pretty penny.

An escape away to solitude and tranquillity to calm and recharge the mind, body and soul in an era of suffocating deadlines and harsh standards is what Rawa Island can offer you.

Rawa is one of several islands off the east coast of Johor, near the small fishing town of Mersing. It is the perfect retreat when you need time to slow down by just a fraction and be surrounded by the natural and unadulterated beauty of flawless beaches and pristine waters. And it is a sure change from the usual cluttered and over-developed resorts of other holiday islands in the region.

#### True Paradise and the First Experience

The moment you step off the boat onto Rawa Island, you will notice that it is indeed a very small island and has only the basics – a comfortable hut or suite to stay in, a restaurant and a rental shack for water equipment such as diving gear, canoes and surf boards. You might even think that it would be pretty boring since it is without jet skis, golf courses, big boats and of course that fancy hotel. But, "It's perfect!" exclaims Melvin Wong, a 23-year-old undergraduate. "You think there's nothing to do but there is," he adds. "It was my first beach trip that I took with my buddy and it was awesome. One morning we woke up early and raced to the top of the island hill to watch the sunrise and it was spectacular. There was this moment of silence that was so serene when we saw the first rays of light."

With activities such as canoeing, wind surfing, diving, snorkelling and island-hopping, days can start at dawn and the sun will set on you before you know it. "There are times when you can go all out and have fun and there are those when all you want to do is lie back, relax and breathe in the sweet smell of the sea," explains Joyce Pathy, a mother who has constantly, year after year, revisited the island for her family retreats. "Do not forget the pure pleasure of lying on the soft sand and taking a short afternoon nap while you tan because without that, the holiday would not be as complete," she says.

As Melvin explains, the fun and exhilarating energy – exhausting things to do without the need of equipment would comprise, "somer-saulting off the jetty, exploring the caves, climbing rocks and diving to the sea floor," and the relaxing and laid-back energy absorbing activities would be, "having a drink at the bar, watching the sky for shooting stars, strolling along the beach, feeding the fishes that swarm around you the moment you've got food in your hands and chatting up girls," he adds with a grin.

#### What's around

"It's cool to know what islands there are around 'cause then you can rent a canoe and explore the closer islands – though none is like Rawa," says Melvin.

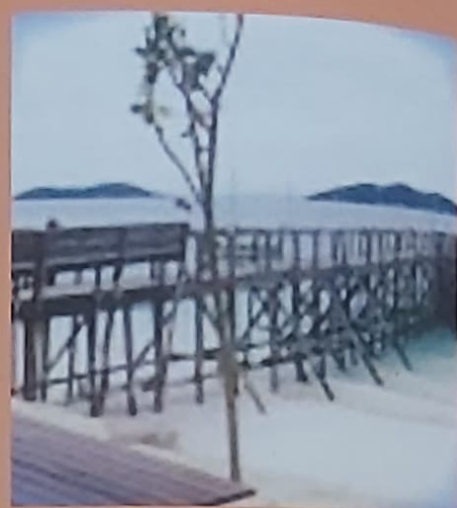
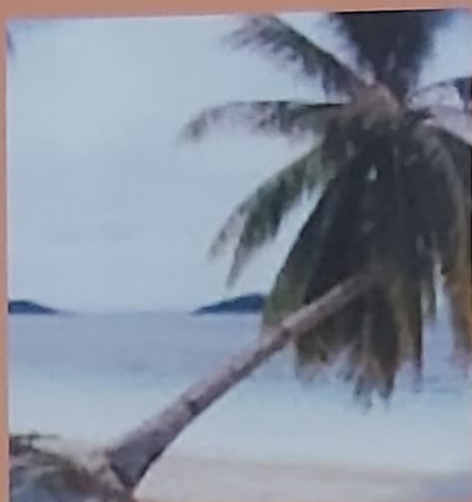
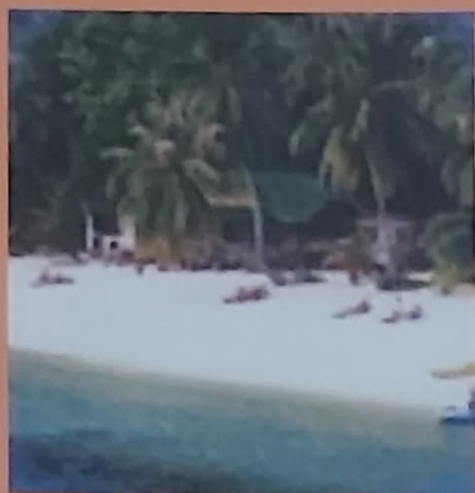
Unlike nearby beach resorts, Rawa is barely touched and is one of the few islands that has managed to escape the claws of commercialisation.



"Lie back, relax  
and breathe in  
the sweet smell  
of the sea..."

- Joyce Pathy, visitor





The other islands that are all built-up and full of tourists, peaking out from the South China Sea, include Pulau Tioman, known for hundreds of activities and luxuries available to visitors; Pulau Tinggi, famous for its five-star hotels; Pulau Sibul, one of the most popular with divers; Pulau Besar, for its kayaking and jungle trekking; Pulau Aur, with its countless dive shops and Pulau Desaru, an attraction for golfers with its 18-hole golf course.

#### How to get there

There is only one way to get to the island and that is by boat. But before even planning that, your first destination should be Mersing. To get to this tiny fishing town, you can either drive or take a chartered bus, which can be arranged by the one-man operation that runs the island's head office, Mr Ong Heng Juat of Rawa Safaris. From Mersing, you can decide on either a speedboat or a slow boat for your trip to and fro from the island for less than RM60. The speedboat takes approximately half an hour whereas the slow boat chugs along for an hour before you reach the island. If you are travelling in a group, both boats can accommodate a dozen passengers at a go, though just to be sure you and your compadres get a seat in the same boat, bookings should be made early as the boat leaves every two hours to the island.

#### Rooms and Food

Rawa Safaris boasts an array of house styles that depends on the area of the island you are staying at. There is the hillside where the studio apartments and the family suites are set against the backdrop of the island's lush greenery, the beachfront where one step out the hut door sets you upon the chilled powdered sand in the mornings, the water front built upon the rocks and opens up unobstructed to the wide expanse of the South China Sea and the tree house built in between the beach and the hill.

Some of the huts are air-conditioned but if you really want to get back to basics, the A-roof huts that line the island's front will suffice.

You will be surprised to learn that the only television and radio on the island are in the restaurant and thus peace and quiet is ensured. "It is a relief to not hear the constant buzzing of the radio or television; this just makes the holiday more relaxing," claims Joyce.

The one restaurant is the only place on the island where you can get reasonably priced food and is open twenty-four hours a day. You will love the fresh seafood and the variety of Western and Asian cooking styles is always changing. Chicken a la King, calamari, steak, lamb chops and fried seafood kway teow are just a few mouth-watering dishes that will fill your stomach before, during or even after drinks at the bar.

#### Duffle bags

There should be only one rule when packing for this free and easy trip: light and comfy. Do not bother with shoes - simply slip on a pair of flip-flops or sandals. Two changes of clothing will suffice for the period of this holiday, live-in swimwear is a must try as that is actually all you need. Do not forget your swimwear, toiletries and a little medicine kit which must have insect repellent. For added relaxation and pleasure, a book for quiet reading while lazing in a hammock would be perfect. And finally, don't forget the beach rule of thumb - sunglasses and sun block.

If you snorkel and do not fancy the idea of using rented snorkelling gear that has been used by others before, you could bring your own. And if you are one of those to explore deep into the night, a torchlight would be great, especially when peering into the dark waters and catching a glimpse of a few harmless baby sharks and other sea life that only come to the surface at night.







"And if you're lucky, you might just get to see dolphins as they make their way across the sea."

- Mr Ong Heng Juat, head of Rawa Safaris

#### Ready to go

The best time to visit this secluded paradise and escape the monsoon rains is from March to October. "With the package deals, it's a great and cheap way to get a thrill and relax at the same time," Mr Ong states. "And if you're lucky, you might just get to see dolphins as they make their way across the sea."

For a three-day and two-night stay inclusive of lodging, food and boat trips, the getaway will cost approximately RM400, so grab your bags and head down now.

#### For more information

RAWA SAFARIS ISLAND RESORT  
Mersing: Tourist Centre, 86800, Mersing,  
Johor, Malaysia  
Tel: (607)-7991204, (607)-7991205.  
Fax: (607)-7993848.  
Online bookings can be made at  
<http://www.rawasfr.com/>  
Email: rawasfr@tm.net.my





## The Fourth Star

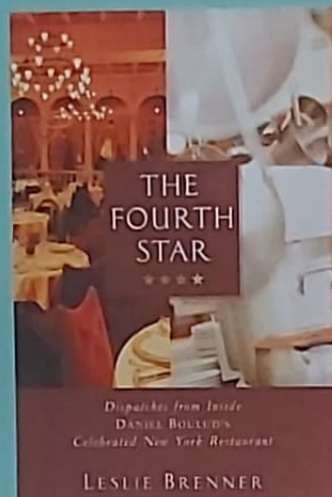
by Leslie Brenner

In this gastronomic book, Leslie Brenner celebrates the status, change and determination within Daniel Boulud's self-named restaurant in New York City. The author, an award-winning reporter from Los Angeles, spent over a year following each staff member at the Daniel Boulud, detailing the inner workings of the restaurant as the staff struggled to earn the coveted "Fourth Star" from New York Times critic, William Grimes. The sophisticated front desk and the elegant dining room lead us seamlessly into the tension and chaos behind the swinging kitchen doors. A combination of the labour of its staff, newly renovated interior and supposedly improved service standards attract Grimes to re-review the restaurant before the next scheduled review season arrives.

Daniel Boulud and his staff soon realise that the fault lies not in their food but their quality of service, and work on exceeding the expectations of their patrons by setting ridiculous standards for themselves. Since putting their patrons at ease and making them feel at home in plush surroundings is their top priority, receptionists have to smile, literally, even when on the phone because a caller can actually "hear a smile over the phone".

Brenner brings her readers through the whole process of getting "The Fourth Star" with her colourful recounting of the squabbles in the chaotic and explosive kitchen, together with the meticulous preparations of the mouth-watering delicacies of the celebrated chef, Boulud. Her exacting descriptions of the dishes tempt you into hopping on the next flight to New York—just to experience a meal in this four-star restaurant.

Chen Zilin



## Slightly Single

by Wendy Markham

One more in the genre of quarter-life crisis novels, *Slightly Single* is author Wendy Markham's attempt at unglamorising the urban yuppie. The problematic protagonist is Tracey Spandolini, a 24-year-old who smokes, eats, drinks and loves her undeserving actor-boyfriend way too much. Topping Tracey's loser lifestyle is the entry-level advertising executive job her boss interprets as secretary. Also adding to her insecurities are best friends Kate, a bleached-blond American-sweetheart, and Raphael, the quintessential gay stereotype.

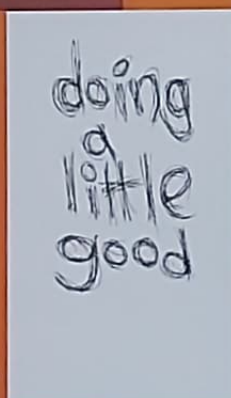
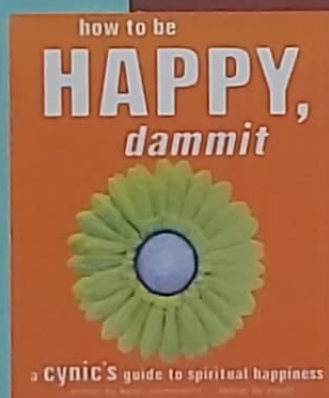
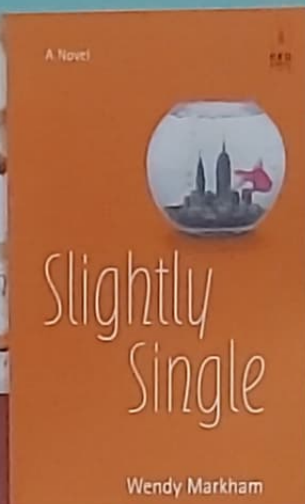
Both annoying and endearing is Tracey's persistent and naive belief that everything will turn out fine. "I'll marry Will," she muses, "He'll become a big stage star and I'll give up my advertising career to stay at home with our children."

Spilling over with insecurities, Tracey embodies the qualities we love to hate and reflects the universal female dilemmas. It's terrifyingly easy to see yourself mirrored in how Tracey only wears black for its slimming effect, how she believes Will has never cheated on her and how unattractive she feels when Kate struts around in a bikini.

When Will leaves to act for the summer, Tracey decides re-invention is her only cure and becomes the thin, well-read woman she's always wanted to be. With each pound dropped, she becomes more confident in herself and more dissatisfied with her life.

Not unlike life in the real world, Tracey takes forever to realise the obvious—that she's better off without the job, without the weight and without the boyfriend. Her route to happiness and self-acceptance is charmingly engaging—in a defective kind of way.

Christine Yee



## How to be Happy, dammit

by Karen Salmansohn

For the cynics out there, there's hope for happiness yet. hilariously entertaining New York-based writer Karen Salmansohn and arty-farty designer Zinzell successfully combine quirky gems of wisdom and great graphics in *How To Be Happy, Dammit*. Merging psychology, biology, and both Eastern and Western philosophy, the avalanche of wit and humour brings to life otherwise boring theories, resulting in a "bumpy, curvy, frenetic ride called life". Dedicated to self-discovery and self-acceptance, Salmansohn explores the ups and downs of life in an in-your-face, provocative way, unlike most self-help books. Cynics aside, those with buoyant personas might also take joy in this read as the 44 life lessons have the uncanny ability of taking you on a self-reflective trip. Having produced other bestsellers like *"How To Succeed In Business Without A Penis"*, Salmansohn has created a thankfully easy-to-read self-help book. And as life lesson #44 puts it: "Live now, procrastinate later". Get this book now. And we mean now, dammit.

Karen Kwa

## Doing a little good

Book Writing & Publishing team.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Before you start reading the content of this book, flip it through and take in the black and white photography that fill the pages. Almost perfect close-up shots of individuals and horses from the Riding for the Disabled Association of Singapore (RDA) tell the story of the work that is done to help the disabled. Each picture paints a tale, and you will get to meet children like nine-year old Samuel Ho, who despite having fallen off a horse in an accident once, enjoys riding so much that he's been doing it for three years. Then, meet JP, the even-tempered and good-natured horse whose gentleness is evident in the pictures. There are bite-sized write-ups that pepper the book, making it an easy read. The best thing about the book is how it effortlessly gives you insight into the lives of the horses and disabled children as they interact. This is not a story about pity for the not-so-fortunate; it is about the power and wonder of the spirit of volunteerism and love. Produced by students from the Book Writing & Publishing team at Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Mass Communication programme, the book truly brings out the essence of what it means to do a little good.

Michelle Tan



# Dear Diary

\* blip \*

Steering away from the  
traditional journal,  
young people have adopted  
the realm of the Internet  
as their confidant.  
Germaine Ong speaks to  
the authors of such sites.

There was a time when diaries were solely affairs of pen and paper. People recorded their daily events and their innermost feelings in hardbound journals, spiral notebooks, or cutesy, colourful booklets with cartoons on the cover, coupled with a flimsy gold lock on the side.

That was then. Diaries and journals have migrated online *en masse* over the past five or so years, taking shape in a medium that has a distinct appeal and notoriety – the blog. Short for “web log”, a “blog” is defined by [marketingterms.com](http://marketingterms.com) as “a frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and Web links”. They function as personal soapboxes on the Internet, where their owners (known as “bloggers”) sound off about anything that catch their attention.

As of August 2002, Newsweek estimated that there were at least half a million blogs in existence.

Blogging goes over and above the original purpose of keeping a diary, which is confined to keeping a written record of a person's life and thoughts. The primary difference is that blogging is highly interactive: readers can click on links that the blogger mentions, or leave comments at the blog entries. In addition, bloggers interact with each other as well, linking and cross-linking to each others' entries and often carrying on inter-blog discussions. Cliques and communities of bloggers are common, such that a popular index of Singaporean blogs and journals ([sgblogs.wonderfulremark.org](http://sgblogs.wonderfulremark.org)) has been affectionately termed “an incestuous collection of links” by its author.



Content varies widely from one blog to another. Some consist of commentaries on news and current affairs (wonderfulremark.org), while others are hobbyist or specially blogs about personal interests, such as a mother-to-be keeping a narrative of her pregnancy (anywhere-is.net/babylog). However, the vast majority of blogs simply contain daily ramblings about loves, hates and daily life, with a convenient comment function installed for friends and visitors to add their two cents' worth.

Most of Singapore's bloggers fall within the 13-25 age range, though there are also bloggers in their late twenties (dannybunny.com/dailybread.htm) and even at least one married couple with matching domain names (nickpan.com and pearlpan.com). There are more females than males on the local blog circuit, which some say is because males are the more reticent gender when it comes to airing their thoughts and feelings.

An exception would be Benson Koh, 20, a computer studies diploma holder and owner of xxx.per.sg. He wanted to "try something fresh" after getting tired of experimenting with web design, and so picked up what he sees as the prevailing Net trend among teenagers. "Perhaps they realise the point of keeping something interesting and memorable that they might want to look back on in future."

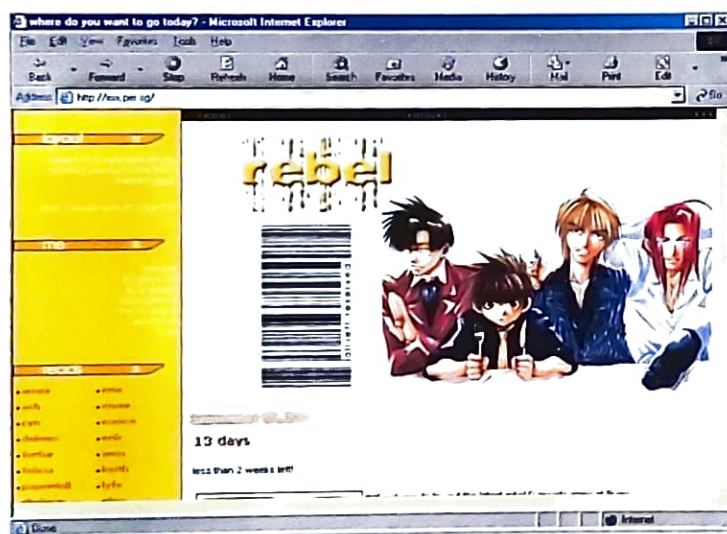
Singaporean webmasters began adding blogs to their personal sites when the trend picked up steam in early 2001. It was only a matter of time before the blog became the main attraction of any given site, compared to its original purpose and content. One webmistress who experienced this phenomenon is Priscilla Liu, 19. Her blog is the only regularly updated section of her attractively-designed site (pixelsstars.net), which also contains surveys, quizzes and a list of wacky facts.

Priscilla illustrates how a simple homepage can evolve into an ego booster with the addition of a blog. "You know that there're people reading, and you can ask for their comments. When you use pen and paper to journal, your only audience is the diary." Her visitors' comments actually make a difference to her: "When I ask for my readers' opinion on something, I will take it. I don't ask just for fun." She recounts how she recently posted an entry about a boyfriend problem. An online friend offered what she felt was good advice, which she then forwarded to her boyfriend; it is unclear what he thought of her unusual approach to solving their relationship though.

Mark Ngan's reason for maintaining a blog is simple, "I just want an outlet to rant." Blogging was not high on the 18-year-old polytechnic student's list of priorities when he registered his personal domain, markism.net. His primary use for the webspace had been to showcase his extensive design portfolio – before he discovered blogging. "It has helped me express my thoughts and emotions in words," he explains. Mark has also gleaned experiences from other bloggers' entries. "Before blogs, was there any way you could listen to other peoples' points of view without having to know them in real life? Take September 11 for example. I could never have realised how the average New Yorker was affected by the tragedy, if not for their blogs."

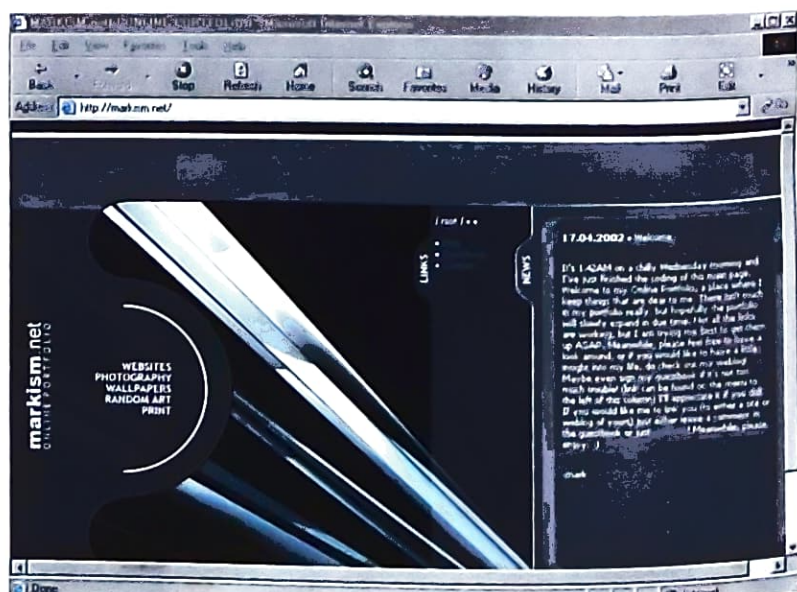
Incredibly, bloggers can forget that privacy becomes an issue when they publish their thoughts to the entire Internet. Some are lulled into a false sense of security, believing the Net too wide and anonymous for their blogs to be discovered by anyone to whom they do not give their URL. However, a simple Google search string containing the correct keywords can lead parents and similar authority figures to troves of incriminating revelations.

Like many bloggers, Catherine Leck, 20, quails at the thought of any of her tutors chancing upon her blog. "What if they come up to me one day and say, 'Hey, I read your blog and you were complaining about this and that.' Wouldn't it be weird?" Although her website (anywool.lazyjuice.com) states that it is "fondly dedicated to [her] family and friends", she cannot imagine her parents taking an interest in her blog. "Being an Asian family, we seldom communicate," she says. "It would be odd if my mum or dad read my blog and found out what I was really thinking."



<http://xxx.per.sg>

Dear  
Diary  
\*blip\*



<http://markism.net>



Not all blogs are popular with a general audience. Kimberly Gordon, 18, would read a blog regularly only if it discussed topics that interest her. "Also, if the style of writing is bearable enough and interesting," she said. On the other hand, 19-year-old Mabel Tan only reads blogs of people she knows personally. "Sometimes I don't have time to talk to them over the phone or meet up. So it's good to know what's been happening with them." She admits that it is easier to read her friends' blogs than to physically meet and catch up with each other.

Despite the hazards of airing previously-private lives in public, often with a load of dirty laundry thrown in for good measure, blogging has already shaped the local web scene for better or for worse. New blogs appear constantly, while existing ones reinvent their layouts semi-regularly to further maintain reader interest. Furthermore, the more prolific bloggers tend to develop a sense of duty towards their websites to keep their visitor counts steady.

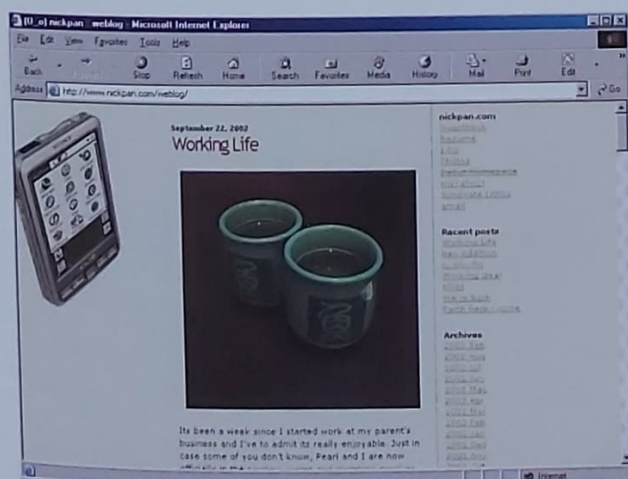
"Blogging is one way to update my domain and keep visitors coming," comments Priscilla. "But sometimes I just want to stop 'cause it seems like there's really nothing to blog about." Should the day ever arrive when bloggers like her get tired of ranting at an online audience, they'll be glad to know that the faithful pen and paper are always available as an alternative.

"I just want  
an outlet to  
rant."

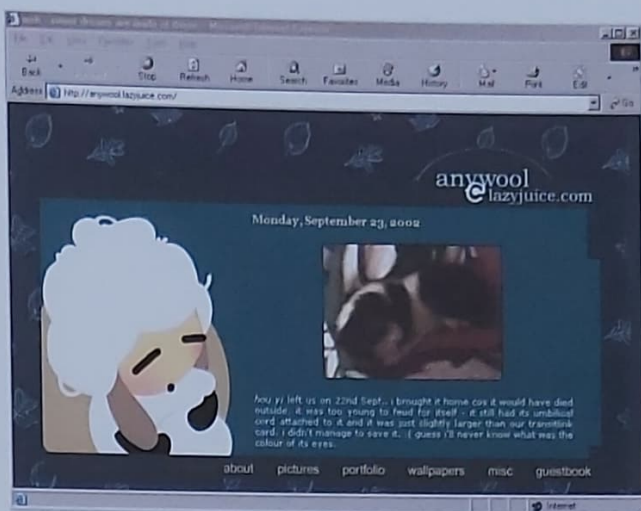
- Mark Ngan, 'blogger'



<http://pearlpan.com>



<http://nickpan.com>



<http://anywool.lazyjuice.com>

## Beware of what you 'say'...

Vast and unpatrolled as the Web may be, the random ramblings of bloggers may get them into legal trouble if their blogs are found to contain defamatory content. Defamation is defined by law.com as "the act of making untrue statements about another which damages his/her reputation". The law of defamation exists to protect people's reputations; should defamatory statements be made in any permanent form, such as on a blog, the author can be charged with libel and taken to court.

When determining whether a certain statement or words are defamatory, the court will adopt an objective point of view and also look at them in context. That means that if the objective 'reasonable man' understands them to be defamatory, they will be upheld as such: for example, if a man were referred to as a 'queen', it would generally be understood that he is being termed a homosexual, and certainly not a woman of royal lineage.

Even if libellous remarks are made about a person without mentioning him specifically by name, the author can still be sued as long as the target of his remarks is reasonably identifiable. Whether referring to a person by direct means such as an IRC/ICQ nickname, or through external facts ("that guy who sits in front of me in class and always carries a blue backpack"), the author can be sued as long as an ordinary person can identify the target of the defamatory words.

Fortunately, the intent of defamation laws is not to curb free speech, whether on the Internet or otherwise. A person cannot be successfully sued for a fair and honest discussion, even if it results in defamatory statements or material, as long as there was no malicious intent. With this in mind, you can blog about virtually anything or anyone as long as you have no spiteful or otherwise ill intentions.





# Keeping Away from Pre-marital SEX

Pop that cherry not.  
**GERMAINE ONG** finds  
out how some are trying  
to make abstinence the  
'in' thing again.



**A**bstinence. It works every time. So says a new initiative that teaches no sex before marriage. Entitled "No Apologies: The Truth about Life, Love and Sex", this workshop was launched in late May by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) and Focus on the Family, a private media and educational organisation that promotes "the preservation of the home". By October, *No Apologies* will have visited a yet-unconfirmed number of primary and secondary schools that have agreed to host the four-hour workshop for their students, who will be encouraged to sign a pledge of abstinence until marriage.

The concept sounds simple – perhaps overly simple for its target audience of teenagers and young adults aged 13 to 25. In a society where sexual innuendo and instruction can be found everywhere from news stands to cinemas and even on the airwaves, the very notion of an abstinence pledge is open to incredulity and a certain degree of ridicule.

"It's an exercise in futility," comments Tai Yu Hsiang, a 22-year-old National University of Singapore undergraduate who doesn't see what good a pledge would achieve. "Most of the time, people get laid without even intending to. Like when they're drunk." Not surprisingly, the MCDS attributes the rising rate of teenage pregnancies and abortions to such increasingly permissive attitudes toward sex before marriage.

In his speech at the launch ceremony of *No Apologies*, Mr Chan Soo Sen, Minister of State for Community Development and Sports, highlighted that the media has adversely influenced young peoples' perceptions of premarital sex. He also noted that a survey conducted by the National Youth Council in 2000 yielded alarming responses, such as that 34 percent of 15 to 29-year-olds surveyed believe that pre-marital sex is acceptable as long as the couple practises safe sex.

"It's not too high  
a standard for  
young people to  
achieve."

- Joanna Koh-Hoe, Programme  
Manager of *No Apologies*

The question, really, is whether a lifestyle of sexual abstinence will be accepted by a generation that has been conditioned to believe that pre-marital sex is acceptable.

*No Apologies* isn't solely about abstaining from pre-marital sex in order to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unplanned pregnancies; it goes deeper than the behavioural level. Workshop facilitator Bess Lim elaborates on its agenda, "The workshop talks about character and values in life, more than just frightening [the participants] with a lot of statistics." The participants are then guided to think about practical reasons for abstinence, such as to prevent having one's life goals disrupted by premature parenthood or by contracting an STD.

This approach seems to have hit home with at least some participants. Rebecca Seow, a 20-year-old undergraduate from the National Institute of Education, felt it was relevant of the workshop to have discussed the emotional consequences of pre-marital sex. "It serves as a warning... the older youths would definitely have benefited from the discussion and the video," she said, referring to the video segment which depicted true-life accounts of youths who regretted becoming sexually active.

Unlike sex education in the mainstream school system, *No Apologies* does not teach or advocate contraceptive use. "Our stand is that there is no such thing as safe sex," says Joanna Koh-Hoe, the programme manager of *No Apologies*. Classing pre-marital sex with high-risk behaviour like smoking and driving under the

influence of alcohol, she states unequivocally that no contraceptive is 100 percent reliable. In addition, the *No Apologies* workbook lays out facts that are typically not shown on contraceptive packaging: that condoms offer only minimal protection against herpes, chlamydia and human papilloma virus (more commonly known as HPV).

Chua Chor Huang, an 18-year-old Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) student, is skeptical. "They should also teach safe sex," she insists, citing her friends who had contracted STDs from their own boyfriends. "It's a very real situation out there. You should always use protection, even though it's not 100 percent safe. At least there's a chance."

Some others take even less kindly toward the stand of *No Apologies*. Nineteen-year-old NP student, Matthew Lim, does not think much of tying youths down with a pledge of abstinence. "Fair enough, you can abstain from sex. But I think signing a pledge is a stupid idea." He does not see young people sticking to such a long-term commitment while in their volatile teenage years. "How can you confirm these things from one bloody signature?"

It appears, then, that youths may have less faith in themselves than the organisers of *No Apologies*. "It's not too high a standard for young people to achieve," says Joanna Koh-Hoe, who hopes to see abstinence eventually become part of popular culture.

Mrs Jenny Ho, a homemaker and mother of four, found *No Apologies* both beneficial and informative. "It gives parents an alternative avenue to talk to their children about the birds and bees... [children and teenagers] are exposed to these things at an earlier age these days, through the media and the Internet," says Mrs Ho, whose two older daughters (aged 13 and 15) attended the workshop. She also believes that parents should play an ongoing role even after the workshop – for instance, her family discussed the topics at dinnertime the same day.

Ultimately, while abstinence truly "works every time", *No Apologies* will probably not see an instant revolution in the prevailing attitudes towards sex before marriage. So far, over fifty percent of participants have gone ahead with the pledge, but the remaining minority demonstrates that abstinence is indeed not the kind of step everyone is willing to take.

"It's a calculated risk they are taking by signing the pledge," says Bess Lim, who acknowledges realistically that not all workshop participants will go ahead with the pledge. "The choice is still theirs." However, she says, even if they do not opt to take the pledge, the awareness of abstinence as an option will make youths think again about pre-marital sex and its consequences. That, in itself, marks the beginning of change.

### The Pledge

#### Saving Myself for Marriage

Believing in saving myself  
for marriage, I make a  
commitment to myself,  
my family, my friends,  
my future spouse and  
my future children to  
be sexually abstinent from  
this day onward until the day  
I enter a lifelong, committed,  
monogamous marriage.

Extracted from p.52 from the  
Participant's Workbook, *No Apologies*



## Chocolat Buffet

The French word for chocolate, *chocolat* (shock-co-lah), sounds more seductive and yet pure. And the experience of an entire meal of chocolate, however, can feel almost decadent, if not sinful.

The Courtyard at Fullerton Hotel offers a rapturous all-you-can-eat chocolate buffet, at \$18+++ per person. Treat yourself to the plentiful chocolate delicacies as you kick back and relax in the soothing ambience of the light-filled atrium of the hotel.

With three hours to savour this sugar-bountiful buffet, the added caffeine in the chocolate will recharge the battered and overworked soul in you. Nothing will do this better than strawberries delicately dipped in melted chocolate sauce.

The blissful array of chocolates also boasts the Belgium Marquise which is a result of digestive biscuits, raisins and cherries in chocolate, heavenly Chocolate Orange Sticks that combine the orange and dark chocolate in a bitter-sweet affair, and the Peanut Butter Chocolate Mousse that melts in your mouth so quickly, yet allows the crispness of the crust to linger.

Other must-tries are the Chocolate Bread and Butter Pudding, the Crème Brûlée, the White Chocolate Mango Calamansi in an eggshell and the Flambe Star Anise Pineapple which will certainly be one passionate, heated affair for your sweet tongue.

This enchanting experience only happens on weekends.

The Fullerton Singapore, 1 Fullerton Square, Tel: 68778129. Open on Fridays and Saturdays 8.30pm to 11.30pm.

Debra Wong



## D'Crepes

Tucked adjacent to Delifrance at Bugis Junction, D'Crepes is anything but small. The latest rage in takeaway snacks, after pretzels and octopus balls, D'Crepes is best eaten while window-shopping. But if you do want to sit to enjoy eating the crepes while people-watching, be warned. The seating area is very limited with four sets of garden furniture making the best use of the lack of space.

Crepes are thin French pancakes with hot and cold fillings, such as banana chocolate, chocolate, cherry custard and choco-cheese. It's best eaten during tea-time. But if you think that these crepes are from France, guess again. This outlet is the brainchild of an Indonesian entrepreneur.

The menu of 15 crepes divided into three sections - hot crepes, hot special crepes and cold crepes - will spoil you for choice, even if its price range of \$2.50 - \$3.80 doesn't already entice you to try at least one.

One of its popular crepes is the *Banana Split* (\$3). Filled with bite-sized banana chunks and vanilla ice-cream topped with chocolate syrup and whipped cream wrapped in thin crepe, you'll feel that you've done the right thing by pampering yourself to this delectable treat. Another popular cold crepe is the *Choco Chip* (\$3.50). Chocolate rice, vanilla ice-cream with whipped cream and topped with a cherry, this crepe is another must-have especially for all those with a weakness for all things ice-cream and chocolate.

You could also try one of their hot crepes, the *Choco Peanut* (\$2.50) - crunchy crepe spread with peanut butter and chocolate rice - the combined taste of melted peanut butter and chocolate rice just stays in your mouth and you'll feel the peanut butter sticking to your gums.

A fun and light snack for people on the go, don't be too surprised if you go down during lunchtime only to find a long queue of people waiting for their turn. D'Crepes chefs are quick in taking your order and making them so you won't have to wait very long.

#B1-06A Parco Bugis Junction. #B1-06A. Opens Monday to Saturday from 11.00am to 9.30pm and Sunday 11.30am to 9.00pm.

Takashimaya Shopping Centre. #B2-08. Open from Monday to Saturday 11.00am to 9.30pm and Sunday 11.30am to 9.00pm.

Masturah Salim



## The Soup Spoon

With its minimalist, orange-and-white décor, one could certainly be forgiven for mistaking The Soup Spoon for any one of the juice bars or smoothie places that litter our streets these days. But, if there's anything that shouldn't be forgiven – passing up on this restaurant knowingly would probably be top on the list.

Tucked away quietly in a corner of the basement of Raffles City, The Soup Spoon immediately impressed with startlingly prompt service provided by a knowledgeable staff who managed to remain collectively calm and polite, despite a heavy lunchtime crowd.

The crowd, however, was soon explained – good food, economical prices and fast service do make for an enjoyable lunch experience. The menu offered that day (which changes every week) certainly didn't fail to please. Living up to its name was the Velvety Mushroom Stroganoff – a thick, creamy soup rich with mushrooms and strong herby flavour, the smooth cream base a perfect complement for the crunchy, textured mushrooms.

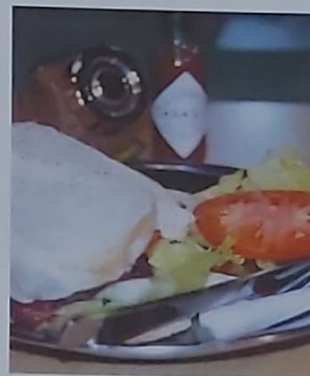
However, for those turned off by cream-based soups, the Tangy Tomato Basil offered a good alternative. Lighter, spicier and certainly as tangy as promised, this soup was marred only by the overuse of basil, which sometimes managed to overpower the tomato.

Unfortunately, the Boston Clam Chowder was something of a letdown. Touted as a healthier chowder, potato replaced cream in the soup, creating a somewhat starchy, powdery texture that was not altogether pleasant. However, good use of pepper and a generous helping of chewy, textured clams did help to salvage this offering.

Soups are offered either on their own (\$3.50 upwards), or in combo meals (\$6.40 for gourmet soups and \$5.90 for classic soups) that include your choice of bread rolls, cookies, chips, and a choice of salads or sandwiches. While the cookies and chips were pretty standard fare, the salad stood out, thanks to a good selection of fresh, crisp vegetables, as did the sandwiches – thick focaccia bread with a variety of fillings, such as turkey ham and chicken. Also offered as a fancy alternative is the bread bowl (\$6.60) – a large toasted roll of bread hollowed out and filled with a soup of your choice. Be warned, however – eating the bread bowl can be something of a challenge... and a messy one, at that.

#B1-03 Raffles City Shopping Centre, Tel: 6334 3220. Open from Monday to Sunday 10.30am to 9.30pm.

Aaron Lye



## Extreme Sports Café

More than just plain eating and drinking goes on at the Extreme Sports Café. As the name suggests – it is also the ground training centre of Singapore's only sky-diving school. This cosy establishment displays sky-diving paraphernalia from helmets to canopies, and two television screens that play videos of novelty jumps to entertain diners and jumpers alike.

The Extreme Sports Café serves deli-style meals with a personal flavour. The *de rigueur* sandwiches bear unconventional names like Tortured Egg Mayonnaise and Moo-vie Star, and are available on potato loaf (\$4) and focaccia (\$4.90). Pizzas are served too, with an interesting twist. A round piece of focaccia replaces the pizza crust, and toppings are heaped all the way to the sides. The Pin-Up pizza (\$5.90) is also wellworth a try: honey-baked turkey, tomato, and basil sauce, all smothered with mozzarella and topped with a pineapple ring.

Drinks-wise, this café serves a range of both hot and cold coffees and teas. The iced mocha with vanilla ice cream (\$5.50) is rich and yummy with a home-made feel, and comes in a huge glass mug like the sort you would typically drink sugar cane juice out of. And if the food is not excitement enough for your senses, the last page of the menu invites diners to sign up on the spot for the "Introductory Jump Course" at \$450 for 2 jumps.

1 Coleman Street, #02-12, The Adelphi. Tel : 6337 7895. Open from Monday to Friday 10 am to 5 pm, closed on weekends.

Germaine Ong



Music has the ability to soothe and to invigorate. In this issue, **hype** looks at the two ends of the music spectrum that do just that.

## Reanimation Linkin Park

Re-package Linkin Park's debut album *Hybrid Theory* in hip-hop and nu-metal, misspell the track titles, and you get *Reanimation*. Every song on this album is a remix of a previous Linkin Park track, re-titled to suit the experimental mood of *Reanimation*; for instance, *Crawling* is renamed *Krwling*. The remixes retain most of the original vocals,

but come across as slightly unconvincing after being stripped of Linkin Park's distinctive guitar hooks. The familiar chorus of *In The End*, now *Enth E Nd*, seems amiss when reworked with hip-hop beats and rapping by Motion Man. Meanwhile, the ballad *My Dsmbr* (My December, remixed by Micky P, featuring Kelli Ali) sounds surprisingly fitting against a background of electronic sounds. The album's overall departure from Linkin Park's rap-metal style comes across as either refreshing or slightly unconvincing – take your pick.

Germaine Ong

josh Groban



## Josh Groban Josh Groban

Josh Groban's "official" entertainment debut was his portrayal of a college boy that no girl wanted to date to the prom on *Ally McBeal*. Out of sympathy, Ally ends up as his date and is swept to tears when Groban takes the floor with the song, *You're Still You*. So mesmerising was his singing that he was asked to appear in another episode, at a later season of the now-defunct show. Yet again, he impressed his critiques with *To Where You Are*. Both the songs are part of Groban's debut album, titled, *Josh Groban*. Produced by the multi-Grammy winner David Foster, this album features 13 tracks. Get this though, six of the songs are sung in Italian. But before you write him off as a Luciano Pavarotti or an Andrea Bocelli wannabe, listen to the songs. Groban's tenor voice makes the first track *Alla Luce Del Sore* very listenable and not at all too "opera-ish". His cover of Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli's *The Prayer* with Charlotte Church, sounds almost mainstream pop, making it different and distinct. As you listen to this album, you'll find yourself humming to the tracks whether it's in Italian or English. Perfect for a listen after a long day.

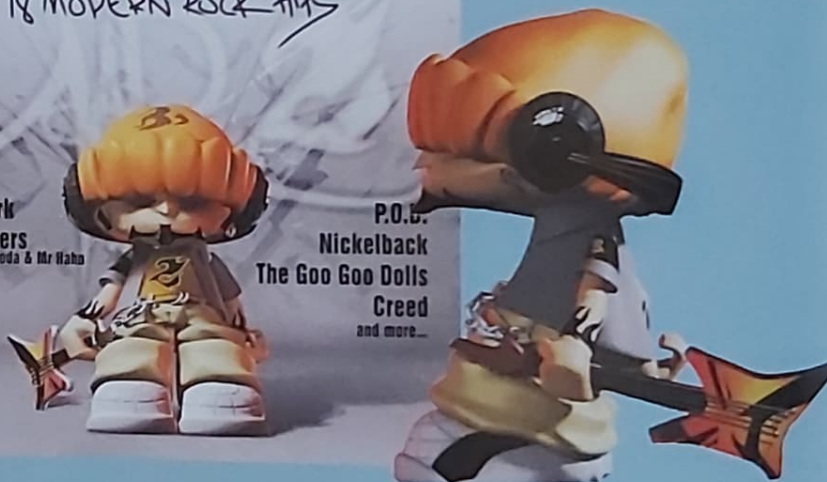
Masturah Salim



## MODERN ROCK 2 18 MODERN ROCK HITS

Linkin Park  
X-Ecutioners  
feat. Mike Shinoda & Mr Hahn  
Staind  
Oasis

P.O.D.  
Nickelback  
The Goo Goo Dolls  
Creed  
and more...



## Modern Rock 2 Various Artists

Linkin Park, P. O. D., Creed, Default, Sugar Ray are some of rock's biggest names that can be found in *Modern Rock 2*. This 18-track compilation CD features their biggest and newest hits for those who can't decide which they like best. From Default's angst-ridden *Wasting My Time*, to The Goo Goo Dolls' *Here is Gone*, there is plenty to go around. This being a rock CD, expect the usual eardrum-blasting songs such as Kid Rock's *Forever* with its heavy base and metal. Strangely enough though, A's *Nothing* sounds similar to the Gorillaz. The album also has more slow rock songs with the likes of Creed's *My Sacrifice*, Oasis' *The Hindu Times* and Incubus' *Wish you were Here*. Sugar Ray's *Answer the Phone* is a cross between *Fly* and *Falls Apart*, while managing to avoid sounding like bubblegum rock. This is one compilation that you'll find yourself moving to especially with its happier and more cheerful tracks as compared to other compilations. Definitely for those hungry for rock music.

Masturah Salim





In case you haven't heard the news, a1, one of the UK's most popular groups, has changed their tune from the usual bubblegum pop to something hardly associated with boy bands – rock music.

Now before you shudder in horror or cry out in dismay (depending on your preference for music, really), the lads' new brand of rock is not hard-core rock ala Bon Jovi or Rolling Stones. Their third offering, *Make It Good*, still has their signature pop tunes. Released in May this year, what the album has is a stronger guitar sound to it.

The foursome, made up of Ben Adams, Christian Ingebrigtsen, Mark Read and Paul Marrazi, speak to **hype** on their new outlook.

Ben pondered for a while and said, "I think it's a natural progression. We didn't just sit around one day and say, 'We're going to change our sound now.'

We took a year off last year and just decided to write whatever came to our minds. Before, they would give us a criteria and they would say, 'Write a song that is a little bit like this or a little bit like that.' And this time we just sat down and wrote anything. So, we wrote about 60 songs and the songs we were writing seems to kinda demand more guitar base to it."

It seems like the group is anxious to shake off the boyish tag that has often been lurking in the shadows. Keen on producing a variation of sounds from their previous work, a1 recounts their experience working with a new producer, Mike Hedges, whose previous work partnerships include U2, Travis and Manic Street Preachers.

Said Christian, "We decided to search around for producers that [have] not really done the typical, you know, stuff that we were doing before. We kinda explored and Mike picked up the sound. He was originally just going to do *Caught in the Middle* and then he heard the rest of the album and he actually came to us and said, 'I wanna do the album and I would be upset if I didn't get to do the whole album.'"

Chipping in, Ben added, "We were like 'Wow', it's a really great move for us. He's a fantastic producer."

In fact, *Make It Good* is rising in the charts in the US, which is usually an impossible feat for foreign bands, especially groups labelled "boy bands". The first single, *Caught in the Middle*, has been receiving more air-time on radio stations. "The response we got from the radio station was that for them, we represented something that they didn't quite have – something in between. We're not a rock band that is very, very 'rocky'. We're not a boy band that is very, very 'pop'. We're something in the middle and we bring in guitar-based pop music that at the moment, seems to be rare in the States. So maybe that's our edge. And that's why you know, right now it's going really well for us," explained Christian. They have a busy schedule of rehearsing in the coming months, followed by possible tours to the US. And Singapore? Plans are definitely in the pipeline, they promise.

They attribute much of the success of this album to the fans. Mark shared his thoughts, "With the fans, it has been a very interesting reaction; I mean a great response. I mean, we were quite surprised because the first song from the third album, which is, I guess a new sound for us... our big tip. I mean it was the right direction to take; it was the right decision to make. I mean, our initial reaction was, 'We don't want to alienate our fans'. We have maintained a fantastic fan base around the world... It was still the same... but making it slightly more global so everyone can enjoy them. So it actually worked out cos our fans said, 'Well you know, this is the best that you've done'. So it has worked in our favour... we were a little bit interested in what's going to happen but it has worked out in our favour and that's the way we want to go," said Mark.

In fact, their brand new sound has received great reviews from critics back in the UK as well as in the US, and even here in Singapore. Their single *Make It Good* was on Perfect 10's 'Top 10 Singles' for four weeks in August. And the guys are proud of it since they now have more experience in the studio and they have more say in what and how they want their album to be like, unlike when they first appeared in the music scene.

So while Backstreet Boys and N'Sync are busy pursuing solo moves, the guys of a1 are happy just the way they are and they are making it good for their fans here in Asia.



# Makin' It Good

a1, the UK boy band that has charmed us with their songs and their friendly demeanour, has taken a step away from other boy bands to establish an identity that is very much theirs. Masturah Salim investigates.



## Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

With the hugely successful *Home Alone* and *Home Alone 2* under his belt, director Chris Columbus turns his energies to bring J.K. Rowling's equally successful *Harry Potter* series to life.

The second installment to a promised seven book-and-movie series, the *Chamber of Secrets* offers a "darker story, filled with scarier creatures and a deeper undercurrent of evil", according to Columbus.



For Harry, life at Hogwarts only gets more mysterious and magical. Early strange and suspicious happenings like warnings of great danger should Harry return to Hogwarts and an attempt at preventing his return are telltale signs of something peculiar taking place.

Ultimately, we discover that the school has fallen prey to a sinister and mysterious threat that has Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe), Ron Weasley (Rupert Grint) and Hermione Granger (Emma Watson) in pursuit of a dark force lurking in the school.

Beautifully crafted to bring out the fantasy of the mystical world, wizardry and witchcraft, the intricately detailed costumes, locations, and settings promise the same quality of animation and action that made the first *Harry Potter* flick the second-highest grossing movie of all time.

Immerse yourself in this fantasy world and you can expect surprising twists and new challenges for the young pupils of magic.

*Opens November 16.*

Jonathan Han

If your nose has been at the grindstone for so long that you don't know what to watch this vacation, fear not. **hype** susses out the best pickings of the season for your convenience.

## Lord of the Rings – The Two Towers

The wait is over. The epic journey of Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood) and his trusted companion Samwise Gamgee (Sean Astin) to the hellish Mount Doom amidst the battle of Good versus Evil continues unfolding with the highly awaited second instalment of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy – *The Two Towers*.

Separated at the very end of the battle with the Uruk-Hai – Saruman, the evil wizard's (Christopher Lee) mutilated army of stronger and fiercer orcs – Frodo and Sam pursue the path to the Land of Mordor relentlessly even as their friendship and courage are constantly tested.

The plot thickens as the creature Gollum first tries to steal the ring – what he calls "my precious" – and then offers to guide Frodo and Sam to Mordor.

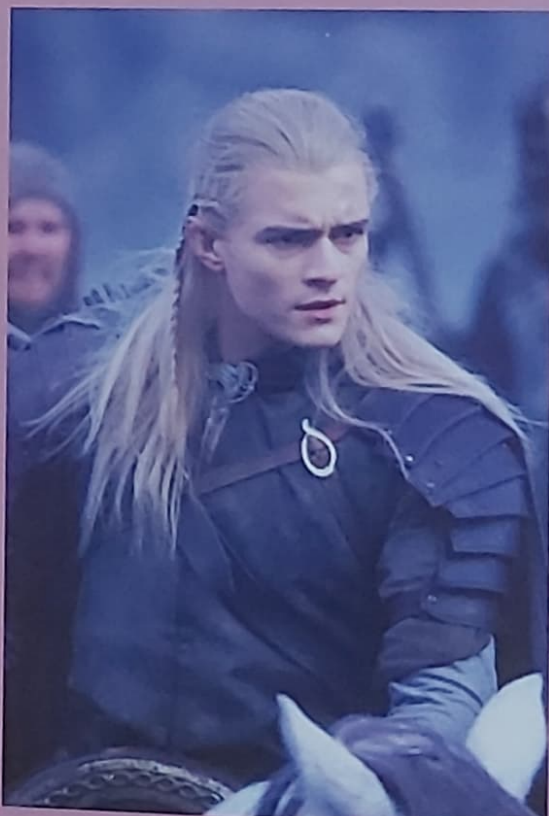
Meanwhile, the other half of the fellowship – Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen), Legolas (Orlando Bloom) and Gimli (John Rhys-Davies) – pursues the Uruk-Hai to rescue Merry (Dominic Monaghan) and Pippin (Billy Boyd), and discovers that a greater, more important task awaits them.

And it appears that Gandalf isn't quite dead yet. But is he human?

With the introduction of new characters and the old reprising their roles, this fantasy tale with a cult following continues to unfold and intrigue with *The Two Towers*.

*Opens December 19.*

Jonathan Han



Also at the cinemas:

Compiled by Svedja Baya Rahman



## The Importance of Being Earnest

Director-screenwriter Oliver Parker and producer Barnaby Thompson team up three years after *An Ideal Husband* to tell yet another Wilde tale of mistaken identities, rampant fantasies, still more rampant love affairs and some dark secrets.

Enter Jack Worthing (Colin Firth), responsible guardian of the apparently innocent and extraordinarily wealthy Cecily Cardew (Reese Witherspoon). Understandably taxed by his upright country living, Jack hightails off to London to work off his country blues under the guise of Ernest – an imaginary errant brother. Whilst there he falls in love with the sophisticated Gwendolen (Frances O'Connor) – who refuses to marry anyone not named Ernest. She's the daughter of the formidable Lady Brackenell (Dame Judi Dench) and cousin to his debonair friend, Algy Moncrieff (Rupert Everett). Algy dons the mask of the above-mentioned Ernest and scurries off to the country to evade debt collectors and romance Cecily. And discovers that she too harbours a secret crush on Ernest.

When Lady Brackenell, mindful of class distinctions, rejects Jack's suit, he returns to the country with the news of his brother's death.

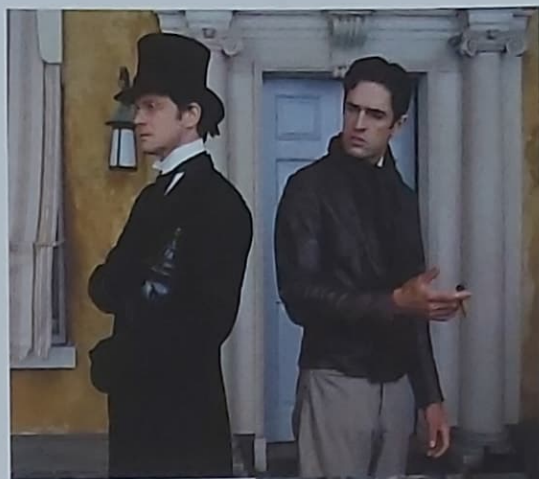
Hilarious chaos, of course, ensues.

A veteran Wilde director and screenwriter, Parker hopes to bring Oscar Wilde's last play to life in a way the 1952 movie depiction of this play didn't. He mainly sticks to the popular three-act version of the play, but also draws inspiration from the little-known four-act version that Wilde penned later on.

Rupert Everett and Colin Firth are obviously suited to their tasks, the former having starred in a Golden Globe-nominated role in Parker's last Wilde movie, *An Ideal Husband* and the latter a seasoned period actor (*Pride and Prejudice*, *Shakespeare in Love*). Dame Judi Dench too, not unexpectedly, sinks gracefully into her role despite being drafted in in the last few weeks of the shoot. Surprise item American Reese Witherspoon, whose first English costume drama this is, adds a little shock value to the stiff upper lip as she maintains an innocent air and proper British accent.

A little less Wilde than his last offering, Parker runs the risk of turning *The Importance of Being Earnest* into something sillier, though no less enjoyable, with his more liberal interpretation of Wilde's work this time round.

Opens October 3



Syeda Sana Rahman

## Slap Her, She's French

Teenage flick alert. Starla Grady (Jane McGregor) is an All-American girl and leads an All-American life as homecoming queen and head cheerleader whilst dating the star quarterback at Splendora High School, Texas. Enter Genevieve LePlouff (Piper Perabo), a French exchange student, who threatens to take over all – her friends, her boyfriend and even the love of her parents. Can Starla abandon her blue-eyed innocence to get her life back?

Opens Oct 24.



## Changing Lanes

Samuel L. Jackson is a father struggling for visitation rights while Ben Affleck's an eager legal eagle on his way to the top. As they rush to court during rush hour, they collide, resulting in mysterious losses, heated words and a hatred unlike any other.

Opens Oct 10.

## Mr. Deeds

Adam Sandler is Longfellow Deeds, a simple small-town pizzeria owner. That is, until Chuck Cedar (Peter Gallagher) strides into his life and declares him heir of a multi-million dollar chunk of corporate America. Soon Longfellow finds himself safeguarding his privacy from the sexy Babe Bennett (Winona Ryder), producer of TV's "Inside Access" and protecting his inheritance from the conniving Cedar.

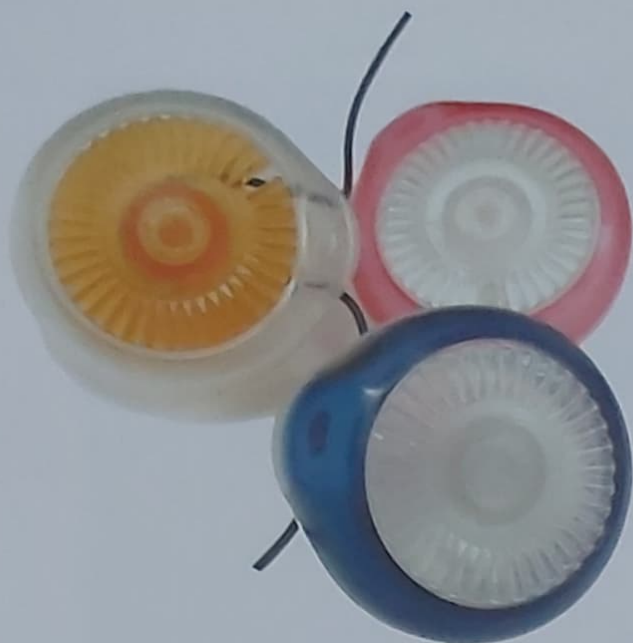
Opens Oct 17.

## The Guru

Introducing Ramu Gupta (Jimi Mistry), a young Indian dancer drawn by the fabled lights of Broadway only to find himself the owner of the dubious title of The Guru (of sexuality). Also starring Heather Graham and Marisa Tomei and directed by Shekhar Kapoor.

Opens Nov 7.





## Colourful Wire Concealer

An ingenious way of tidying up the cords you bring around. This wire concealer "turn-about" quickly and effectively changes your messy wires into neat little knobs. This means no more twining and turning your wires around your devices.

Made for people on the go, it's suitable for your perpetually messy yarnball of earphones and headsets. This neat little wire concealer comes in an assortment of rainbow colours.

\$4.90. Available at 77th Street, #04-04, Far East Plaza.

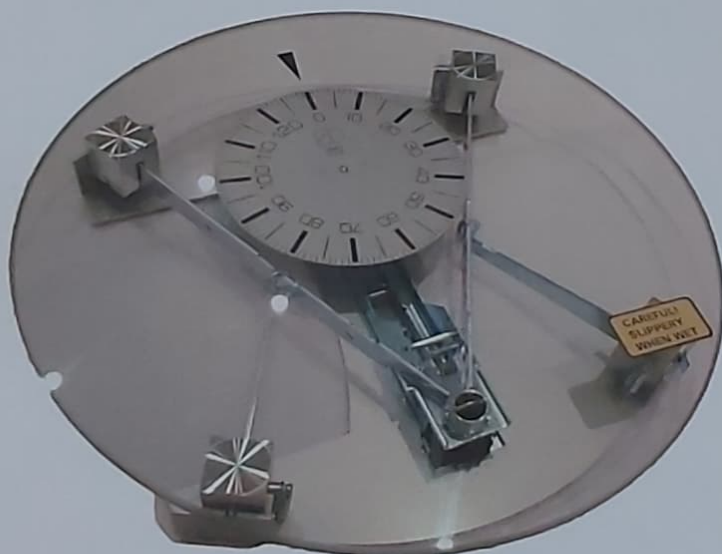
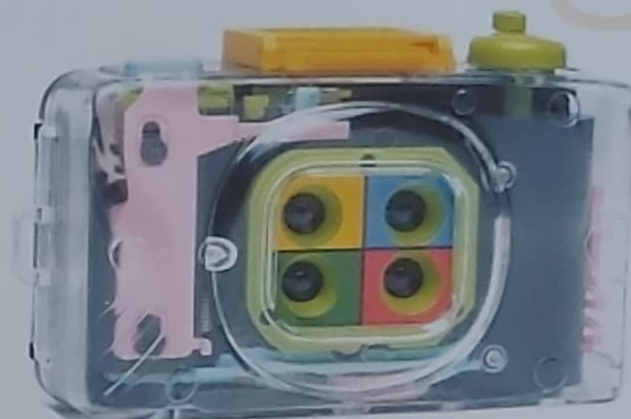
Chen Zilin

## Lomo Action Sampler Clear Camera

Change the way you look at leisure photography with the Lomo Action Sampler Clear. With each click, its four lenses capture separate frames at intervals of 0.22 seconds, and the resulting photo shows each frame on each quadrant of the print. Snapping a moving subject produces a sequence of freeze-frame action shots, while taking still shots gives you four wallet-sized copies of the same image. Also, the Lomo uses normal 35mm film, which won't tax your shoe-string budget. It is best used outdoors on sunny days, as it lacks a flash function.

\$69. Available at Molecule, #02-147A, Marina Square.

Germaine Ong



## Tempered Glass Weighing Scale

Never underestimate this flimsy-looking glass weighing scale. Blasted by fire and strengthened by grind, the tempered glass has undergone more gruelling changes than your "I-swear-to-diet" plan itself. The unique sundial face spells a fusion of contemporary and medieval influences. Approximately the size of your average weighing machine, this glass piece sits elegantly in any corner of the room.

\$198. Available at Molecule, #02-147A, Marina Square.

Anne Ng



\$251 - \$500



### Sony Clie Palmtop

Yet another gadget for the techno junkies among you is the Sony Clie PEG-SJ 20. With its pearly silver casing, this is one hand-held that you will definitely want to be seen using. But don't just judge it by its cover. Operating on 16MB of main memory, this also delivers a high pixel resolution screen that comes with backlight support. And this palmtop comes with regular features such as memo pads, calendars and also an Internet launcher. The highlight however, is that it weighs a nifty 139 grams for all the software packs.

\$369. Available in major electrical stores.

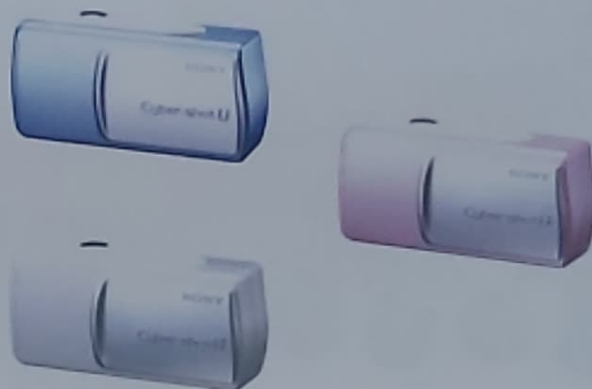
Sue-Ann Woo

### Sony Cyber-shot U

Hitting the shelves right now are the Cyber-shot U, the latest range of user-friendly and affordable digital cameras from Sony. Judging from the petite frame of these cameras, there will be minimal hassle while snapping your shots. The camera weighs 87 grams and fits the size of your palm. Depending on the location of your shoot, the Cyber-shot U can be set to accommodate the various environments. So for example, if you want to capture nature in all its glory, you can select the "vivid nature" mode, which will enhance the greens and blues of your landscape.

\$399. Available in major electrical stores.

Sue-Ann Woo



### Foldable Sneakers

Talk about a functional, versatile, yet stylish and portable pair of sport shoes. Reebok has come up with the first-ever foldable sportswear called Travel Trainer (TT). Made from a one-piece upper material and outsole with Reebok's patented special lightweight and durable technology "3D Ultralite", the TT provide a convenient alternative pair of shoes for people on the go. They weigh less than 150 grams and roll snugly into a small ball, fitting easily into a backpack. Available in six hip colours - white, grey, lime, navy, orange, pink - each pair comes with a matching shoe bag. This limited edition Reebok Travel Trainer is available only in Asia.

\$109. Available at Stadium at Ngee Ann City, Tunnel at Bugis Junction, Alternative Sports at Queensway Shopping Centre, Check Footwear at the Heeren, and Country Sports at Far East Plaza.

Karen Kwa

\$250



In the past decade, the Web has changed the world and the way that we work and live. But despite its chaotic nature, the Web is slowly becoming more uniform in appearance and content. **hyper** sifts through the monotony and reveals some of what's left of the different.

### www.urbanobjects.com

Morph a clump of garbage into a piece of art? Sounds improbable but that is the "core aesthetic" of American artist Aaron Kramer. This portal displays his multiple works of art - re-creations of immaterial possessions. Though it may seem like simple recycling, the subjectivity of modern art allows this art form enough leeway to take itself to a higher level. If you ever thought garbage is just garbage, think again after taking a look at urban-objects.com. It will almost definitely change your view of trash and maybe even start you on a creative streak. Kramer's art pieces of spheres, lamps, gourds and baskets have all been moulded from used wooden coffee stirrers, street sweeper bristles and anything else he can get his hands on. This site will show you that inspiration is more than enough to make changes and, yes, even a transformation of trash to treasure - one of those sculptures you only see in art galleries.

Rachel Fang

### www.ducttapeguys.com

Ah, duct tape. That sticky, silver stuff works minor miracles when it comes to repairing broken items and fixing minor calamities around the house. However, some truly innovative people have taken it into their hands to create new and wacky uses for the humble roll of duct tape, liberating it from its previous sole task of sticking stuff together. Duct tape fashion may never be haute couture, but the photos at this site illustrate that this shiny stuff looks decent enough as neckties, boots, and even formal prom attire. One particular duct tape enthusiast took his obsession a tad further and up-holstered his car in (guess what?) duct tape. Also, be inspired by how NASA has used duct tape to save lives and equipment while in space, such as during the Apollo 13 mission. Our only grouse is with the awkward navigation: we had to keep returning to the cluttered index page in order to switch around sections.

Germaine Ong



site.  
seeing

### www.makeoversolutions.com

Face it - how many of us have fantasised about that hot-pink hairdo or punk crew cut but never dared to take the plunge for fear of eternal damnation under the critical eyes of fashion spies? This portal could be your saviour. A leading virtual make-over website, it lets you change the colour of your eyes and eyewear, try out all manner of cropped or elaborate hairdos and experiment with different types of makeup. Choose from the menu of 12 models or scan in a personal image to do a virtual makeover. You could even try to spice up a friend's jaded appearance and send the made-over image to her via email. Male models are also available in the catalogue for makeover. Do note that makeoversolutions.com does not provide outrageous looks like Mohawk hairstyles or Marilyn Manson's hellish makeup. While the majority of us can find presentable hairstyles to work on, the fashion-savvy ones may be turned off by the less daring, out-dated styles. Say, how about an actual makeover instead?

Anne Ng



### www.adbusters.org

Popular and media culture may never be the same again, if the Adbusters Media Foundation has its way. This site showcases the activities intended to incite change in the way North Americans live and think, including massive prank campaigns and some of the most hilarious spoof advertisements ever made. While these media campaigns engage and entertain, their underlying message is part of Adbusters' aim to revolutionise and institute change in the media and the materialist culture of today's world. The print advertisements are examples of creativity run slightly amok. These spoofs take nasty digs at well-known brand names such as McDonalds and Tommy Hilfiger, ranging from satirical to thought-provoking. Look out for the cleverly produced ad series based on the distinctive Absolut Vodka ads, archived under 'Alcohol' in the concise, subject-based spoof ads index. You can also download and check out various TV and radio "uncommercials", which are broadcast advertisements that promote Adbusters' campaigns such as TV Turnoff Week and Buy Nothing Day.

Germaine Ong

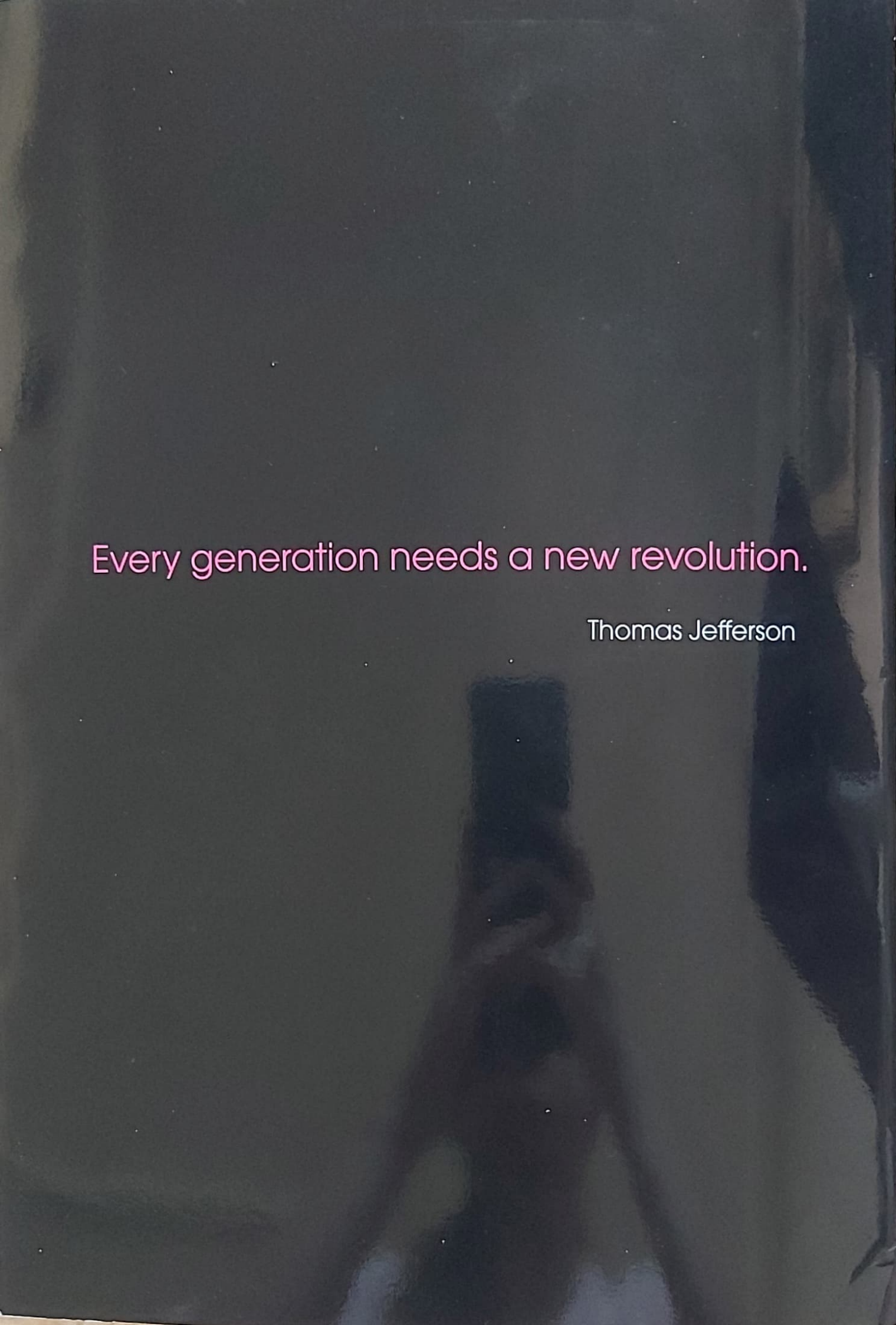




"CHANGE is a form of progression. We need to walk out of the past and work towards the future and better ourselves. And sometimes even though the change is upon us, we don't see it and to notice the change, it may be necessary to see it from the outside."

- Alex Ellinghausen,  
Photojournalism student





Every generation needs a new revolution.

Thomas Jefferson