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Reader's Digest

NOVEMBER 2020

₹100



**LAUGH
YOURSELF
SMARTER**

How Humour Builds Brains

DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

Hijacked!

**Children's Rights:
Why They Matter**

FICTION SPECIAL

**Professor
Shonku's Date
with History**

**In conversation
with Radhika Apte**

35 **Virus Facts
You Need to
Know**

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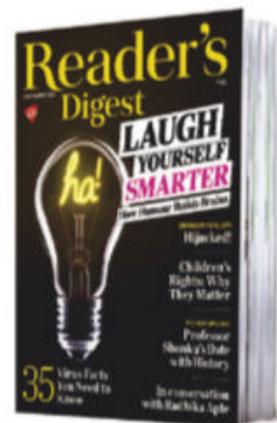
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TOP RIGHT: MARTIN GALLAGHER/GETTY IMAGES,

Real-life problems need a real-life solution

A story of every household

Ever since it was launched 17 years ago, Fenesta has been the market leader and India's No.1 brand of windows and doors. Naturally, when plans were afoot to do its first ever TVC, the team, instead of going to the drawing board, went and met the customer first. After all, that's been Fenesta's credo all along. The findings were along expected lines.

How many times have you dreaded the prospect of coming back to a dusty, messy home after a long vacation? Across the length and breadth of the country, irrespective of where you live in the city, this is a problem, which everybody has to deal with. And this was the one problem that Fenesta overcame. This is why, customer after customer sang paeans of just how their life transformed after they had Fenesta installed at home. Insulation from dust, noise and pollution were not just hollow claims of the brand but were for real.

These were people who did not fear coming back to a locked house, in fact, quite the opposite. They were not scared of going out either, whether it is for a week or a month. These were people who had foresight in their lives and Fenesta on their windows. These were people who had now become used to coming back to a spotlessly clean home - just the way they left it. No layer of dust. No tossed up papers around the house because of the old window, which lets in gusts of air on occasion. These were the people whose experience became the platform for the TVC.

This real-life problem is the narrative that drives Sharma ji's plight in the new Fenesta commercial that's just been released. Sharma ji is our guy next door, the happy go lucky gentleman, a character that we all easily associate and relate with.



So what's Sharma ji's problem?

Given the drudgery associated with getting the house back in shape, Sharma ji panics at the thought of leaving town for more than two days.

So be it a wedding in Bangkok, or a conference in Singapore or a holiday in Kashmir for Sharma ji, it's got to be 'Sarf, do din ke liye'...leading to uncomfortable and humorous situations in the commercial.

At one level the commercial will have you empathizing with Sharma ji and at another, it will tickle you with the reactions that he gets because of his quirk.

Shot at the height of the pandemic, it was a first for the team to do a long distance shoot over Zoom. What's more, there's a message in the end too that dissuades unimportant travel during the current times.

So go ahead and catch the commercial across various digital platforms and if you share your story of how you have avoided going out of

town because of this problem you could end up with a surprise hamper from Fenesta.

How many times have you dreaded the prospect of coming back to a dusty, messy home after a long vacation?

For the complete story just scan the QR code



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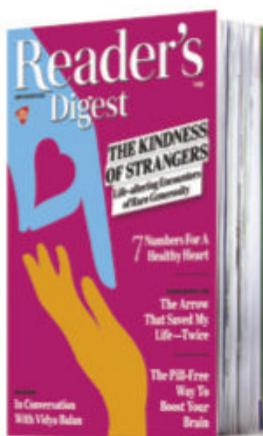


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OVER TO YOU

NOTES ON THE
September ISSUE



7 Heart Numbers You Should Know

While the rest of media is focussed on bringing out news covering only the Covid pandemic, which often excaerbates fears and despair, it is heartening that *RD* has chosen to publish articles covering the other key health parameters to keep ourselves in peak physical condition. Information about how to care for vital organs, such as the heart, keeps us in the loop of how to look after ourselves, which goes beyond current COVID-19 health concerns. With most hospitals busy attending to the corona-afflicted, the rest of us are unable to go for regular health check ups. *RD*'s articles on health management are definitely a boon to all in these trying times.

—THARCIUS S. FERNANDO, *Chennai*

Tharcus S. Fernando gets this month's 'Write & Win' prize of ₹1,000. —EDS

Say Goodbye to Procrastinating

This article should serve as a clarion call to all about the importance of taking timely action. In April this year, my mother complained of weakness in her whole body, particularly her right hand. The matter

was dismissed as a common old-age issue. Pandemic-related restrictions added to procrastinating a doctor's visit. The next month, she had a stroke and it turned out she needed brain surgery to remove several blood clots. The damage was great and

we lost her in September. So much pain was caused by putting off a simple checkup. Often delays and negligence can have dire consequences from which there is no escape, as it was in my case.

BHUSHAN CHANDER
JINDAL, *Mumbai*

The Answer is Not in a Bottle

Jane E. Brody is right in her anti-pill advocacy—no pill can take your memory back to what it was in one's youth, and most pills have an inherent side effect. In fact, I believe losing a bit of one's memory is actually beneficial—like shedding baggage!

Instead of depending on medication, my husband and I, both over 70, play word and number games with our granddaughter, solve crosswords, write letters and exercise for 20 minutes everyday. No genie from a bottle needed!

MALLIKA GOPALAKRISHNAN, *Bengaluru*

The Arrow that Saved My Life—Twice

We have often heard the proverb, whatever happens, happens for a reason (and usually a good one!). Donna Barbour's story reminded me of that. She was extremely lucky—or blessed—that her unexpected accident drew attention to two deadly diseases developing in her body, which, left unattended, would have caused an irreversible catastrophe. The story seems like a miracle, but what is remarkable is the narrator's positive attitude and faith that everything would get better. I would also like to mention *The Boy with*

the Spike in his Head (October 2019 issue) recounting a similar harrowing experience, but with a miraculous recovery at the end, courtesy the amazing team of doctors. Whether it be in a pandemic or not, doctors are always there to snatch you right out of jaws of death—with a little bit of luck and blessings!

RIA ROY, *Kolkata*

The Smokejumpers

The enduring story of 'smokejumpers' who risk their lives for hours and days to protect mother nature is an eye-opener to the rest of the world. These bravehearts

remind us that there are heroes in the world who fight a daily battle of facing down towering infernoes and going far beyond the call of duty to place the safety of others before their own. A smokejumper's job centres around the motto 'serve selflessly to protect.' Their tales of valour should be retold over crackling campfires for generations to come.

MANU MANUEL

VARGHESE, *Bangalore*

Write in at editor.india@rd.com. The best letters discuss RD articles, offer criticism, share ideas. Do include your phone number and postal address.

Finding the Silver Lining

This past year has perhaps been one of the most challenging ones in recent memory. And yet, through it all, so many of us have discovered a new appreciation for life's simpler joys.

Share with us your stories of the people, anecdotes and incidents that kept your spirits high and inspiration flowing this year, and you could be published in our special feature *Finding the Silver Lining*. Send in your 150-word entries to editor.india@rd.com or any of our social-media handles by 15 December 2020. Be sure to include your name, location and contact number as well.



Faber launches World's only 3 in 1 chimney

With growing air pollution & increases in the risk of health hazards, it is important to use something which keeps you and your loved one healthy & your's kitchen pollution free.

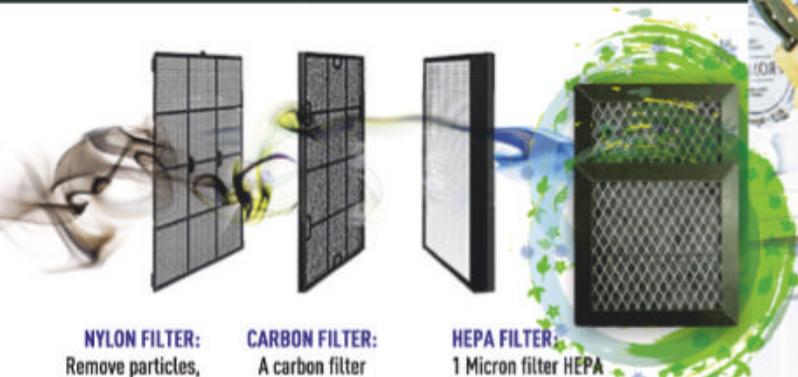
Faber introduces the world's only 3-in-1 Aeration Chimney which offers the functionality of 3 appliances in 1 appliance. This appliance combines the functionality of a chimney, a fan and an air purifier.

This hood comes in exciting new finishes including Alligator Black, Antique Silver, Shiny Black, Antique Copper & Neocraft Grey and also has 3 kinds of air Filter in it.



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Faber Hood 3 in 1 Aerostation was launched by South Sensation popularly known as "Wink Girl" Priya Prakash Varrier during IPL 2019.

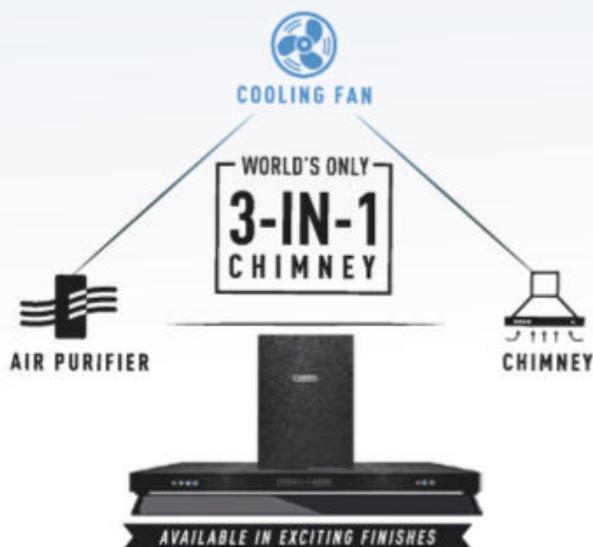
FFIL is India's leading kitchen appliances manufacturer with Swiss and Italian parentage for "Franke" and "Faber" brands respectively. Franke Faber India Limited is part of 2.5 billion USD Franke Artemis Group. Franke Artemis Group has business interests in Kitchen Systems, Food Service, Coffee Systems, Beverage Systems & Washroom Systems and is present in over 70 countries.

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CONVERSATIONS

Children: Their Rights, and Why They Matter

Every child is a right-holder and should be treated as such

BY *Shantha Sinha*



THE CHILD population in India today stands at more than 400 million, which is more than the total population of many countries in the world. As a large

country with diversity in economic attainment, political and institutional histories and cultural specificities, the protection of children's rights continues to represent a key challenge.

While there have been gainful achievements in child development indicators of health, nutrition, education and other entitlements—some states doing better than the others—these key areas continue to be abysmally poor for certain classes of children and more disadvantaged communities. Currently, India has the largest network of

public schools with 1.5 million schools covering 260 million students, 13 million *Anganwadi* centres and noon meal schemes covering millions of children.

Yet, our country also ranks 94 out of 107 countries on the Global Hunger Index 2020—lower than Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. According to India's National Family Health Survey 2015–16, 38 per cent of India's children are stunted and 36 per cent are underweight. While the global infant mortality rate was 30.5 deaths per 1,000 live births, in India it stood at 41 in 2016 and higher still among scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and girls.

The scenario regarding education is no better with the rapid increase in private schools and no corresponding growth in government schools. There is an enormous demand for education but a totally dysfunctional public



education system, lacking both quality and universal retention of students. Only 56 per cent of children are enrolled in higher secondary school education. The inequality in the education system reinforces the social divide, resulting in an education apartheid.

The COVID-19 lockdown has exacerbated social inequalities, and has affected children the most. With schools closed, millions of children have been pushed into the labour force, working in subhuman conditions. Trafficking of children as migrant labour has already begun. For girls especially, child marriage, violence, abuse and gender discrimination remain crucial challenges. Children

with disabilities are left uncared for as services for their learning, health and other entitlements are negligible. They remain hidden and invisible. Denied state services and protective schemes, children have become victims with no possibility of mobility or opportunities that can give them confidence, self-esteem and dignity.

Against such a harsh reality, it was heartening to hear about cases of triumph. Abandoned and mistreated as a child, Laxmi*, originally from Simhapuram village near Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, graduated as a head constable this month. Nearly a decade ago, she was rescued as a 10-year-old domestic labourer and sent to the residential

bridge course of MV Foundation—a Hyderabad-based NGO working for children's right to education and abolition of child labour. A lovely girl, with artistic talent and leadership qualities, she became a role model for batches of children joining MV Foundation.

Often, it is argued that children *have* to work because they are poor but those who rescued Laxmi firmly believed that children are not to be held responsible for their poverty. She was enrolled in a public school, lived in the social welfare hostel, accessed government scholarship and demanded that the state provide her the entitlements children deserve, as a matter of right. Every child deserves this support.

Violations of children rights are to be addressed at two levels. On one hand, civil society has a huge role in changing social norms, promoting non-violence and not subjecting children to hurt of any kind. During the pandemic there have been hundreds of voluntary initiatives by local groups, NGOs and gram panchayats to reach out to children, engage with them through village education centres, introduce theatre, music, art and other learning activities. These are truly inspirational and worthy of emulation. They have shown how the violence on children—which occurs as regular

practice in institutional settings, and even within a family—is wrong, and stand as exemplars fostering a change in the societal framework that respects children as equals.

On the other hand, especially during the pandemic, the state should make a commitment to providing the country's children the resources, services and institutions mandated by law and ensure entitlements to edu-

**IT IS ARGUED
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THEIR POVERTY.**

cation, health, nutrition and protection against exploitation. It has to prevent abuse, violence and neglect of children, keep them safe from risk or perceived risk to their lives or childhood. Collaboration with local bodies to track every child in a constituency and make available funds that could be used for emergency relief of children is

key. The system of equity and justice in the protection of children's rights will forge a new set of traditions, cultures and values that will, eventually, bring transformation in all our lives. **R**

Shantha Sinha is a child-rights activist, the founder of MV Foundation and a professor of political science at Hyderabad Central University. She was a two-term head at the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights. She received the 2003 Ramon Magsaysay award and the Padma Shri in 1999.

HUMOUR *in*
UNIFORM

While serving in South Korea, I was assigned guard duty. The ensign issued me a gun and a whistle, but I quickly realized there were no bullets. Brandishing the empty weapon, I asked, "What do I do if I run into trouble?"

The ensign replied, "That's what the whistle's for."

—GORDON STANLEY
 SCHAUMBURG

During basic training, our drill sergeant often led us in a game of Simon Says to help teach us the marching commands. "I bet you can't get me out," a private insisted.

Challenge accepted, the drill sergeant went through the commands, sometimes beginning with "Simon



"Oh, stop it. You know perfectly well that before every battle the enemy shouts things at us that we may find offensive."

says" and sometimes not. The private was as good as he claimed and stayed in the game until the sergeant commanded, "Simon says, jump up!" The private leaped into the air and landed again.

"You're out!" the sergeant shouted.

"Simon said jump up, but not down!"

—THOMAS WEBER
 DEKALB

Reader's Digest will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email us at editor.india@rd.com



(Left) Kanta Prasad and his wife Badami Devi; (right) Prasad being examined by Dr Sud

GOOD NEWS
FOR A *Better Planet*

Social Media with a Heart

SOCIETY Like thousands of small businesses around the country, ‘Baba Ka Dhaba,’ a small roadside food joint in south Delhi’s Malviya Nagar faced dismal prospects ever since the coronavirus pandemic sent the nation into lockdown. But when a touching video of its octogenarian owners—Kanta Prasad and his wife Badami Devi—tearfully describing their struggle to make ends meet went viral in October, things turned around.

Viewed over 4.7 million times, the video sparked a massive campaign to

offer Prasad financial aid as well as spread awareness about the need to support local vendors. Footfall improved dramatically, but the generosity did not stop there. Later that month, Dr Samir Sud—a family friend of the woman whose post about the dhaba first went viral—noticed from the video that Prasad and Badami Devi have cataracts and performed the necessary surgery for the condition without charge. While Prasad has since filed a complaint alleging misappropriation of the donated funds, his story is a telling reminder of how social media can be a powerful tool for good too.

(TOP LEFT): TWITTER, @SHARPSIGHTDELHI; (TOP RIGHT) TWITTER, @VASUNDHARATANKH; RIGHT: FACEBOOK @BINISHDESAI

Banking on Green

ENVIRONMENT As part of its continued efforts to be India's first 'carbon-neutral panchayat', the Meenangadi village in Kerala's Wayanad district has rolled out a unique way to support afforestation efforts—allowing farmers to mortgage trees on their land for interest-free bank loans.

The project, devised by the state finance minister Dr T. M. Thomas Isaac, offers farmers financial incentive to plant and preserve forest cover by providing interest-free loans through local cooperative banks so recipients can care for the trees as well as meet other farm requirements.

From the state-allocated budget of ₹10-crore, loans for 184 farmers have already been sanctioned in two wards of the panchayat, according to Beena Vijayan, who heads the local panchayat. Regular carbon audits monitor progress towards a carbon-neutral status, which will not only protect local biodiversity but also boost industries. If successful, the panchayat's good work could lead the way to a cleaner, healthier environment and economy for other states as well.

Responsible Recycling

INNOVATION Discarded PPE kits and single-use masks, which are non-biodegradable, have greatly exacerbated the already serious issue of

plastic pollution around the world. But 27-year-old Binish 'Recycle Man' Desai, founder of Eco-Eclectic Technologies, Gujarat, had long anticipated this, based on the rising demand of protection equipment against COVID-19. Desai—known for designing the P-Block (recycled bricks made of industrial paper waste) in 2010—responded to this crisis with



Binish Desai holding a Brick 2.0

Brick 2.0, launched earlier this year. Made from discarded single-use masks and PPE gear, which are processed with "special binders" he has created in his personal lab, these bricks are said to be three times stronger than conventional ones at twice the size and half the price. They are also fire retardant, recyclable and absorb less than 10 per cent water. With innovations like this, the future of sustainable building and infrastructure looks brighter than ever before. **R**

—COMPILED BY ISHANI NANDI

It Happens
ONLY IN INDIA



The Cure-all Cow-chip

In the latest on 'how to bolster immunity', chairman of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog (RKA)—a department under the Union Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying—Vallabhbai Kathiria, made the “scientifically proven” claim that cow dung cakes will rid one of radiation and serve as

a safeguard against all diseases. That's not all the bovine business he had to offer—Kathiria went on to unveil a cow dung “chip” called *Gausatva Kavach*, which can “be used in mobile phones to reduce radiation”. Katharia's unsubstantiated claims were greeted by a letter signed by 600 researchers and scientists from across the country,

demanding evidence to support his assertions. We would simply like to drop a gentle reminder to the RKA chief about the constitutional principle of developing a scientific temper.

Source: ANI, timesofindia.com

Zip It Safe

With the threat of COVID-19 still looming large and casting a pall over general merry

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making, food joints are pulling every trick in the book to bring in customers. Take Kolkata eatery, Wok'ies, for instance. If its 2D-themed, monochromatic design isn't enough of a draw, the café is offering customers free masks they can wear even during meals, courtesy a zipper addition. Simply unzip, eat and zip it back up again. We are not convinced that these help ward off infection, but we laud the enterprising spirit.

Source: ANI

All's Fair in Love and Ludo

As we get used to the tedium and the exception Year 2020 has brought, some, more than others, are worse for wear. A father-daughter duo from Bhopal almost went to court over a game of Ludo! The 24-year-old daughter was so miffed at her father conquering one of her tokens in the game, she wanted to snap all ties with him. The reason for such escalation: She hadn't expected her father, whose filial duty is to care



Steam inhalation, in the hopes of driving COVID away

about her happiness, to “cheat” his way to victory. Wildly incensed at the state of affairs, the daughter had to undergo four sessions with a family-court counsellor to go back to feeling “positive” about life and family. The takeaway? Seek non-competitive ways, such as knitting, to spend self-quarantine.

Source: *intoday.in*

A No-Steam Idea

As the world races towards creating a vaccine for COVID-19, hoping to restore life back to the old normal, several quacks and hacks have been cashing in on the corona-cure bandwagon. Several Coronils, cow-dung and

immunity-boosting papads later, we now have a Pune steam bar that claims to both prevent and cure coronavirus infection. A video of people undergoing the ‘treatment’ shows them sitting side by side, inhaling steam through pipes attached to a pressure cooker. We would love a corona cure too, but these quacks would do well to wear a mask, wash their hands and save their breath till the experts create one.

Source: [doorarshanews.com](https://www.doorarshanews.com) 

—BY NAOREM ANUJA

Reader's Digest will pay for contributions to this column. Post your suggestions with the source to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com

POINTS TO PONDER

I feel more passionate about the teaching side of my job than I have ever been, because it's so important to convince the younger generation that their ability to question and think is crucial to the future of the world.

Andrea Ghez, 2020 Physics Nobel Laureate, on being a professor.

There is no need to congregate in large numbers to prove your faith or your religion ... You can pray to your gods at your homes. I would suggest that all of you celebrate festivals with your families.

Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union health minister

Every injustice owes its origin to the sense of impunity that is entrenched in the system: my power is my sword; my epaulette above my breast pocket is my shield; my caste folk will fight for me ... Now you know why injustice prevails: impunity triumphs over justice.

P. Chidambaram, politician



Andrea Ghez

Dr Harsh Vardhan

P. Chidambaram

So it came to light that the male and female
flew under different banners: whereas the male
believed that love was what one felt in one's heart
the female believed love was what one did.

Louise Glück, 2020 Literature Nobel laureate

**We should keep in mind that our precious
constitution is what it is because, at the helm
of its creation, was a man who knew what it
meant to be discriminated against.**

T.M. Krishna, musician and writer

... there cannot be any advance of knowledge without
the questioning of the existing knowledge. So dissent
is very much tied into asking questions about the
world in which we live and the way it is being
organized, run, instituted.

RomilaThapar, academic

ALAMY, BANDEEP SINGH, VIKRAM SHARMA



Louise Glück



T.M. Krishna



RomilaThapar



Truth Be Told

Learning to shut down self-deception is the first step towards a more honest life

BY Rachel Chen

ILLUSTRATION BY *Christy Lundy*

DOLORES PIAN DIDN'T want to believe her friend could be a bad person. They'd been close since 2000, when the two met at an event for work. About five years ago, though, the 59-year-old interior designer started

questioning why this friend was always mean to her—and only to her—at get-togethers. When Pian's feelings were obviously hurt by an insult, the friend would respond by buying Pian a gift or taking her out for dinner.

Somewhere along the line, Pian started rationalizing her friend's behaviour: If her pal could recognize her bad behaviour and make amends, surely the next gathering would be better. Or maybe if Pian was even nicer herself, the nastiness would stop. Pian stuck around, a response she says came from the high expectations she'd had early on for their bond. "You kind of create a lie to keep the illusion," she explains.

We deceive ourselves from time to time—or sometimes on an ongoing basis—about major parts of our lives. We do it to stay comfortable or to avoid the inconvenience of making a big change. Ultimately, though, learning how to be honest with yourself can pay huge dividends.

Lean on Friends

According to a 2016 study in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, when it comes to self-perception we tend to assume others view us positively, and usually correctly guess when someone feels that way. We are less adept, however, at recognizing when we leave negative impressions. As a result, it's easy to stay deluded about our undesirable traits unless we're directly told otherwise.

Although Pian's friend was the cause of her self-deception, those in our communities can often be the key to seeing ourselves more clearly. "Develop a support network of people who are honest and have integrity," suggests Tatiana Sean, a certified

clinical counsellor based in Abbotsford, British Columbia. "People who are comfortable giving you feedback even if you don't like what you hear."

One thing this network can be especially useful for, says Sean, is noticing what you are defensive about. She points out that if you find yourself repeatedly justifying your choices or actions to the people in your life, it would be good to take a closer look in the mirror. They might be giving valid criticisms that you don't want to acknowledge. For example, it's normal to get defensive when your friends call you out for potentially dangerous behaviours such as budding alcoholism, but Sean says, "Ask yourself, would they say things to hurt you just for the sake of saying them?"

Even better, instead of becoming immediately guarded, Sean suggests following up with open-ended questions: How did you come to that conclusion? Why are you telling me this? What do you think I should do? According to Sean, asking friends for specific examples of your behaviour can help clarify the issue.

Evaluate the Consequences

Once you've become aware that you're lying to yourself, the next step is figuring out why. Kathryn Bollich-Ziegler, an assistant professor in the department of psychology at Seattle University who researches self-knowledge, explains that self-enhancement—when you try to make

yourself out to be greater than you really are—is one of the most common ways that we partake in self-deception. “Typically, people see themselves as better than average, are overly optimistic about their futures and claim credit for successes, while dismissing failures,” she says.

This type of distortion of the truth can have serious consequences. For example, Bollich-Ziegler says a person who holds an unrealistic view of their health might opt out of preventive treatments. Or, she says, “They may try to discredit the expertise of a doctor who suggests a behavioural change like dieting or exercise.”

On the other hand, if they can admit they’re lying to themselves and seek help, they might actually have a chance to become as healthy as they pretend to be.

Make a Change

Lee Weisser, the director of career services at the Toronto office of Careers by Design, says that many people tell themselves they’re satisfied with their work even though it’s only the security of their job that keeps them there. “They may stay because of the promise of a pension even though they hate the work environment,” she says. In her 10 years advising clients, though, she’s found that when she coaches them to clearly articulate their accomplishments to themselves, they become more willing to take risks. And those leaps of faith have big payoffs—her

clients not only find more fulfilling work, but also become more confident in their lives overall.

While a counsellor can help you explore whether you’re just pretending you’re satisfied, you can dig deeper on your own, too. “One thing that often helps a client see their situation differently is when I ask, ‘If you had a friend in this position, what would you tell them?’” Once you figure out what advice you’d give your friend, you might find fewer excuses not to take it yourself.

If you come clean with yourself, you’ll have a better sense of what actions to take to align your life with your true desires. In Pian’s case, she eventually had enough of trying to appease her mean friend. “It was like coal to a furnace. You keep throwing coal in, but the room is never hot enough,” she says. In an effort to understand the root cause, she began tracking the times her friend was mean and discovered that it was always when she was drinking alcohol. When Pian confronted her friend about the pattern and it didn’t change, she began to see her less in order to create a healthier boundary.

Nowadays, Pian abides by what she calls “the rule of three” when she reflexively blames herself for an uncomfortable dynamic. Once or twice may be a coincidence, but “three is an established pattern,” she says. When that’s confirmed, she knows to question the internal voice that says it’s her fault. **R**



Wealth in Water

Why clean and safe trumps fortified hydration options

BY Neelanjana Singh

AMONG ALL THE NECESSITIES for survival, water is the most indispensable. It accounts for nearly 60 per cent of an adult human's body weight and is key to keeping every cell and organ in the body functional. But despite its critical importance to our health, most of us fail to drink enough water through the day, which means chronic dehydration is a common wellness issue faced by both adults and children. Inadequate water intake alters the body's chemistry and metabolism, causes toxins to build up and leads to poor skin vitality, fatigue, laboured breathing, impaired cognition as well as a host of other problems.

While a small section of the affluent population can splurge on fancy potable water, for the rest of India,

getting access to safe drinking water is a top concern. Tap water might be okay to drink in some developed countries, but in India water processed for drinking can contain a range of harmful substances, such as micro-plastic compounds and heavy metals.

There are many ways to purify water for drinking. Reverse Osmosis (RO) is a popular method, but for every litre of RO-purified water, nearly three to four litres of water is wasted. UV lamps, chlorine or iodine addition and boiling and straining to kill pathogens and remove settled impurities are other time-tested methods. Advances in membrane technology and ultrafiltration techniques are also effective.

Assuming sufficient access to potable water, most of us still don't drink enough of it. According to the 2020 Recommended Dietary Allowance released by the National Institute of Nutrition, the minimum water requirement for adult men and women ranges between 32 to 58 ml and 27 to 52 ml per kg in body weight respectively. How much water you require depends on your age, activity levels and environmental factors such as temperature and humidity.

The other reason for inadequate water consumption is a general perception that water is boring. An easy way to induce one to drink more is by infusing it with flavourful fruits and herbs. The bottled water market has effectively cashed in on the hype around



such ‘nutrient waters infusions’ with all kinds of special waters—alkaline, fortified, spring, volcanic. Indian Red Wood, an infusion prepared by soaking red wood (*pathimugam*) in water, is customarily offered at Kerala’s Ayurvedic centres, prescribed for its digestive properties among other health benefits. Black Water, containing over 70 minerals claims to detoxify better, hydrate the cells faster and increase metabolic rate of the body (read weight loss) and improving alertness.

Many claim that water alkalinity can boost immunity or that water with a pH of above 8 is effective in combating the coronavirus. But such infusions are rarely necessary or even helpful. In the words of famed ecologist and science writer Loren Eiseley, “If there is magic on the planet, it is contained in water.” So, do we really need to fiddle with this magical potion by adding

more nutrients to it? Experts in the field of medicine and nutrition are unconvinced. The tall claims related to alkalinity and other commonly added components like humic and fulvic acid remain unsupported by robust studies.

Finally, let’s address a simple but important question: Is thirst a good enough indicator for maintaining water balance in the body? Thirst and satiety are surely indicators, but not reliable ones. Some elderly people may fail to perceive the sensation of thirst. A good indicator of hydration levels is the colour of urine—a pale straw colour means the body is adequately hydrated. **R**

Neelanjana Singh is a nutrition therapist with over 30 years of experience in the field. She is on the National Executive of the Indian Dietetic Association and is the author of Our Kid Eats Everything and Why Should I Eat Healthy

I Am THE
**FOOD
ON YOUR
PLATE**



I Am Walnuts ...
**A Great Food
for Thought**

BY *Kate Lowenstein*
AND *Daniel Gritzer*

IN THE 16TH century, a hare-brained health theory circulated widely among physicians in Europe: Foods that resembled body parts, they believed, were especially beneficial for the health of those parts. A firefly for night vision, red coral to help with your blood and little old me for the most important organ of all, the powerful human brain.

It's true that even the most unobservant of humans couldn't miss the resemblance, with my meaty, folded hemispheres tucked into a protective, skull-like shell. And in the end, misguided as their theory proved to be, those scientists got lucky about me. My plentiful poly- and monounsaturated fats, along with my enviably high level of omega-3s (I'm the only nut with significant amounts of them), really are essential for cognitive health.

For the record, I'm also a star when it comes to your digestion, given that I'm plenty high in fibre. But, humans fell in love with me before science gave me such serious health food cred. In America especially, my sweet, quintessentially nutty flavour and delicate texture long ago found me a place among the most delicious comfort foods, dotting your cookies and cakes, strewn atop sundaes, nestled in brittle or chocolate and toasted in butter and coated with sugar and spices. I'm no stranger to savoury indulgences, either, whether

pureed into soups and pesto or sprinkled on salads. My light, buttery crunch (which is all the more delightful if you toast me until I'm fragrant) allows me to add just enough texture to a dish to make it interesting without creating a strain on your jaw. You can't say that about almonds!

Speaking of my more popular (but some might say less fabulous) colleague, you may be interested to know that neither of us are botanically nuts at all—nor are pistachios or cashews, for that matter. A nut features a seed sealed inside a hard outer shell with no flesh on the outside. Think acorns, chestnuts and hazelnuts. However, if you were to pick me off the tree instead of off-the-store shelf, you'd see I am the pit inside the green, fleshy layer of my fruit. And the soft stuff you eat is actually the seed inside that pit. If you've ever cracked open a peach pit and found an almond-shaped seed inside, you'll know what I'm getting at.

As tough as my shell can get, delicate oils found within the lobes can go rancid fairly easily. If I'm bitter or lingeringly musty, then we'd best go our separate ways. If you're not going to eat me right away, put me in the fridge or even in the freezer in a well-sealed, airtight bag.

If you pick my fruit early, before the pit has fully hardened, you can do rather unexpected things. In Britain they pickle me, brining me whole in salt water and preserving

SPICED WALNUTS

In a small bowl, stir together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar, 2 teaspoons salt, $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon, $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground ginger and one large pinch each of freshly grated nutmeg and ground cloves. In a separate medium bowl, whisk 1 large egg white until lightly foamy. Whisk in dry ingredients along with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract until a smooth batter forms. Using a rubber spatula, fold in 4 cups shelled walnut halves (about 450 grams) until evenly coated. Spread glazed walnuts in a single even layer on a greased rimmed baking sheet and bake at 149°C (300°F) until the nuts are lightly toasted, around 25 minutes. Let it cool, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking. Break up any remaining clumps, then serve.



me in a brown sugar-and-spice syrup. With that I become delicate and soft; you can slice clean through me and see the seed, the proto-shell and the rim of fruit flesh. But what's really fascinating is the colour of a pickled walnut: black. That's because my clear, milky juice turns dark when it's exposed to air.

Young walnut fruits provide that same inky colour to *nocino*, the Italian after-dinner drink made by macerating me in high-proof liquor with

sugar and spices. In ancient Rome they would combine my tinted sap with leeches, ashes and charred things to make dark hair dye. My juice was also used to make walnut ink, which Rembrandt, Leonardo and Rubens are said to have used for some of their sketches.

The Encyclopedia of Hair will tell you that in 17th-century England, the oil pressed from my seed was used as a depilatory, thinning the eyebrows and hairlines of women when that look was in fashion. Now, inexplicably, walnut oil is touted as a baldness cure. Suffice it to say you might be better off not using me for hair-related purposes.

But you humans have found countless other applications for me, including employing my shells as an abrasive cleaning agent, used to this day. This was not always a good idea:

In 1982, a US Army Chinook helicopter crashed because of walnut-shell residue that had blocked the oil jets lubricating the copter's transmission.

My favourite inedible function, though, is as an investment vehicle. The Chinese regard the finest examples of me the way you might regard jewels or fancy pottery. I can fetch wild sums of money in the East, where swirling a pair of me in your palm is said to stimulate blood circulation. Matching sets can go for more than ₹20,00,000—the larger and older I am, the more I'm worth. Think of that the next time you pop a handful of me into your mouth as a snack. **R**

Kate Lowenstein is the editor-in-chief of Vice's health website, Tonic; Daniel Gritzer is the culinary director of the cooking site Serious Eats.



Industry Leaders

Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work.

STEPHEN KING

Nobody ever drowned in his own sweat.

ANN LANDERS

In the Line of Fire

Jerry Parr, a Secret Service agent who helped save President Ronald Reagan's life during a 1981 assassination attempt, was inspired to join the Secret Service after seeing the movie *Code of the Secret Service*. The film's star? Ronald Reagan.

WTKR.com



ALL
in a Day's
WORK

It's a problem that the machine I use to do my work also has a function where you can shop for a new duvet cover for three hours.
—[@CAITIEDELANEY](#)

A letter arrived at our post office with the

address crossed out and this message scribbled next to it: "Addressee doesn't live here anymore (THANK GOD)."

—ANNETTE THOMAS

This is why it's called 'work' ...

♦ I tied my hair back into a ponytail for work before teaching. It kept coming undone, so I used a rubber band to hold it. Later, I was reprimanded for misusing school supplies.

♦ Someone tried to return a defective item without a receipt. After explaining that I could not find where she had paid for the item, she yelled back, "It's not my fault you people didn't catch me!"

♦ I was listening to the radio at work when a girl near me screamed. Then a girl on the radio screamed. The show was about bad jobs. It was her, calling in while still at work.

—[dumbemployed.com](#)

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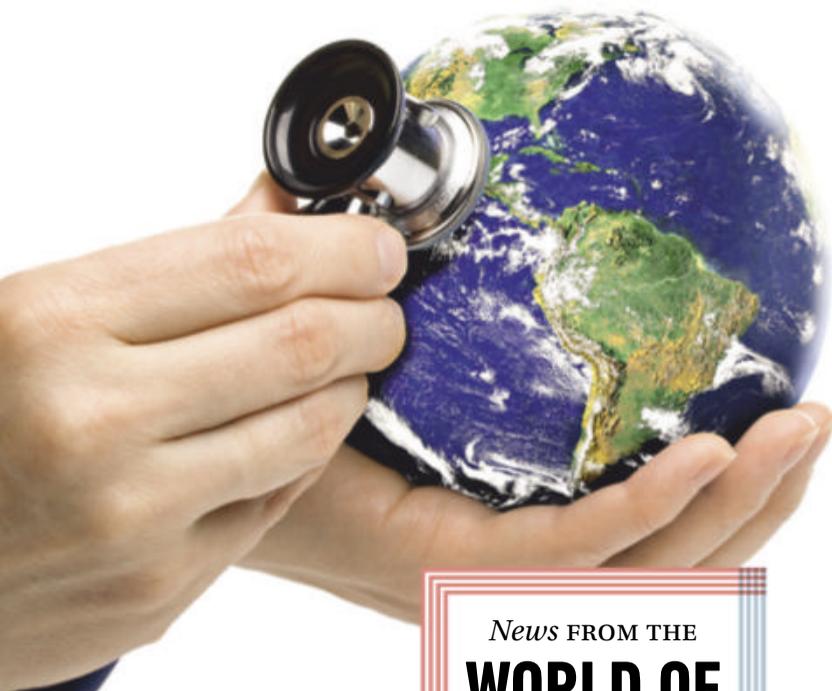
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News FROM THE
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FISH OIL DOESN'T STOP DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY

Fish oil supplements aren't the magic bullet doctors had once hoped they were. Studies have shown that they aren't much help in fighting cancer or heart disease, and a meta-analysis commissioned by the World Health Organization has found they have little effect on mental health. People who consume more omega-3-rich foods, such as salmon, sardines, nuts and seeds, are at lower risk of developing depression, but the WHO study found that omega-3 supplements likely don't stave off depression or anxiety.

Higher-Intensity Exercise Boosts Memory Most

When it comes to improving your memory, the old line is true: no pain, no gain. In a Canadian study, 64 sedentary adults between the ages of 60 and 88 were divided into three groups. One group did four sets of high-intensity intervals, alternating between walking fast for four minutes and at a leisurely pace for three minutes. A second group simply walked at a medium intensity for about 45 minutes, and the third did stretches. After doing their routines three times a week for 12 weeks, the high-intensity group improved its performance on a memory test by up to 30 per cent; the medium-intensity and control groups didn't improve at all. However, both the high- and medium-intensity groups did better on tests measuring reaction time, focus and accuracy.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Diabetes Hurts Women's Hearts

Researchers have long known that diabetes raises the risk of developing heart disease. Now a series of analyses shows that this increased risk is greater for women. Women in general have a 44 per cent higher risk of coronary disease (as well as a 27 per cent higher relative risk of stroke) compared with men. But women with type 1 diabetes had a 47 per cent higher risk of heart failure (when the heart pumps blood inefficiently) compared with men; women with type 2 diabetes had a nine per cent higher risk. Researchers aren't sure why, but they speculate that undertreatment of women with diabetes may lead to poorer blood sugar control and the development of diabetic cardiomyopathy, a disease of the heart that causes it to become thick or rigid.



GINGIVITIS IN THE BRAIN

A University of Louisville study found that the bacteria behind chronic gum disease may migrate to the brain. What's more, the *Porphyromonas gingivalis* bacteria then release toxins called gingipains that can attack the areas involved in memory and critical thinking, which may eventually lead to dementia and Alzheimer's. This doesn't necessarily mean that gingivitis causes Alzheimer's, though a Taiwanese study has already found that living with gingivitis for more than 10 years increases the risk of Alzheimer's by as much as 70 per cent. One key takeaway: floss!

Dermatological Conditions More Than Skin-Deep

Psychological support isn't usually part of caring for skin problems such as acne and vitiligo, but it should be, according to a survey by the British Skin Foundation (BSF). "Skin conditions can be burdensome for a number of reasons, such as the pain they cause or the long-term treatment regimens they require," says Andrew Thompson, PhD, a BSF spokesperson and a professor of clinical psychology at Cardiff University. Psychological treatment can address emotional and behavioural reactions that sometimes aggravate skin conditions, such as stress and scratching. "It can also improve quality of life," Thompson says, "for example, by building confidence to return to previously avoided activities." 

Laugh

Yourself

Smarter

Humour activates our brains and enhances our well-being perhaps more than anything else



BY *Adam Piore*



E. B. White once wrote, "Humour can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process." That might not be true after all.



BY DAY, ORI AMIR is a mild-mannered 30-something college professor. He teaches undergraduate psychology and neuroscience classes, conducts research into how the brain functions and holds regular office hours on the leafy campus of Pomona College in southern California.

But his students aren't fooled. They've seen the YouTube videos, the ones that document his not-so-secret other life. In one of them, Amir is gripping a microphone and standing centre stage at the 1,400-seat Alex Theater in Glendale, California, wearing a striped rugby shirt, faded blue jeans, battered construction boots—and a ridiculously shaggy white fur coat. It's the second night of the Glendale Laughs Comedy Festival, and Amir is grinning broadly at the audience through his ample beard, looking like a crazed six-foot-two red-headed Fozzie Bear.

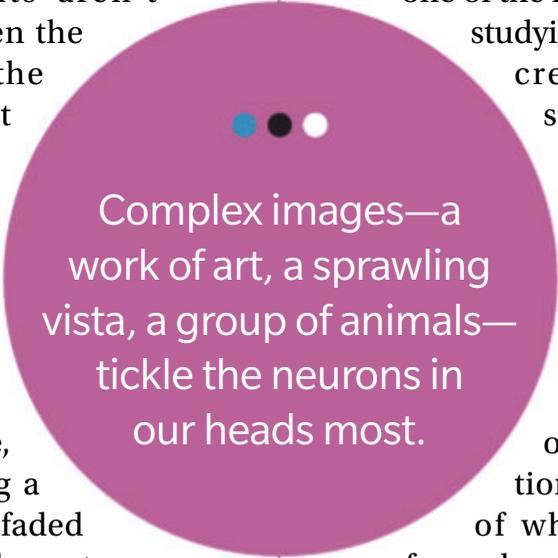
"As you can tell by my accent, I'm a neuroscientist," says Amir, who grew up in Israel. "They tell the professors at the university where I work to dress 'business casual.' This is pretty much the best I can do. My wardrobe ranges from very casual to

inappropriate." Tonight, he's wearing the full spectrum.

Amir likes to tell his audiences—and occasionally his students—that his dream is to become a "professional comedian and an amateur neurosurgeon." ("That way I could cut up brains for fun!") In fact, he has already managed to combine these seemingly unrelated passions. Amir is

one of the leading researchers studying the way the brain creates and understands humour. Unless you happen to be a neuroscientist who moonlights as a comedian, that speciality might seem trivial compared with other fields of cognition. But the question of why we find things funny has fascinated philosophers for centuries.

This is a particularly exciting time for Amir and his fellow humour researchers. It has been only in the past few years that scanning technologies, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), have let us see how the brain works when it is processing information: which parts do what and what benefits might accrue from exercising different areas. It turns out that joking, long dismissed by some as a frivolous diversion from the serious business of reality, may make



Complex images—a work of art, a sprawling vista, a group of animals—tickle the neurons in our heads most.



Ori Amir takes his field of study seriously. When he's not in the lab studying humour and the brain, he can be found performing stand-up comedy.

us smarter and healthier. There is even some evidence that a sense of humour helps the human species survive.

TO UNDERSTAND WHY humour is a kind of superfood for the brain, it helps to know what our brains crave in the first place. You might think they'd prefer when we sit alone in a room and stare at a blank wall—we don't burn up much energy

doing that. But the brain is like a muscle, and it needs exercise. What gives the brain a workout? Information. When researchers asked people to look at a series of pictures while their brains were being scanned in an fMRI machine, it was the more complex images—a work of art, a sprawling vista, a group of animals—that tickled the neurons in their heads most.

It's the activation of those neurons—

nerve cells, which, among other things, send and receive sensory information—that ‘lights up’ the fMRI scans in bright, almost psychedelic colours. In fact, there is an almost drug-like effect taking place. The brain is filled with opioid receptors—yes,

opioid, as in the drug. Made of specialized proteins, these receptors poke out of our neurons like tiny radio antennas designed to pick up passing signals. When the right kind of molecule bumps into a receptor—perhaps one of the body’s naturally occurring



In *The Champion*, the guy on the right had the bigger weapon and mustache, but he was no match for Chaplin.

Charlie Chaplin’s Good Humour Theory

In a 1920 prototype of *Reader’s Digest*, film legend Charlie Chaplin shared the surprising minimalist craft that went into his Hollywood hits. “To make an audience roar is the ambition of many actors, but I prefer to spread the laughs out. It is much better when there is a continual ripple of amusement, with one or two big ‘stomach laughs’, than when an audience ‘explodes’ every minute or two. *Restraint* is a great word, not only for actors but also for everybody to remember. Restraint of tempers, appetites, desires, bad habits and so on, is a mighty good thing to cultivate.”

opioids, such as an endorphin, or a synthetic drug designed to look like one, such as heroin or morphine—it can kick off a cascade of brain activity that bathes the neurons in feel-good neurotransmitters and other chemicals. The more neurons that are activated (and the more activated they are), the more pleasure we feel. In essence, learning and problem-solving get us high.

Amir and his mentor, University of Southern California professor of neuroscience and psychology Irving Biederman, suspected that humour might feed the brain in much the same way that complex information does. People who study humour generally agree that most jokes are built around an incongruity—an inappropriate, absurd, surprising, or unusual combination of two fundamentally different ideas or elements. (To wit: a six-foot-two neuroscientist in a fluffy fur coat and scruffy construction boots.) When we first see or hear this mash-up, we're confused. That's the set-up. The punchline is the resolution of that confusion. (Oh, this is his idea of business casual!)

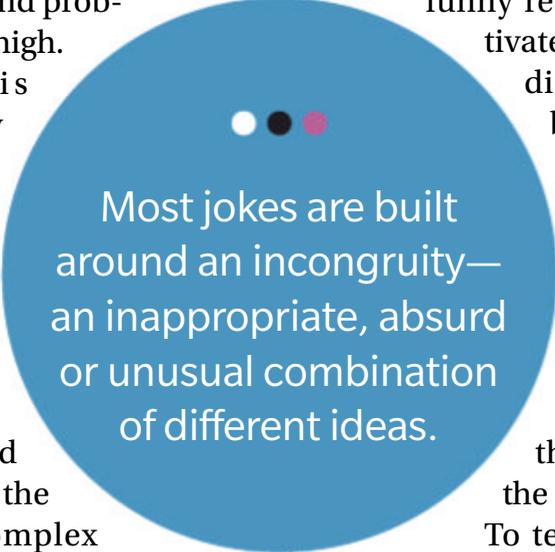
So in that sense, appreciating humour is not unlike solving a puzzle, and it yields a similar kind of

satisfaction. Instead of an 'aha' moment, you get a 'haha' moment. In fact, Biederman and Amir theorized that because humour requires the brain to process lots of distinct types of information (Isn't it too hot in Southern California to dress in so many layers? What is considered appropriate business attire? Is it ever OK to wear fur?),

funny revelations would activate different and more disparate parts of the brain than unfunny ones. This would excite the neurons even more, which would lead to the release of more neurotransmitters and activation of the reward centres of the brain.

To test their hypothesis, Amir and Biederman recruited 15 students to view 200 simple line drawings during an fMRI scan. Each drawing came with two captions: an 'obvious' description and an 'interpretive' one. For a picture with three T's in a row, the obvious caption read 'thick T-shaped junctions'. An interpretive caption might read 'trumpet valves', because the three T's resemble the finger buttons on a trumpet.

Some of the interpretive captions were designed to be funny. On a drawing of two horizontal ovals wedged inside a vertical one, the obvious caption read 'two smaller



Most jokes are built around an incongruity—an inappropriate, absurd or unusual combination of different ideas.

horizontal ellipses in a larger vertical ellipse'. The interpretive/funny description: 'Close-up of a pig looking at book titles in a library.' (Think about it, or look at the drawing below.) For another drawing, 'a plethora of dots surrounded concentrically around a single dot' could be just that, or it could be 'germs avoiding a friend who caught antibiotics'. The subjects were asked to rate each caption as 'not funny', 'a little funny' or 'funny'.

As expected, the interpretive captions lit up more areas of the brain than their obvious counterparts—in line with the cognitive theory that insight in and of itself is pleasurable. But the scans revealed that humorous insights activated the most regions of all. The funnier the subjects rated a caption, the more neurons were fired. It is this extra burst of brain activation at the moment we 'get' a joke that transforms 'aha' into 'haha', Amir and Biederman concluded. What's more, the opioid receptors they were studying are located in the higher-level processing areas of the temporal lobes, a patch of neural real estate running from

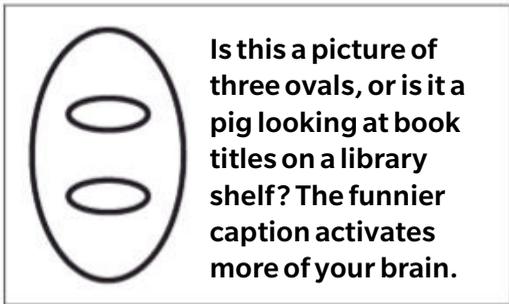
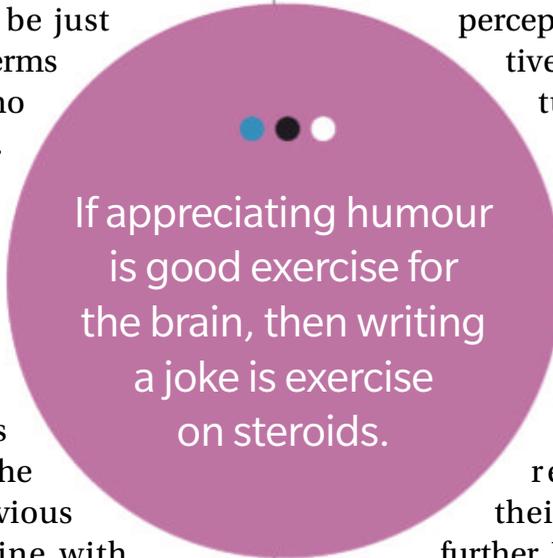
roughly behind the ears up to the eyes, where we store the memories and associations we use to make sense of the world. They also have connections to neurons in the basal ganglia, the reward centre of the brain.

"We had come to think of these perceptual systems as relatively mundane structures meant simply to passively get us information," Biederman says. "But it turns out that getting new information is actually pleasurable."

From there, the researchers took their analysis one step further. In a follow-up study,

Amir recruited people to compose captions for a series of cartoons while he scanned their brains. When they came up with a joke, the same regions of the brain that light up when people appreciate humour were activated. And, as in the first study, the funnier the jokes (as rated by independent observers), the more neurons fired in the jokers' brains.

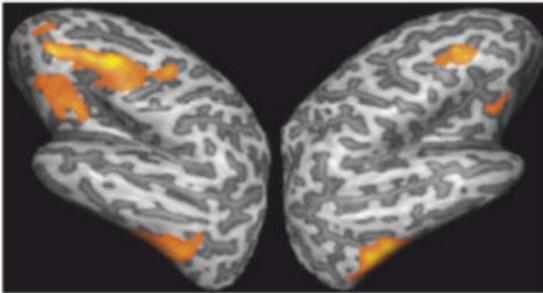
But the firing of the brain cells occurred on a different timeline, enhancing the process and making it all the more powerful.



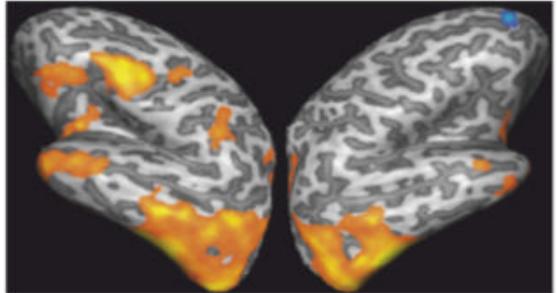
This Is Your Brain On Humour

These fMRI scans of the left and right halves of the brain show how it responds to different types of information. The yellow and orange represent greater activation than baseline brain function, while blue represents significantly lower activation than baseline. Scan A is of the brain looking at a cartoon with a non-humorous caption. In scan B, the brain is looking at a cartoon with a humorous caption, which activates more neurons.

A Non-humorous Insight



B Humorous Insight



When we ‘get’ a joke, the neurons are activated in a quick burst. When we construct a joke, activity in the same brain regions increases slowly as we rack our brains for dissimilar elements that we can link. If appreciating humour is good exercise for our brains, then writing a joke is exercise on steroids.

HUMOUR HELPS OUR cognition in less obvious ways too. Laughter is a natural stress reliever, and our brains work better when they aren’t slowed down by a fog of worry. In 2014, researchers in California demonstrated that elderly subjects who watched a funny video experienced significant improvements in their ability to learn and retain new information, possibly because the

feelings of mirth reduced levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that has been shown to hinder recall.

A good joke can function as a release valve for the whole body. “Humour can help reframe stressors, challenges or difficulties that seem insurmountable to a person,” says Tom Ford, a social psychologist at Western Carolina University and a co-author of *The Psychology of Humor*. “If one is able to make light of a stressor or challenge, then it doesn’t seem so big. It seems more manageable.”

Researchers in Hong Kong, for instance, demonstrated that when nursing-home patients with chronic pain enjoyed jokes, funny books and videos, and goofy singing and dancing on a weekly basis, their perception of pain and loneliness decreased

significantly. They also felt happier and more satisfied with life. Others have demonstrated that laughter can be associated with increased blood flow, improved immune response, lower blood sugar levels and better sleep. You don't have to write a joke to reap the benefits. Merely experiencing

humour will do the trick. But there might be an even stronger reason that a sense of humour is hardwired into the human genome. Not only does humour make us smarter and healthier, but it may also make us more attractive to the opposite sex.

"There's a gigantic study," Biederman

How to Be Funnier

Are you humour-challenged?
Experts share their tips on
strengthening your funny bone



BY *Andy Simmons*



notes, “that’s been done in 38 cultures. It turns out that in every culture, both males and females desire their potential mates to be bright. But we don’t have our IQs tattooed on our forehead. How do we know that someone’s intelligent?” In Western cultures, at least, it’s often by the person’s sense of humour.

Because creating and appreciating jokes both require us to make connections between many discrete pieces of information, having a sense of humour demonstrates that we possess a wide breadth of knowledge and that we know how to think about it in novel and innovative ways. Take

QUESTION EVERYTHING. Let the absurdities of everyday life be your muse. Jerry Seinfeld made his career wondering “Why does this happen?” Example: “Why does moisture ruin leather? Aren’t cows outside a lot of the time?”

GET THE BLOOD FLOWING. Funny people tend to be more creative, according to *brainpickings.org*, and to get their juices flowing, creative types get moving: “Dickens and Hugo were avid walkers during ideation; Burns often composed while ‘holding the plough’; Twain paced madly while dictating; Goethe and Scott composed on horseback; Mozart preferred the back of a carriage.” He might have also liked this gag: Why couldn’t Mozart find his teacher? Because he was Haydn.

DON’T WORRY, BE HAPPY. The myth of the morose comic notwithstanding, happy people are funnier, say researchers in Austria. “Increased depression,” they write, is “associated with greater problems in the use of humour to cope with stressful events.” Fortunately, good humour can be contagious. The researchers also found

that cheerful people tend to laugh more, which can help you feel funnier, even if you are prone to telling corny jokes such as this: Which side of a duck has the most feathers? The outside.

MAKE IT SNAPPY. “My building blocks are little jokes and short ideas,” explains comedian Demetri Martin. Example: “The worst time to have a heart attack is during a game of charades.”

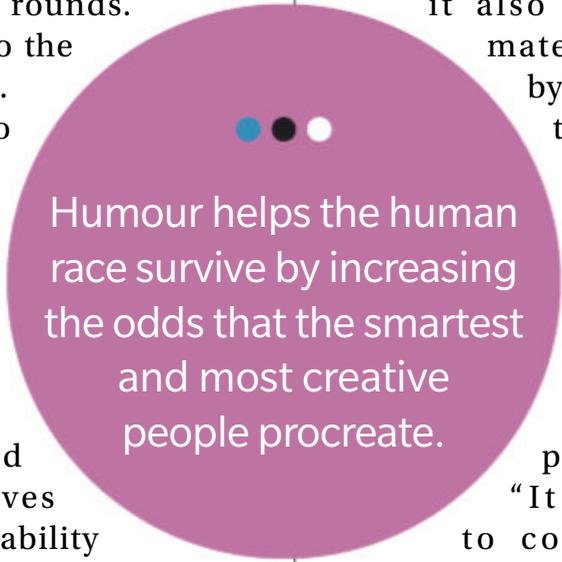
SURPRISES WORK. “Lead the audience to assume one thing, then surprise them with something different,” comedy coach Jerry Corley writes on *standupcomedyclinic.com*. Example: “Never say anything bad about a man until you’ve walked a mile in his shoes. By then he’s a mile away, you’ve got his shoes and you can say whatever you want.”

GO EASY ON YOURSELF. If you’ve tried these tips and the room still isn’t erupting into laughter every time you open your mouth, fear not! While creating humour exercises your brain the most, simply appreciating a good joke or a funny story brings with it ample benefits for your health.

Amir's and Biederman's favourite cartoon, for example: A mouse is standing outside his house, having just pulled a gun on a cat, who is depicted with one paw raised in mock submission. "Six rounds. Nine lives. You do the math," the cat says.

In order to appreciate this joke, you need to know that mice are usually the victims of cats, many revolvers have six bullets and cats are said to have nine lives because of their ability to always land on their feet. You also need to be able to subtract six from nine to understand that the cat has the upper hand (or paw, as the case may be) in this scene after all.

A University of New Mexico study of 400 college students found that those who scored highest on intelligence tests also scored high on humour ability—and they reported having more sex. This confirmed a wide body of literature that suggests



that "humour is not just a reliable intelligence indicator ... but may be one of the most important traits for seeking human mates." Being funny is not only a powerful sign of smarts;

it also makes potential mates feel good. And by ensuring that only the cleverest, fittest and most creative people procreate, it helps safeguard the survival of the human race.

"Humour has several unique powers," says Amir. "It forces people to consider different perspectives. It brings people together; if they are laughing together at something, they must agree with each other on some level. It reduces the pain associated with life's difficulties. It exercises your brain. And it makes you happy."

If a healthy sense of humour can make you smarter, sexier and happier, then one thing is clear: Finding time in your day for a good joke or two is no laughing matter. **R**



Holy Water, with Hops

In Milwaukee, even the nuns are in the beer business.

Last year, the School Sisters of St Francis opened a summer beer garden to raise money for clean-water projects in Peru and India.

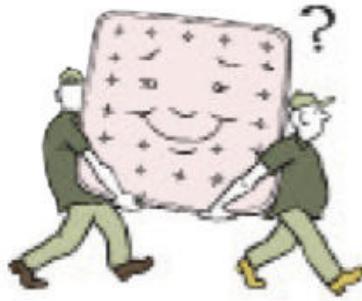
Among their top sellers: a pale brew called Ale Mary.

WORLD WIDE WEIRD

BY Alex Manley

Bed on Arrival

Quality sleep is important, and investing in a good mattress can help. But in 2016, New Yorker Karan Bir recognized a potential loophole—mattress returns. For over a year, he slept on a rotating series of free trial mattresses, sourced from online companies with money-back guarantees. Bir realized he could hack the system by simply returning his purchases within 100 days. By the time he bid a bed adieu, he'd ordered another to take its place. Enough brands offered refunds that he could go years without actually paying for one. However, he gave up after he moved to an elevator-less building—lugging a mattress up or down several flights of stairs each time wasn't some-



thing he was willing to lose sleep over.

Intern-Planetary Sensation

Wolf Cukier, a 17-year-old high school student from New York state interning at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland, went far beyond his summer job description when he helped discover evidence of a new planet. Even more impressive? He did it only a few days into the job, when he noticed a pattern in NASA's data on light coming from two faraway suns. The pattern suggested an object moving in front of them. The object turned out to be TOI 1338 b, a gas giant similar in size to Saturn, located about 13,000



light years away from the earth.

Scented Protest

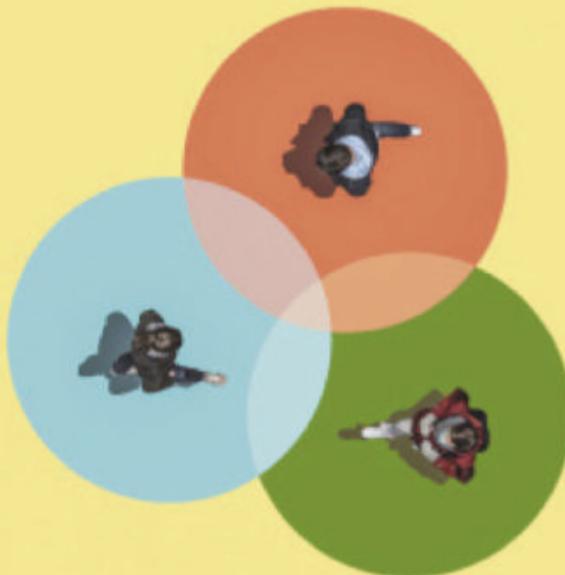
United States Customs and Border Protection staff near the southern U.S. border are coming up against an unlikely foe: a flock of vultures. Legislation that forbids the killing of these migratory birds means the vultures roost where they see fit. But their excretions—including the birds' corrosive vomit—seem to have damaged a Texas radio tower. Online commentators claim the birds are protesting the mistreatment of many migrants detained at the U.S. border. Whatever their motivation, the vultures sure know how to make a stink. **R**

35

Virus Facts You Need to Know

We're inundated with news about COVID-19 and other viruses, but how much do you really know about how they work and whom they target?

BY *Charlotte Hilton Andersen*



VIRAL SPREAD
can be measured
by R_0 , the average
number of people
someone with the
virus will infect.

There's a long-standing argument in scientific circles over how to classify viruses. They're not inanimate, because they multiply, have genes and evolve. Yet they're not 'alive,' as they don't have cells, can't convert food into energy and can't survive on their own.

Viruses are biological zombies. They have one mission: to find a host and use it to replicate. They reproduce by hijacking the host's cells, eventually causing them to burst and die. That's why viruses that infect humans nearly always cause illness. Fortunately, just as we know a great deal about how viruses do their damage, so do we know how to fend them off. These facts are a good place to start.

1 There are many more viruses than you think

We often think of just a few viruses—flu, HIV and now coronaviruses—but they are the most plentiful microbes on the planet. There are about 3,20,000 types that infect mammals, but just 219 are known to infect humans, according to the US National Library of Medicine.

2 They are even in the rain

The next time you dance in the rain or catch snowflakes on your tongue, you might want to consider the fact that it's literally raining viruses. Viruses and other microorganisms get swept up into the atmosphere in small particles from soil and sea spray, returning to the earth via rain, snow

and sandstorms, according to a study published in *Nature*. Luckily, most of them aren't infectious.

3 Figuring out how contagious they are is both an art and a science

One way to measure viral spread is R0 (pronounced 'r naught'), which is the average of how many people may be infected by a single person with the virus. If the R0 is four, then each infected person could spread the disease to about four others. The ideal R0 is less than one, which means the virus is dying out in a population. But calculating R0 is far from straightforward, as it is based on biological, socio-behavioural and environmental factors that can change rapidly.

4 You can get some viruses more than once

There's a popular myth that once you've had a virus, you're immune to it, but that's not always the case, says Kathleen Dass, MD, an allergist and immunologist with Michigan Allergy, Asthma & Immunology Center. When you get a virus, your body builds up antibodies to fight it. Those antibodies stay in your system, helping you ward off future infections. (This is also how vaccines work.) However, not everyone makes enough antibodies, and they can wear off over time, which is why you need booster shots of some vaccines. In addition, viruses can

mutate, making your antibodies ineffective against a new strain.

5 Viruses and bacteria may be hard to tell apart

It's often difficult to tell based on symptoms whether an illness is caused by a virus or bacteria, but lab tests can confirm the culprit. Unlike viruses, bacteria are single-celled organisms that can live and reproduce on their own.

6 You can be contagious without ever showing symptoms

Some viruses, including those that cause herpes, COVID-19 and AIDS, can be spread via asymptomatic people (they never had signs of the illness) and presymptomatic people (they don't have symptoms yet), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Some people may even be 'superspreaders', infecting dozens to hundreds of other people without even realizing it. Take precautions to prevent spreading viruses even when you don't feel sick.

7 If you're very overweight, you need to be extra cautious

Obese people are contagious with the flu virus 42 per cent longer than those who aren't obese, according to research in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases*. Because obesity is linked to many health problems, it may affect your immune system. Extra weight may make the flu shot less effective too.

8 The flu can trigger heart attacks

The influenza virus doesn't just irritate your chest and sinuses—it also causes widespread inflammation throughout your body. That can increase the risk of developing blood clots that can trigger a heart attack, according to a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

9 Cold air can make it easier to get sick

"Going out into the cold won't make you sick on its own," says Saralyn Mark, MD, president and CEO of SolaMed Solutions in Washington, DC. "But if you are in the cold often, your body adapts by allowing your mucous membranes to dry up. When that mucous dries up, it can't protect you, and a virus can get in."

10 Nail-biting is a no-no

Your fingers pick up germs easily, and chewing on them gives viruses a one-way ticket into your body. Cut your nails to keep them short and try to keep your fingers away from your nose and mouth.

11 Staying up late can slow your recovery

A study published in 2019 in the *Journal of Experimental Medicine* found that a good night's sleep can boost the effectiveness of specialized immune cells called T-cells. Sleep as much as possible when you're sick to give your body a chance to recover.



WASHING HANDS with soap and water is really the best defence.

12 Cold showers aren't a fever cure

You may have been told by a parent or grandparent that an ice bath or a cold shower is a good way to lower a fever quickly, but cold water can cause shock and may end up spiking your temperature higher, says Patricia Whitley-Williams, MD, a professor and the chair of the department of paediatrics at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. Lukewarm water is best to help break a fever, she says.

13 Secondhand smoke increases your risk of getting sick

You already know that tobacco smoke—whether you're the smoker or not—damages your lungs. That goes double when you're sick because smoke weakens immunity and can make congestion and coughing worse.

14 COVID-19 isn't a super-deadly plague

People hear the word *pandemic* and automatically think mass deaths, but most people who develop COVID-19

will recover, stresses Len Horovitz, MD, a pulmonary specialist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. "Most people will get better at home on their own, but you can be in for a long course of illness that lasts several weeks," he says. If you have chest pain, shortness of breath or severe dehydration, go to the hospital.

15 Vitamin D might help

The relationship between COVID-19 and vitamin D isn't entirely clear, but a recent analysis of preliminary research, published in *Nutrients*, found that having low levels of vitamin D is linked with more severe symptoms; increasing vitamin-D levels may provide some protection by reducing your risk of getting infected with or dying from the coronavirus or the flu.

16 Yes, you should wear a mask

The CDC recently urged all Americans to wear cloth face coverings when in public to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, but they can help lower the spread of other viruses as well. Wearing a mask doesn't completely prevent you from getting sick, but if everyone wore them in public places, the rate of infections and community spread could be cut significantly, says Dr Horovitz.

17 'COVID toes' are a thing

While it mainly produces respiratory symptoms, the virus that

causes COVID-19 has been found to be capable of attacking most anywhere in your body, including your toes, explains Matthew G. Heinz, MD, a hospitalist and internist at Tucson Medical Center in Arizona. This symptom looks a lot like chilblains, which is redness, swelling and itching of the toes (or fingers) in cold weather.

18 **Loss of taste or smell is an early warning sign**

Another unusual warning sign of COVID-19 is losing your sense of taste and smell, says Dr Heinz. For some people with mild cases, this may be the only symptom, and it's more likely to appear in younger people, he says. It's not clear what causes it, but the disease provokes a profound inflammatory response throughout the body that could somehow impede the functioning of the senses.

According to a recent Indian study conducted by researchers from the National Agri-Food Biotechnology Institute in Mohali and the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research in Chandigarh, certain smells—peppermint and coconut oil—were lost to most COVID-19 patients who participated in the study.

19 **COVID-19 can hurt your brain**

A review of scientific literature published in June in the *Annals of Neurology* found that about half of hospitalized COVID-19

patients experienced neurological symptoms, including headaches, dizziness, difficulty concentrating, strokes and seizures.

Researchers speculate that this may be due to increased inflammation, lack of oxygen, an autoimmune reaction, or a clotting disorder triggered by the virus.

20 **Herpes simplex virus might cause Alzheimer's disease**

Could a pesky little cold sore be responsible for destroying a person's memory? Research over the past 20 years suggests a link

LOSING YOUR SENSE OF TASTE AND SMELL—AN UNUSUAL WARNING SIGN OF COVID-19—IS MORE LIKELY TO APPEAR IN YOUNGER PEOPLE.

between the herpes simplex virus (HSV-1), which causes cold sores, and Alzheimer's disease.

A Taiwanese study found that people with HSV infections had almost three times the risk of developing dementia later in life as those who were virus-free. Those who then took antiviral medication to treat their herpes cut their dementia risk by 90 per cent.

21 VIRUSES CAN LINGER IN MANY PLACES

Viruses are tenacious and can survive for quite a long time on surfaces outside the human body. Exactly how long they remain infectious depends on the type of surface and the environmental conditions; in a lab environment, the COVID-19 virus stayed active for two to three days on plastic and metal surfaces and for 24 hours on cardboard and paper, according to a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Among the objects in your home that can harbour viruses:

- phones
- railings
- remotes
- keyboards
- faucets
- door and cabinet handles
- sheets, pillowcases and blankets

In public places, be certain to clean your hands after touching:

- faucets
- door and escalator handles
- ATM and other keypads
- petrol-pump handles
- weights at the gym
- utensils at buffets and salad bars

22 Celiac disease might be caused by a virus

This autoimmune bowel condition affects an estimated one in 100 people worldwide, says the Celiac Disease Foundation. New research published in *Science* suggests that it may be partly due to the immune system's response to a common virus called a reovirus.

23 Ebola and Zika viruses can be transmitted sexually

You know that if you want to avoid sexually transmitted viruses such as herpes and HIV, you need to use protection when you have sex. But many other viruses can be transmitted through semen and/or vaginal fluids. In 2018, researchers discovered that the Zika virus could be transmitted sexually. A separate study found traces of the deadly Ebola virus in the semen of people who had recovered from it—up to two years after they were sick.

24 Zika virus might kill brain cancer

Not all virus side effects are bad. While the Zika virus can have devastating effects on foetal brains, its ability to target brain tissue may one day help it treat glioblastoma, a type of brain cancer.

25 Rabies is the most deadly virus

Nearly 100 per cent of people who get infected with the rabies virus will die from it, making it the most lethal known virus. To date, only 14 people

have survived the disease after showing symptoms. The disease is also nearly 100 per cent preventable with a vaccine, according to the CDC. If you get the vaccine before any exposure, it can prevent an infection, but it also works if you get the shots soon after being exposed. As most cases are caused by being bitten by an infected animal, it's important to see your doctor after any animal bite, no matter how small.

26 If you can't touch your chin to your chest, call your doc

A stiff, sore neck is one of the first signs of viral meningitis, a serious illness that may follow exposure to many common viruses, including enteroviruses and those that cause herpes, influenza and measles. If you have cold- or flu-like symptoms that progress to a severe headache, light sensitivity, lethargy, and a neck so stiff you can't easily bend it forwards, call your doc stat.

27 You can get rid of one virus with duct tape

Warts aren't caused by cuddling with toads but rather by an infection with the human papillomavirus. The unsightly bumps are usually benign and will go away eventually on their own. One home remedy that may speed up healing time is covering them with duct tape, according to a study published in *JAMA Pediatrics*. In fact, researchers found that duct tape therapy was far more effective than cryotherapy for the treatment of common warts.



COLD AIR
can make
it easier to
get sick.

28 Avoid the sun if you are prone to cold sores

Once you've had a herpes infection, the virus lies dormant in nerve cells in your skin and may reemerge as another cold sore in the same place as before, according to the US National Library of Medicine. Recurrence often is triggered by sun exposure.

29 There is no cure for the flu and other viruses

Sad, but true. "The best 'treatment' is prevention through vaccines and lifestyle changes," says Dr Dass. "However, antiviral medications, such as oseltamivir [Tamiflu], can help you feel better faster, and they can make your symptoms less severe," she says.

30 Don't ask for antibiotics for your viral infection

Antibiotics kill bacteria, but they don't work on viruses. Still, many doctors report feeling pressured to prescribe antibiotics by patients who insist on them

despite having a viral infection, such as the flu, according to a study published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. In fact, the researchers found that so many people are convinced that antibiotics will help their viral symptoms that up to one third of all antibiotic prescriptions are unnecessary.

31 Soap and water really are the best defence

‘Wash your hands’ is practically a mantra these days, and for good reason. A drop of soap diluted in water literally pries apart the virus, causing the protein-wrapped particles to rupture and become useless. Make sure to wash for a minimum of 20 seconds and dry your hands on a clean towel. Avoid air dryers, which blow contaminants all over the place.

32 Disinfect your house—but not with antibacterial wipes

Just as antibiotics don’t cure viral infections, antibacterial cleaners are ineffective against viruses, the CDC cautions. Worse, using antibacterial products can build antibiotic resistance. Instead, use hydrogen peroxide, ammonia, or another EPA-registered disinfectant product to clean items that may be contaminated with viruses, including the coronavirus. (See item 21)

33 Exercise can help you ward off the flu

Don’t skip that regular workout: “Regular exercise, which can include

taking brisk walks, has been shown to improve your immune system, thus decreasing your likelihood of developing a cold or the flu,” Dr Dass says. But don’t overdo it. “If you’re training for a long marathon, that can have the opposite effect and hurt your immune system,” she says.

34 Drink green tea

According to a meta-analysis published in *Molecules*, green tea may be an immune booster, helping fight both cold and influenza viruses. Researchers found that drinking green tea regularly not only helps you recover from a cold but may also help prevent recurring infections—and could make you less likely to get it in the first place.

35 Don’t count on herd immunity

You may have read that you can skip getting vaccinated if you live in a place where most people have had the disease or the vaccine, allowing you to take advantage of herd immunity. “But effective herd immunity requires that more than 90 per cent of the population be vaccinated against a disease,” says Tish Davidson, medical writer and author of *Vaccines: History, Science, and Issues* and *The Vaccine Debate*. “The exact percentage depends on the contagiousness of the disease, and the flu is very contagious. With the current low flu vaccination rate, people should not count on herd immunity to protect them. It won’t.” **R**

Our White Mosquito Net Palace

*A loving tribute to our protector against
all things that buzz, bite and bother*

BY *Indu Balachandran*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Siddhant Jumde*



EVERY HOUSEHOLD I KNEW had one—a great, big, family-sized mosquito net. It was among the classic symbols of middle-class necessities in our '60s childhood—a purchase as basic as the pressure cooker, the Godrej steel almirah and Pond's talcum powder. This 12x12 feet gossamer nylon curtain was our 'fortress of protection,' preventing us from waking up with red pockmarked faces the morning after, which even Pond's would not hide.

Growing up in Bangalore, it was with a certain smugness that we regarded our city's weather. The envy of the rest

AT BEDTIME, FATHER
WOULD BRING DOWN
THE HUGE, WHITE
BUNDLE AND BUILD
US OUR VERY OWN
MOSQUITO-NET MAHAL.

of India! Well, at least it was for my Madras cousins, who landed up every sweltering summer holiday, thrilled to be shivering on a May morning. But the sound of clapping as evening approached wasn't applause for our climate—it was my cousins' bare-handed murder-spree among the swarms of singing mosquitoes that Bangalore was also famous for.

Mothers would scream as we left the doors wide open on our way to play in

the streets after our evening tiffin and Ovaltine, rushing to shut the windows before 6 p.m. Usually, even this was too late and the stealthy marauders would have already snuck in, lying in wait to make a meal of us when we returned from play to enjoy our own pre-dinner snack.

As bedtime drew near, and we busily fought over an after-dinner game of cards, ludo or mah-jong, my father would begin his important head-of-the-household duty—transforming the living room into a huge dorm for us noisy bunch of pre-teens.

The first order of business was to lay out several makeshift beds on the floor, with cushions for pillows and my mother's soft old saris for sheets. Next, he would bring down a huge, white bundle from the top of the Godrej—the made-to-order, giant *koshu-valai*—and proceed to construct our very own Mosquito-Net palace.

It was a precise, practised operation. The structure would be suspended with the help of a *nada*—a cord hastily pulled out of a sari petticoat or pyjama, or a ribbon from one of our braids. (My cousin Ambi was once admonished for readily offering up his brand new, sacred *upanayanam* thread that draped across his chest.)

To ensure that the square tent made the perfect height to allow for a neat tuck-in, four points in the room—usually a convenient door latch—were predetermined to hold up the four ends of the nylon fort. Dad would then neatly

WITH OUR GRAND PALACE READY, IT WAS TIME FOR SUPER STEALTH AND SPEED—EACH OF US HAD TO ENTER WITHOUT OUR TREACHEROUS ENEMY INFILTRATING THE PREMISES TOO.

spread the net over our many beds and, one by one, the corners would go up.

One corner however required him to perform a most memorable preamble—removing the sombre, framed portrait of his grandmother from the wall because the nail from which she hung was the perfect point on which to tie the final loop. Early next morning of course, she would regain her place next to our other ancestor. Somehow, even here, my distinguished, patriarchal great-grandfather was never disturbed for a bit of domestic help.

With our grand palace ready, it was time to set in motion an operation of super stealth and speed—each of us had to enter without our treacherous enemy infiltrating the premises too. Accompanied by raucous yells and laughs, the whole brood would enter one at a time. The few sneaky intruders would be quickly hunted down, their black bodies showing up against the white walls of our fortress—and with a CLAP! they would perish, leaving blood on the hands of a triumphant cousin, who'd immediately proclaim an exaggerated tally of kills.

Even the groundbreaking invention of the Tortoise-brand mosquito

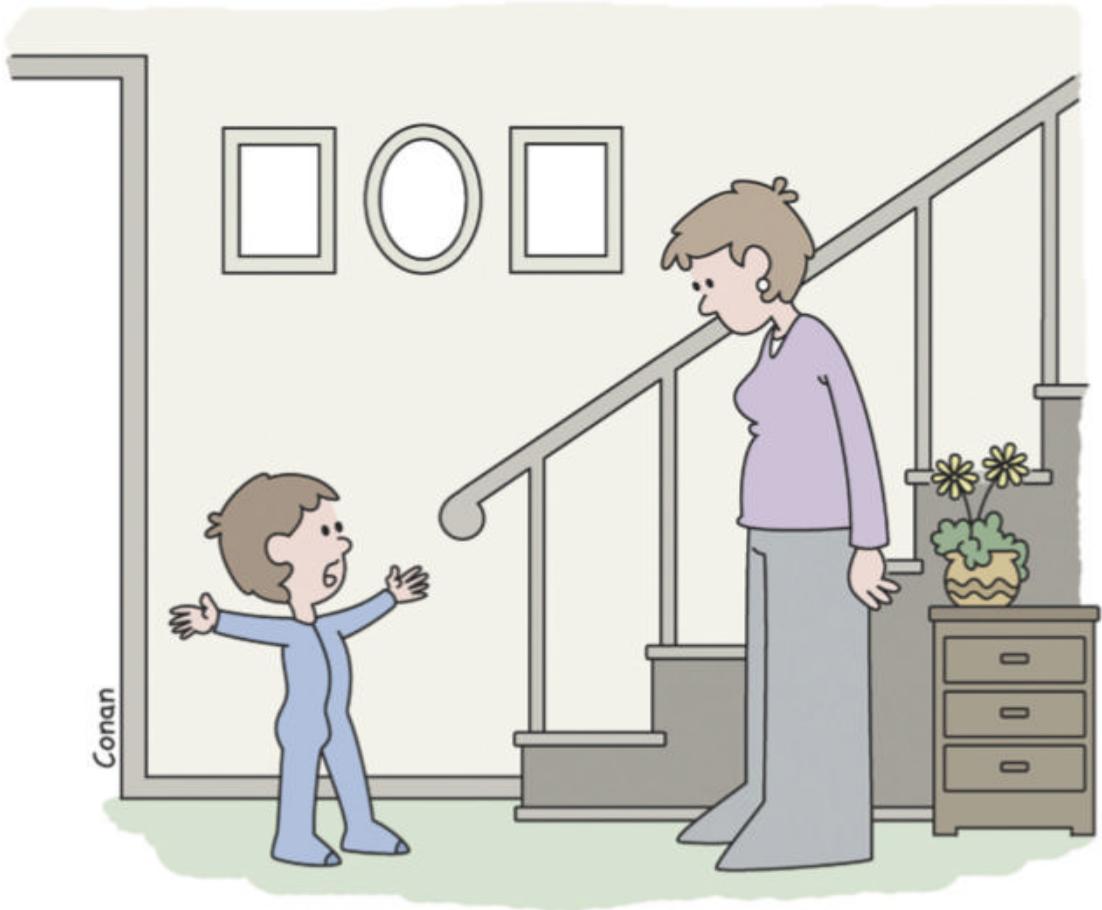
repelling incense coil never fully replaced our pest deterrent. Worried that we were gulping smoke in our sleep, or that the coil would topple and set us on fire, our parents stayed loyal to the net. An occasional rip would appear through wear and tear, but this emergency was easily dealt with by bunching up the area and deftly securing it with a clothespin.

Today, with oils and creams that smell less like dead insects and more like Cleopatra's oils, and neat plug-in devices that promise us a 'Good-Knight's' sleep, we may never see these elaborate containment chambers except perhaps in Satyajit Ray films.

But whenever the family gets together, a collective hysteria breaks out as we look back on those days. "Remember how your *kolu paati* [great grandmother] came off her lofty perch every night to make way for the net?" my cousin Bhavani recalls.

Our bewildered spouses and children look on, wondering what could be so funny, as a flood of nostalgia binds us in a hug of memories and we huddle again inside our gossamer chamber of white. **R**

AS KIDS SEE IT



“I love this sleeper. It’s like I can walk around tucked in.”

No one makes more observations than a child sharing a stall with his mother inside a public toilet.

— [@LHLODDER](#)

My two-year-old and I were out for a walk at 8 a.m., and we saw that a neighbour had their

curtains closed.

Two-year-old: Oh, they’re sleeping!

Me: Yeah, you know you could also still be sleeping, right?

Lots of people sleep past 6:30 a.m.

Two-year-old, laughing: Nooo.

— [@LIFETHREWLEMONS](#)

You don’t know what stress is until you watch your two-year-old try to spread cream cheese on a bagel.

— [@TIRED_DAD_OF_2](#)

After a typical rapid-fire question session with my five-year-old, my wife inquired as to why

she asks so many things. Her response: Well, I don't know anything. *Reddit.com*

I put so much more effort into naming my first Wi-Fi network than my first child.
—SOFIA BENOIT, WRITER

My toddler just started cheering and I joined in. I've no idea what we're cheering for, but I'm liking this positivity.
— @LOTTIE_FLY_X

Five-year-old: Do I have to fall in love someday?
Me: No.
Five-year-old: Good. I have stuff to do.
— @XPLODINGUNICORN

Soccer coach: When you're trying to score a goal, kick the ball with the laces of your shoes.
My daughter: Um, we're in preschool. There's only Velcro walking around here.
—KATY SAYLER HORNING

I recently ran into an old student of mine,

who said, "I always liked you. You never had favourites. You were mean to everyone."
—LOIS HENRY

My five-year-old told me she wants to be a bird. Not to fly around or anything cute like that. She wants to be a bird so she can poop on cars.
— @SMITHSA22

I went to see my mortgage advisor with my seven-year-old son. As I sat at the desk, my son sat down and said to the man, "Hello. I am not her husband."
—KELLYLOUISE ENISZ

Me: *Singing*
My three-year-old: *Stares up at me with big eyes, listening intently*
Me: Do you like it when Mummy sings?
My three-year-old: No.
— @MUMINBITS

Son: I had some scary thoughts.
Me: Okay. What kind of scary thoughts?

Son: Vacuum cleaners. Broccoli.
Me: ...
Son: Vacuum cleaners are LOUD.
—LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA, *Composer*

When I told my son how old I was, he whispered, "You were born in the nineteen hundreds" and looked at me with such awe and reverence. Now I feel old but also strangely godlike.
— @VISIONBORED1

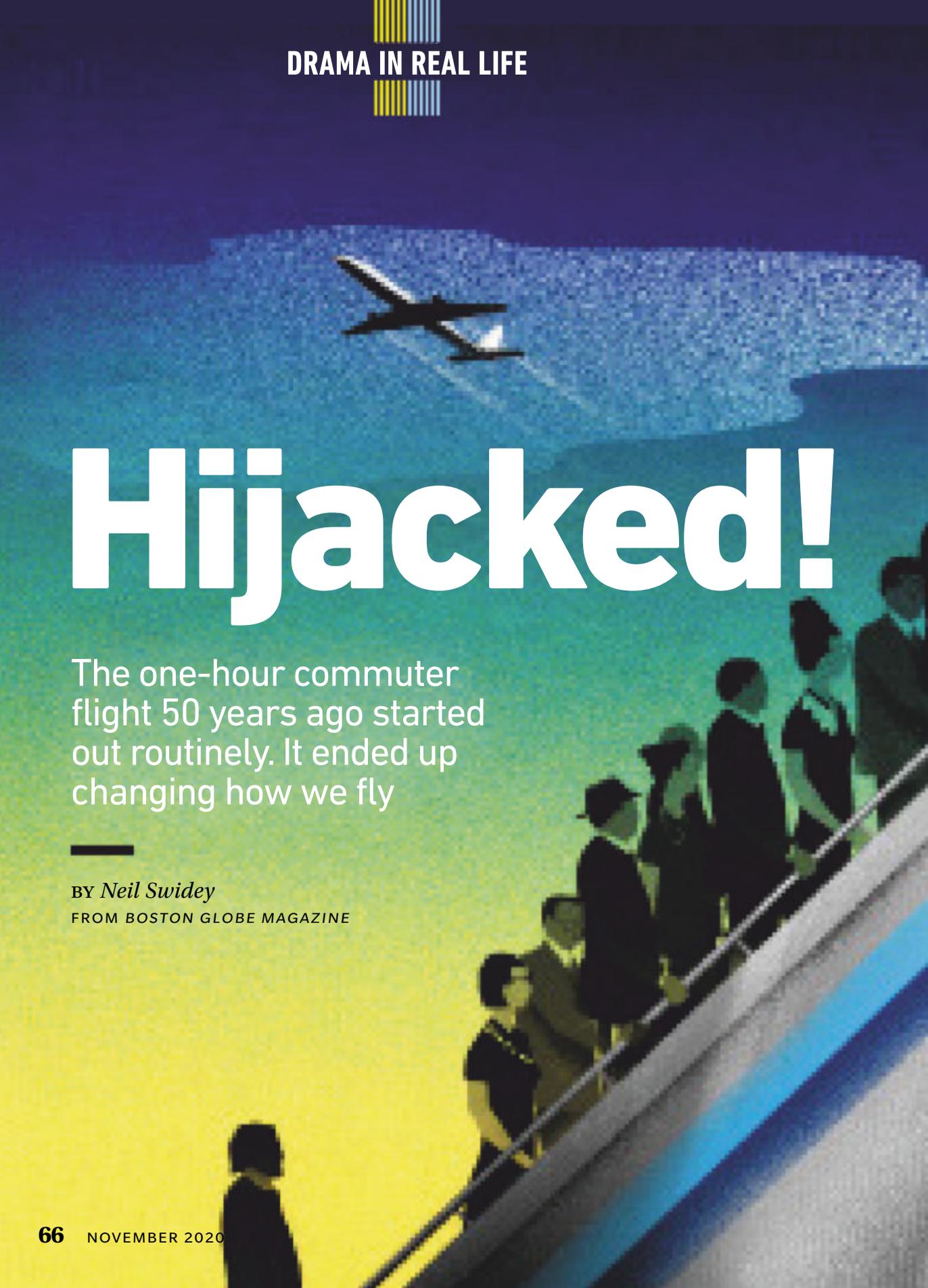
My kid can tell me all about a 24-minute episode of *PAW Patrol* in 56 minutes.
— @SIMONCHOLLAND

Dad: Cameron, you put your boots on the wrong feet.
Three-year-old Cameron: No, these are definitely my feet.
—PETER BELYEA

Reader's Digest will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE



Hijacked!

The one-hour commuter flight 50 years ago started out routinely. It ended up changing how we fly

BY *Neil Swidey*

FROM BOSTON GLOBE MAGAZINE



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN STAUFFER

THE UNITED STATES IN THE 1960s had been plagued by so-called skyjackings, but none had turned deadly. For some experts Flight 1320 on St Patrick's Day, 1970, is a dividing line in aviation history. Before it, major carriers could treat the threat of hijacking as barely more serious than an air-traffic delay, and let passengers walk on to planes without screening them. After it, everybody knew better.

THEY SPRINTED ACROSS Newark Airport in New Jersey, two middle-aged men desperately trying to make their 7:30 p.m. flight, home to Boston. By the time they got aboard Eastern Airlines Flight 1320, they were sweating. As the stewardess secured the passenger door behind them, Lloyd Pedersen looked back to his colleague Al Cavalieri and said, "How lucky are we?"

Within minutes, this shuttle flight on 17 March 1970, with its 68 passengers and five crew members, was in the air. It was scheduled to land in Boston in under an hour.

About 30 minutes into the flight, Pedersen, a plant supervisor, and Cavalieri, a mechanical engineer, were talking shop when two stewardesses, one blonde, the other brunette, both in their 20s, appeared at

their row pushing a cart. Passengers didn't need reservations for the shuttle, and they paid in the air—the fare was \$21 (₹1,541).

The brunette greeted Pedersen and Cavalieri. Her name tag read Sandy. She was pleasant and efficient, and soon moved on to the row behind them.

SANDY SALTZER, 26, a native of upstate New York, gave up a good job in a school system to become a stewardess. She had been flying with Eastern for six months when, at the beginning of March 1970, she began a stint with the Newark-based shuttle crew—a pilot, a co-pilot and two other stewardesses—on two daily round-trip flights between Newark and Boston.

The flight was too short to provide a drink service, collecting fares took

Divivo pulled out a black Colt revolver. "I want to see the captain," he said.

up most of the time in the air. Saltzer worked the collection cart with Christine Peterson, 25, the crew's senior stewardess.

At the second-to-last row, Saltzer greeted a young guy with sunglasses who had the row to himself. She smiled and asked for \$21.

He handed her \$16 (₹1,174). "There's not enough here, sir," she said politely.

He looked confused then reached under his seat to retrieve a black leather camera bag. A label on its strap read JOHN DIVIVO, NY. He pulled out a black Colt revolver.

"Don't get excited," Divivo said. "I want to see the captain."

He stood up. Not wanting to cause a panic, Saltzer asked Divivo to hide his gun.

JUST AFTER 8 p.m., the pilot turned on the fasten seat belts sign. The plane would soon be making its descent. Glancing to his left, Pedersen spotted Saltzer walking towards the cockpit, trailed closely by a guy with thick sideburns and shaggy brown hair wearing sunglasses, as well as a ragged suede coat.

Nothing about this seemed right. He



Stewardesses Sandy Saltzer (top) and Christine Peterson were collecting fares on Flight 1320 when a passenger pulled out a gun.

walked with his arms awkwardly folded, as if hiding something. And he was heading to the cockpit when the fasten seat belts light was on and the plane was close to landing.

"Al, that guy shouldn't be up there!" Pedersen said, tapping his seat-mate's arm.

Al wondered if he might be a hijacker. More than 50 US flights had been hijacked in the previous two years. The hijackers would typically demand money and command the pilot to fly to Cuba, where they hoped to find asylum. The airlines seemed to treat these skyjackings as

little more than a nuisance.

Even passengers didn't seem too put out. They would typically get bottomless drinks and a story they could tell for the rest of their days.

DIVIVO GESTURED FOR Saltzer to open the cockpit door.

"I'll have to call him first," she told him. She picked up the intercom phone. Saltzer knew that Bob Wilbur, 35, had been promoted from first officer to captain a few months earlier. But over just a few weeks, she had

found him to be a gentleman and as sure-footed as any seasoned veteran.

"Captain," she said quietly, "there is a man outside with a gun who wants to see you."

"I cannot help you now," Wilbur replied. "I'm too busy." He sounded distracted—Saltzer figured he hadn't really heard what she'd said.

She hung up the receiver and told Divivo that the pilot and co-pilot were too preoccupied getting ready to land. She detected an instant change. She had been confident he could be reasoned with, like other hijackers she'd heard about. She didn't believe that now.

the Air Force, flying missions around the Middle East, Europe and Africa. Although he'd never seen combat, he'd had enough weapons training to recognize a .38-caliber revolver when he saw one.

Divivo told Saltzer to close the door, but she asked Wilbur if he wanted her to stay. The pilot said no. She headed to the back to update the other two stewardesses.

Wilbur calmly asked, "What do you want?"

Divivo removed his sunglasses. He had glassy eyes and a scar on his left temple. "I don't know what's wrong with me," he said. "I'm all f---ed up."

"Where would you like to go?" Wilbur asked. Divivo seemed unsure.

"Call him back," Divivo snapped.

She picked up the receiver and spoke slowly and firmly. "You don't understand, Captain, he has a gun," she said.

THE DC-9 COCKPIT was so small that co-pilot Jim Hartley was able to open the door without getting out of his seat. Captain Wilbur turned to see a hippie who looked to be in his mid-20s, maybe five feet eight inches and thin. He was wielding a gun just inches from Wilbur's face.

Wilbur had served five years in

Trying to calm Divivo, Wilbur invited him to sit down on the jump seat, though he remained standing. The plane was about 32 kilometres from Boston, flying at an altitude of around 5,000 feet. A voice from Approach Control at Logan Airport crackled, instructing Wilbur to begin his descent to 2,000 feet.

The pilot asked Divivo if it was okay if they stuck with the plan to land in Boston.

"No," he said.

"Where would you like to go?" Wilbur asked.



Flight 1320 co-pilot Jim Hartley (left) and pilot Bob Wilbur, pictured with wife Anita, a former Eastern Airlines stewardess.

Divivo seemed unsure. After a long pause, he said, “Fly east.”

Wilbur flashed Hartley a knowing look. Although they’d been working together for just a couple of weeks, the two had already developed a good rhythm. Hartley was an Army veteran who had worked as a truck driver and fireman before getting his pilot’s license. His first marriage had produced a daughter and a son, but ended in divorce. That experience had taken its toll. But, the 30-year-old had rebounded, marrying a nurse named Becky the previous year.

Wilbur and his wife, Anita, had just played bridge with Hartley and Becky.

They planned to get together again on the weekend.

When Wilbur began talking with the gunman, Hartley had quietly used a transponder code to alert the control tower that they were being hijacked. It wasn’t clear the message had gotten through. Now, Hartley radioed the tower. “Eastern 1320,” he said, “we’re gonna take up a heading of east here for a while and go out over the water.”

“Do you have a problem?” the approach controller asked.

“Affirm,” Hartley replied.

Wilbur banked right, out over the Atlantic. “We don’t have a heck of a lot of fuel,” the pilot said.

That triggered a response from Divivo that stopped Wilbur cold. "Just fly east and let me know when we're within two or three minutes of running out of fuel."

This guy doesn't want to be in Cuba, Wilbur realized. He wants to be six feet under. And he wants to take 70 people with him.

After several minutes, Wilbur tried to coax Divivo into changing his mind. "Do you mind if we turn back?" he gently asked.

Divivo seemed a bit distracted, but said, "Okay."

As the plane began making the

lung and then his aorta, before exiting his right armpit. His chest cavity was quickly filling with blood.

But now, somehow, he summoned the strength to pull himself up. He lunged at Divivo and wrested the gun from him. Hartley aimed at Divivo's chest and fired twice. Divivo fell to the floor, his feet pushing open the cockpit door.

Hartley collapsed back into his seat, the gun dropping from his hand. He stopped moving.

Wilbur grabbed the gun from the floor and placed it on the console in front of him. He looked down to

As Wilbur prepared to land, Divivo lifted himself up and lunged at the pilot.

wide turn, Hartley got on the radio again. "Eastern 1320, we're heading back in now."

As they were completing the turn, Divivo asked Wilbur, "Are we on our way in?"

"Yes."

Divivo fired his gun at Hartley, throwing the co-pilot back in his seat. As Wilbur turned, Divivo fired at him. Searing pain shot through both of Wilbur's arms.

What happened next shouldn't have been possible. Hartley was slumped in his seat. The bullet had entered near his left shoulder blade, puncturing his

see blood pumping from his arms—Divivo's bullet had torn through both of them. To his right, his co-pilot was unconscious. At his feet was a homicidal hijacker who began to moan, "I can't even die."

IN THE CABIN, someone yelled, "Those were gunshots!"

Cavalieri and Pedersen looked on with alarm at the feet sticking out through the open cockpit door. They prodded Saltzer, who had taken an empty seat behind them in preparation for landing, to check on the pilots.

Nothing in Saltzer's life had

prepared her for this. As she walked hesitantly to the cockpit, she could see the legs of a bloodied man on the floor. *What if it was the pilot or the co-pilot? What if I find them both incapacitated?* she thought. The few dozen feet to the cockpit felt like the longest walk of her life.

Saltzer peered into the cockpit. She was horrified to see Hartley slumped over in his seat, eerily still. Looking down, she saw Divivo lying underneath the jump seat, moaning.

Wilbur was at the controls. He was bleeding from both arms, soaking the sleeves of his starched white shirt. But she couldn't have been more relieved to find him in command.

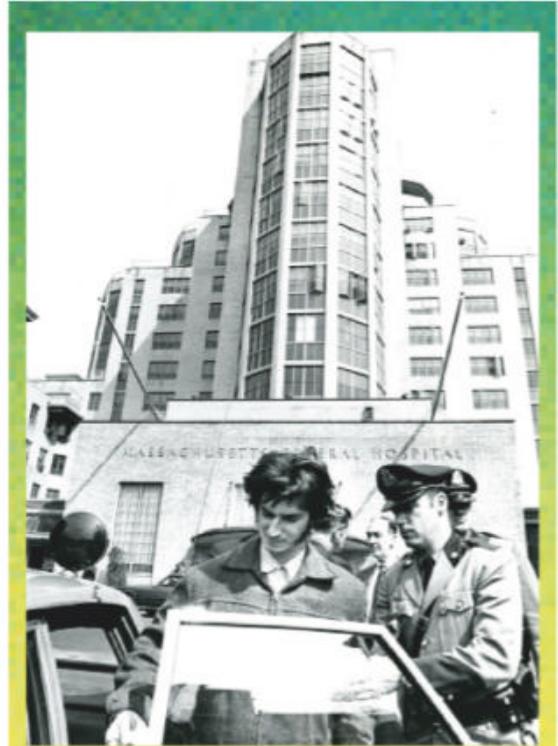
"I'm all right," he said.

From the front row of passengers came a shout, "We have a pilot!"

WILBUR PUSHED THE plane up to 288 kms per hour, nearly its top speed, and radioed Approach Control on a frequency open to other pilots in the area. "You better get the police to the airport," he said, "we just had, ah, the co-pilot is shot."

Wilbur thought of Hartley. "Get an ambulance to the airport, also," he said.

The control tower didn't seem to grasp how dire things were. Less than two minutes later, when Wilbur was 9.65 kms out and closing in fast, the tower informed him that a small Mo-hawk aircraft was first in line to land.



After recovering from surgery, Divivo underwent psychiatric evaluation while police investigated his motivations.

It took the pilot of another jet on approach, American Airlines 380, to make the tower understand. "Call the police—and an ambulance!" the American pilot screamed. "The Eastern behind us, the co-pilot is shot! The co-pilot is shot!"

After the American pilot stressed, "Every second might count," the tower hurriedly told the Mo-hawk to "Go around!" Now, Wilbur had an open path to bring the DC-9 in for a landing.

The DC-9 was designed for short, frequent flights. In the five years

since the first one had been pressed into service, it had become a popular workhorse for airlines. Still, flying it took skill and muscle.

About three kms from the runway, Wilbur was on his own. He used one arm to control the levers and the throttles, and the other to guide the nose steering wheel.

As Wilbur prepared to land, Divivo somehow managed to lift himself off the cockpit floor and get to his knees. He lunged at the pilot.

Wilbur reached for the gun he had placed on the console, and smashed the flat side of it against Divivo's head, twice, yelling, "Get down, you bastard!" The gun grip shattered. The hijacker collapsed onto the floor.

Wilbur instructed Saltzer to return to the cabin. He had to land this thing.

Police took Divivo to the hospital.

Hartley was pronounced dead on arrival. The medical examiner later said he likely died within a couple of minutes of being shot. The devastating power of a bullet fired at close range made Hartley's last-breath heroics all the more remarkable.

As Saltzer was leaving the plane, she saw a bullet hole in the cockpit door, and then the spot near the first row of passengers where the bullet appeared to be lodged. She thought: An inch or two in the other direction, and a passenger would have surely been killed.

On the news, the nation was learning about Flight 1320. John Joseph Divivo, Jr., was a 27-year-old high-school dropout who lived with his mother and his younger siblings in a

The new security measures had a dramatic and immediate effect.

He didn't have time for the customary gradual descent. Considering how fast he was coming in, it was remarkable how smooth the landing was.

STATE POLICE OFFICERS stormed onto the plane with guns drawn. They asked Wilbur if he was okay. "Take care of Jim!" he shouted. Ambulance crews rushed the pilots to Massachusetts General Hospital.

rough section of West New York, New Jersey. Significantly, his father had died in prison on 17 March 1968—Saint Patrick's Day.

Divivo had long worked at Palisades Amusement Park, doing odd jobs. He had no criminal record. At 16, apparently distraught over a girl, Divivo shot himself in the head, which left him with a slight limp and occasional slurred speech. He was fixated on Halloween

and would often dress in black capes and carry walking sticks with ornate knobs bearing satanic figures.

By autumn, after a lengthy psychiatric stay in hospital, Divivo was at Boston's Charles Street Jail, awaiting trial for murder. Asked why he had shot Jim Hartley, he said he wasn't thinking clearly and had gotten spooked when the co-pilot seemed to move suddenly. Asked why he had told Wilbur to fly east until they were nearly out of fuel, Divivo insisted he was simply stalling to give enough time for the news crew to get to the airport.

Early on Halloween morning, 1970, guards found him hanging from a scarf in his cell.

FOR YEARS, EXPERTS had been calling on the airlines to put all passengers and their carry-ons through electronic screening before boarding. The airlines had refused, concluding that inconveniencing regular business travellers and scaring newer travellers outweighed the safety benefits. The hijacking of Eastern Flight 1320 laid bare that false calculation.

Yet even in the face of this deadly skyjacking, the airlines accepted only half-measures: screening for weapons, but only with passengers who matched a certain behavioural profile.

In September, following the Eastern skyjacking and others overseas, President Richard Nixon announced a raft of new anti-hijacking efforts, including additional security personnel at

airports and improved surveillance.

However, the situation didn't really improve until January 1973, when the Federal Aviation Administration mandated that the airlines screen all passengers and carry-on bags. A month later, the United States and Cuba signed an extradition treaty for hijackers. The new security measures had a dramatic and immediate effect. While there had been 124 hijackings from 1968 to 1972, in all of 1973 there was one.

AFTER UNDERGOING SEVERAL surgeries, Bob Wilbur regained full use of both arms. He received a flood of commendations, telegrams and plaques. He flew for Eastern for another two decades, then for Saudi Arabian Airlines, retiring at 60. Now 86, he lives in Florida.

For Sandy Saltzer, flying was no longer fun by the 1980s. She got her master's degree in counselling and used that, combined with the nursing degree she already held, to work in a hospital cancer centre outside Rochester, New York. She helped start a comfort care home for the terminally ill.

Jim Hartley's granddaughter Dani Brown maintains a tribute Facebook page for the grandfather she never met. She learned more about him after connecting with Wilbur, who calls Jim Hartley the true hero of Eastern Flight 1320. 

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A HONEYMOON, INTERRUPTED

*A young couple caught in a bind, are
saved by an act of kindness*

BY *Aditi Shah*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Siddhant Jumde*

It WAS A FRIGID January afternoon, in the year 1966. Flushed with anticipation, my wife, Savitri*, and I sat silently side by side, on the Sahyadri Express. As the train pulled out of the Bombay Central Station, we could barely hide our excitement. We were finally on the way to a two-day honeymoon to Matheran! Although, we were no longer newlyweds, this was the first time we had enough savings to go on a trip together.

*ALL NAMES CHANGED UPON REQUEST



The train halted at Neral, where we were forced out of our reverie—the serving Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, had passed away. The news brought chaos in its wake. As we stepped out on to the platform and started making inquiries, we realized it was unlikely we would find a toy train to take us to the misty hill station we had been dreaming of for months.

The afternoon gradually settled into a pink dusk as we sat in a corner at the station, unsure of what the evening was going to bring, waiting for news of the train services as the chilly winter breeze rattled our bones. We unwrapped some biscuits we had brought along when, out of the blue, a little girl, no more

**PRIME MINISTER LAL
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REACH MATHERAN.**

than five or six years old, went gliding past us, shrieking, “But I want food! I am hungry!”

Savitri’s eyes turned to the child’s family, seated a few metres away. She couldn’t help but notice the rich embroidery adorning the mother’s raw-mango coloured hijab. The family was clearly well-to-do—the little girl was



The Kotadias

wholly unfamiliar with the sharp pangs of hunger that Savitri and I had often felt. The lone station-shop had been emptied in a frenzy, Savitri’s conscience compelled her to help the little girl.

Smiling, she called out—her name was Mehrunisa, we overheard—and asked her to seek her parent’s permission to accept a half-eaten packet of Parle-G from us. Left with no option, her family graciously accepted. And in the hours spent at the station, we began chatting with the Niazis.

After several hours, the train finally arrived. We entered alongside, like friends. As the short uphill journey progressed, Savitri and I softly discussed our predicament. It seemed unlikely that our reservation at Ragdi Hotel would still be held, considering the long delay, the lack of communication and the probability that guests unable to board their trains from Matheran would surely have to extend their stay.

As the train came to a screeching halt and we rose to bid the Niazi family

VIRAAZ SUGGESTED THAT HE WOULD ACCOMPANY US, TO MAKE SURE THAT WE HAD A PLACE TO STAY. HE HAD OVERHEARD SNIPPETS OF OUR ANXIOUS EXCHANGE AND WAS ADAMANT ABOUT HELPING US.

goodbye, Mehrunisa's father, Viraaaz, suggested that he would accompany us, to make sure that we had a place to spend the night. He had overheard snippets of our anxious exchange and was adamant about helping us. After much discussion, we agreed.

The rest of his family headed to the guesthouse that was arranged for their stay, and Viraaaz came with us to look for a hotel. To no one's surprise, Ragdi Hotel was packed with people, with dozens occupying even the community verandahs. The manager, apologizing profusely, tried his best to offer assistance by placing a few beds in the coal storage room but the suffocating darkness and cold made it scarcely habitable.

A gradual dread started to creep steadily into my mind—what next? Even if we were lucky enough to get a train back to Mumbai the next day, we'd still have to spend a night in Matheran.

Sensing our helplessness Viraaaz swooped in and offered to put us up in their accommodation for the night. "It'll be stuffy and small," he said. "The rooms are actually for two. I was

bringing my brother Naseem, and thought I could squeeze my wife and daughter in too, you know? Little did I know ..." he drifted off, shaking his head. I was overwhelmed at his generosity. Necessity compelled us to agree and we set off by foot towards the guesthouse.

Upon our arrival, Viraaaz's family worked tirelessly with meagre supplies to make us feel at home—food was quickly heated and shared, makeshift *gaddas* and blankets brought out for the several occupants. The guesthouse was grumbling, filled to three times its usual capacity, but in spite of the cold and limited space, everyone managed.

The commotion caused by Shastri's death lasted a day or two, but obtaining train tickets was quite the task, and it was only several days later that we bade farewell to the wonderful Niazis. Our friendship has since continued for decades—Viraaaz even came to live with us in Ahmedabad, when he shifted to the city. It is quite a wonder that this rich friendship between families started with a half-eaten packet of Parle-G, at a train station. **R**



INSPIRATION



For love of the WRITTEN WORD

United in their passion for books and stories, these five ordinary folk are on a mission to spread the joy of reading with their unique libraries

BY V. Kumara Swamy



Sheik Sadiq Ali handing out books to young children in Hyderabad.

THE PUSH CART LIBRARY

For years, journalist Sheik Sadiq Ali has dabbled in various businesses—a matrimonial bureau, real estate, but his greatest happiness came from the children who rushed over to receive the books he distributed from his pushcart, or *thopudu bandi* in Telugu.

As a one-time book-retailer, he realized that many children couldn't afford books so he decided to distribute them for free. In 2015, Ali began travelling around Hyderabad handing out poetry and storybooks among children. He

then started taking his mobile library beyond the city too.

At 57, Ali claims to have travelled more than 3,000 kms pushing his cart across Telangana on foot, even in the remote interiors of the state. "I have distributed books worth more than ₹50 lakh so far. I have also set up around 150 libraries in village schools, panchayats and youth clubs," he says. Ali says that 90 per cent of whatever he and his wife, Usha Dayal, a government servant, earn is used to buy books to give away." We are a childless couple, so whenever we see any young person

who has a hunger for knowledge, we consider these children our own and want to help them grow," he says.

With the coronavirus pandemic putting the breaks on Ali's donation circuit, he is now on a different mission—arranging access to mobile phones for poor children, so they can access online classes. "Everybody, including government schools, are touting online classes for children. But how will poor kids, who don't have slippers for their feet, afford expensive mobile phones to attend lessons? But I am doing my best to arrange phones for those who really need it. It's a drop in the ocean, but I am trying," he says. He uses Facebook and other social media handles to encourage netizens to contribute.

True to his mission of spreading a love of reading, Ali is also building a library in Kallur, his village in Telangana's Khammam district. He has no plans to pack up his pushcart library however. "Sharing books with kids gives me the utmost happiness. We will be back on the streets once the pandemic recedes," Ali says.



THE STORYTIME SALON

As a barber, Pon Mariappan is fairly skilled, but in his home town of Thoothukudi (formerly Tuticorin), 670 kms south of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, this 39-year-old is better known for something far more interesting. Amongst the cans of shaving foam, aftershave lotion and other



Pon Mariappan in his salon-library

salon equipment on the shelves of his 10x10 ft salon, more than 1,500 books—Tamil and English novels, history texts, poetry collections, autobiographies, periodicals and other tomes—jostle for space. This treasure trove of reading is a labour of love for Mariappan—a library that would enable a culture of reading and knowledge-building in his community. "Most customers, many of them young students, would be busy gaming on their mobile phones. I wanted to encourage them to read instead. Why not offer them something better?" he says.

Being surrounded by books was Mariappan's dream ever since he was a child. "I had to leave school in class eight as my family couldn't afford my schooling, but I never lost interest in reading," Mariappan, who worked as a labourer and did other odd jobs to make ends meet before taking up the tools of his current trade. When

Mariappan first started the salon-library in 2015, he selected biographies of famous Tamils such as Periyar, Annadurai and A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. Since then, his collection has only grown. Most of the books are bought by him, while others are donated.

Over the last six years, his visitors and customers have included several celebrities, including politicians, writers and film stars. His business has now resumed after remaining shut for months during the nationwide coronavirus lockdown. A father of three, Mariappan says that he wants the younger generation to think beyond their regular school curriculum. He even offers a discount on salon services to students who are willing to read a certain number of pages of a book and produce a small synopsis. “The aim is to inculcate the habit of reading—something our youngsters are losing,” Mariappan says.



THE ROADSIDE READING NOOK

Youngsters glued to online games on their smartphones was also a concern for Ngurang Meena, a school teacher in Nirjuli, a small town in Arunachal Pradesh’s Papum Pare district. The 30-year-old social-science teacher, who runs the Ngurang Learning Institute—an adult literacy centre—says that she feels disheartened every time she reads student papers. “The graph of student performance is falling every year. It breaks my heart whenever I see answer sheets—basic

grammar skills are missing and there’s an absence of any cohesive expression. They lack guidance and reading culture is almost zero,” Meena says. When her school and the centre she runs had to close due to the Covid lockdown, the social worker in her wanted to do something to address the problem.

Inspired by a similar initiative in Mizoram, Meena set up a bookshelf with around 80 books as well as some benches on the side of the road in Nirjuli on 30 August 2020, where passers-by could spend time reading. The selections include motivational books, biographies and novels as well as comics for young children. “I have to bribe the younger ones with sweets to sit and read, but that is okay,” she laughs.

Meena’s library became a hit among youngsters who spend hours in the reading corner. Within two months, her effort became the talk of the town.



Ngurang Meena’s Self-Help Library is reigniting a culture of reading among Nirjuli’s youth.

Generous contributions of books come in from the public and she is even receiving requests to set up such libraries in other parts of the state, including one in the capital, Itanagar. Since the tiny library is far from the main town, she also lends books out to those who want to read at home.

"I never thought that this would become such a big inspiration," Meena says. "Since childhood, we were told that books are our best friends. The next generation of kids is focussed on games and other things. I don't want them to stray," she adds.



THE TEA-SELLER'S TALE

Nestled deep in the Edamalakkudy forest, in the Idukki district of Kerala, is the Mulakutharakkudy School—home to the Akshara library, a veritable pilgrimage point for book lovers from the neighbouring countryside. Founded in 2012, Akshara came to be when tea-seller P. V. Chinnathambi met P. K. Muraleedharan, a primary-school teacher who visited the stall as a customer. Chinnathambi expressed a love of reading, prompting Muraleedharan to loan him some books.

As the collection grew, the duo felt the book bank should be shared with other bibliophiles. "I told him that he could encourage others do the same by having books in his tea-stall," says Muraleedharan, who is called *Murali maash* ('teacher' in Malayalam) by the tribal families, who live in the forest.

The books were made available for customers during working hours and packed up in the evening but when the process became too cumbersome Chinnathambi sought a better way to share them. In 2017, Muraleedharan offered to move the collection to the Mulakutharakkudy government school, where he once taught.

The library, now comprising 1,500 volumes of novels, history books and classics, is free for the public to peruse. Muraleedharan enthusiastically recounts how the library stayed open even during the pandemic as the only source of information and entertainment for the area. "That is the strength and significance of Akshara. People care for it as if it is their own," he says.



THE UNLETTERED BOOK LOVER

A paperback copy of Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*,



P. V. Chinnathambi first began offering books to customers in his small tea stall.

sits next to an old, hardbound edition of Ian Fleming's *Goldfinger*. Classic novels by George Orwell and Ursula K. Le Guin lie on other shelves along with contemporary literature and classics in English, German, French and Russian.

These are just some of the 350 books housed in the 'Travellers' Library', a nondescript, two-storey, wooden house on the banks of Srinagar's Dal Lake. Its creator is 50-year-old Muhammad Latif Oata—a high-school dropout. While Oata lacks the required schooling to read these books himself, the stories they tell hold great value to him regardless. Forced to drop out of school and move out of Kashmir to support his family in the early '90s after the onset of militancy in Kashmir, Oata was only 16 when he moved to Goa and then Karnataka, where he sold handicraft items from his home state.

One day, a foreign tourist passing by his stall gave Oata a book that he was done reading. Unable to read, he asked the tourist to tell him the story. It was about a poor, young girl in Kerala who gained success despite great struggle. Inspired by the tale and hungry for more, he began a barter-like system where anyone borrowing a book would have to give one in return and tell him the story.

Oata's collection grew to around 600 by 2003, but floods damaged around 200 of them since then. "They are my most prized possessions," Latif says with pride in broken English he's picked up from conversing with tourists. When



"Books hold great value to me," says 50-year-old Muhammad Latif Oata.

Latif returned to the valley in 2007, he set up a small travel agency with a library for visitors to enjoy.

Over the past year, however, trouble in the state has reduced footfall to a trickle and Latif's business has also suffered, forcing him to take on work as a casual labourer. How long will he take care of the books and keep his small library open? "As long as I am alive," he says with a smile. "And even when I am gone, these books will remain there ... because books always find readers."

—Majid Maqbool **R**

Professor Shonku's Date with History

One of the most beloved characters created by the master storyteller Satyajit Ray was Professor Shonku, a genius scientist and inventor of eccentric gadgets working from his laboratory in Giridih (now in Jharkhand). In this story, Shonku and two of his German colleagues invent the Compudium, a device to communicate with souls of the departed. What follows are some surprising results that celebrate the spirit of human imagination and scientific invention. Read on ...

BY *Satyajit Ray*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Raj Verma*



12 SEPTEMBER

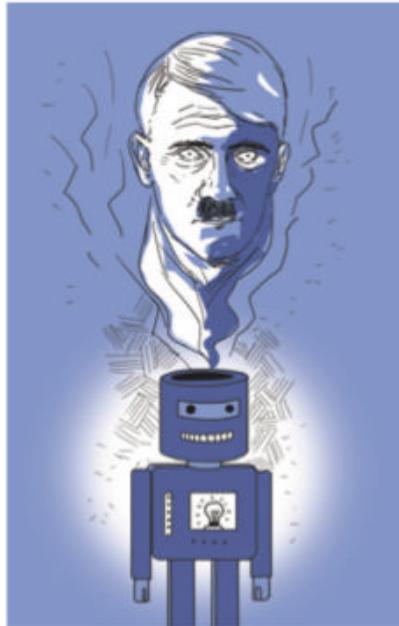
What a delightful day! After one-and-a-half years of relentless hard work, we have finally finished all our work on our device. Though the entire idea was mine, I'm using the word 'we' because by no means could I have accomplished this task on my own. My Giridih laboratory cannot provide the necessary material to build this machine. Therefore, right at the initial stage, I had written a letter to my German friend, Wilhelm Crole, who in turn wrote to the well-known Psychic Research Institute in Munich, Germany. Thanks to Crole's recommendation, we received a grant in financial aid from the institute and it became possible for two Germans and one Indian scientist to create this machine in Munich.

The second German is a young fellow, one Rudolph Heine. He has an insatiable curiosity about spiritualism. Now, let me say a few words about the machine we invented. We have called it Compudium. That is, computerized medium. Those who connect with departed souls in a séance often take the help of a medium, an individual through whom the spirit communicates with this world with ease. Spiritual mediums possess

a special quality. I have come in contact with many mediums in my country and have studied them carefully. There is something special about them. They are sensitive, sharp, emotional and always preoccupied or absorbed. They often suffer from indispositions and many die young.

Before we completed this machine, both Crole in Europe and I in India studied the characteristics and behaviour of at least 350 mediums in detail. Our sole mission was to set up a mechanical and artificial medium to establish contact with the spirit world in place of a real live medium. Thanks to the generous endowment from the Psychic Research Institute, there was no stopping us in our quest. The results our Compudium has yielded so far confirms that our joint effort is nothing but a grand success.

The machine need not have resembled a human but we decided to give it the shape of a body and add a head to it; we have also added a pair of legs to make it stand. The equipment is a metre in height. We have created a slit on top of the head to insert the name and details about the spirit one is going to call upon. This equipment will be placed on one side of the room and the



human but we decided to give it the shape of a body and add a head to it; we have also added a pair of legs to make it stand. The equipment is a metre in height. We have created a slit on top of the head to insert the name and details about the spirit one is going to call upon. This equipment will be placed on one side of the room and the

people taking part in the séance will be seated about two metres away facing the machine. After inserting the card in the machine, the lights are switched off. In this pitch-dark, a red light fixed in the machine's chest will gradually come on, indicating that the spirit has arrived. Now we start asking questions and the answers begin to emerge from the mouth of the machine. When the spirit begins to feel tired, the red light will gradually fade out and the séance session will come to an end.

The three of us have tried out our tests on this machine. Adolf Hitler's spirit was called. Within a minute of inserting information about him, the red light glowed.

I asked him in German, "Are you Adolf Hitler?"

The reply was "*Ja*", which means 'yes' in German.

Crole asked a second question: "Don't you have any regret or remorse for torturing and killing the Jews so ruthlessly during your lifetime?"

Immediately, a shrill voice came out in the form of a reply from the machine, "*Nein, nein, nein*", that is: 'No, No, No'. This encounter went on for about five minutes.

This experiment proved two things: One, that it worked! And two, that it was clear that Hitler's opinion of himself had not changed even in death. We will take a break for two days and then resume our work on the machine. Heine's aspirations are very high. He thinks if we can further

fine-tune the machine we can even see the image of the spirit. In other words, the spirits will appear before us in person. That would be very useful, an added bonus; my latest invention has already reached a state which is definitely quite unprecedented in the history of science. Now we need to select a few scientists and invite them over for a demonstration of this machine. So far, the news of the invention is yet to reach the public.

At Crole's request, I'll stay back in Munich for another month.

15 SEPTEMBER

With the help of this machine, we were able to connect to two more spirits of well-known personalities. One is Indian, Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah. This was chiefly to satisfy my own curiosity. I checked with Siraj about the *Andhakup* murder (Black Hole of Calcutta, 1756). With a lilt in his voice, Siraj said he knew nothing about this and that the British had spearheaded this horrible campaign only to malign him! Spirits do not lie. Hence, in my mind at least, his honour was restored with ease.

The second spirit was that of Shakespeare. My question to him was: "There are some who are of the opinion that judging by the standard of your education and your modest family background, it doesn't seem plausible that you penned these plays and poems. Many people are of the view that the real writer is Francis Bacon. What's your opinion on this?"

To start with, the spirit of Shakespeare, after hearing my question, let out a hearty laugh. He then recited a charming four-line poem on people's lack of faith and respect and asked me, "Do you know what the name Bacon means in my language?"

I said, "What?"

"Bacon means country bumpkin. Go and check any dictionary. You will find the meaning. And this country bumpkin is supposed to have created my plays? Have people lost their minds?"

During these last two sessions, only three of us were present. Last evening, we invited 11 scientists. We gave them a demonstration of the machine. Crole had forewarned me about the presence of a few scientists who don't believe in a spirit world. He mentioned Professor Schultz in particular. Even as a person, Schulz doesn't have much of a reputation though he is heading a physics-based organization. When its former director Professor Hubermann suddenly died three years ago, Schultz was offered this position.

I said, "A few sceptics who will be difficult to convince doesn't bother me. We'll carry on with our demonstration irrespective of Schultz."

Heine said, "The best way to convince them would be to call upon Hubermann's spirit. All present are familiar with his style of speaking. If our machine adopts that similar style, it will be easy to convince them." We agreed to his suggestion.

Everything was arranged in a hall of

the Psychic Research Institute. The séance was fixed for 7 p.m. Everyone arrived on time. Before settling down in a chair in the front row, Shultz said, "I'd like to see the machine first."

Crole said, "Gladly."

Shultz scrutinized the machine in great detail for five minutes. He then returned to his own chair and quipped, "It's fine. The farce can now begin."

Crole announced that to begin with we would try to establish contact with Professor Hubermann. I had assumed Schultz would raise some objection to this, but he remained quiet. The others present agreed to the suggestion.

After putting the required information into the machine through the slit in the head, Crole switched off the light and occupied his seat next to me. Each one in the room was watchful and quiet. Even the sound of the 14 scientists breathing could not be heard. After two minutes, the light started shining. In the radiance of the light partially reflected on the people, all of us could be easily identified. But the area behind the machine was completely dark.

"Are you Professor Hubermann?" enquired Crole.

A voice responded, "Yes, but why have I been called? This fake world holds no value for me."

"Why do you say so?"

The answer was, "What's the point of a world where even the most brutal murderer gets away from the law?"

I noticed the guest scientists stirring with excitement. Schultz roared,

“What’s all this rubbish? Crole, I’m convinced that you’re speaking on behalf of Hubermann. You’re adept at ventriloquism!”

That Crole knows ventriloquism is something I too was aware of. But there was no doubt that this voice was indeed emerging from the machine. Crole’s mouth was shut. It’s simply not possible to voice words without opening one’s mouth. Meanwhile, words once more started coming out of the machine.

“I was the director of a physics-based organization. To grab my position, Johann Schultz mixed potassium cyanide in my coffee. For the sheer lack of evidence, he went scot-free. What can be worse than this? I ...”

Suddenly, there came the sound of smashing glass and the light went off. My eyes were on Professor Schultz. I had seen him take out a pipe from his pocket and hit the light of the machine with it to smash the bulb. With the fading of the light, the words from the spirit died out too. Crole got up and switched on the lights.

All our eyes were on Schultz. It was obvious that he had nerves of steel. He pointed to Crole and said coldly, “On the basis of today’s incident, I can call for a defamation case against you. Projecting the machine as an excuse to prove I’m the assassin? What audacity!”

He strode out of the room, leaving behind his pipe. Of those who remained, only one, a physicist, Professor Erlickh, commented in an intense

voice: “Today, Hubermann’s spirit has confirmed most of our reservations. This machine is incomparable.” [...]

28 SEPTEMBER

[...]

The majority of the tabloids are against us. Disgusted with this breed of journalists, I have been contemplating returning home. However, Heine appeared suddenly this morning and declared jubilantly that he had succeeded in his mission at last—the spirit had started appearing in person next to the machine. This left me speechless.

When Crole was informed, he said, “We need to check on this right away. What have you tested?”

“How could I make this up?” jibed Heine. “I’ve just now spoken to my namesake, the 18th-century poet, Heinrich Heine. I can even describe in detail the dress he wore.”

We instantly sat down to study the machine. Within 10 minutes, we saw the world-famous German composer, Beethoven, clad in a black suit pacing up and down right in front of us. Before we could shoot a question at him, Beethoven lamented, “Oh God—my deafness will be the end of me! How could you destroy my hearing ability?” I remember Beethoven had turned deaf since his middle age.

We were of course thrilled with Heine’s achievement. My inner self tells me perhaps one can now alter the rigid mindset of the journalists and prove the uniqueness of this

machine. We decided that with the institute's help we would call for another meeting inviting all journalists, particularly the ones who had criticized our efforts. This time we would use the bigger lecture hall of the institute and place the machine right in the middle of the platform.

With this in mind, we sent out all our invitations. We also invited Schultz. He phoned me after receiving the card. He said: "So what new charade have you planned this time?" I remarked, "Why don't you witness everything with your own eyes? All I can say is that this time it will be not just an aural experience but a visual one too."

Shultz laughed and retorted, "But then who doesn't enjoy watching such magic? And if one can divulge your tricks publicly what can be nicer?"

I calmly said, "Even if this be your ultimate aim, do come, please."

"Let's see," said Schultz. I have a feeling that Schultz can't help but come.

In all we invited 700 people. The hall can accommodate 800. The meeting is scheduled for 3 October.

4 OCTOBER, 12:30 A.M.

It makes me shudder again and again every time I think of the last evening's affair. There's no doubt that we were victorious all the way. After the meeting, despite the climax, no one could refrain from clapping. The Compudium did full justice to our efforts.

All the invitees had come. Who wants to let go of an opportunity of

watching a spectacle free of cost! Before the meeting, Crole gave an introductory speech to explain our mission. Judging by history, no one had easily accepted any of the revolutionary scientific discoveries. Starting with telegraph, telephone, television to nuclear explosion, men landing on the moon, sending satellite into space—people have nursed their reservations about every innovation. We, too, would face a similar reaction and what was about to be demonstrated would now perhaps instil faith in people's mind concerning our machine. That is what we hoped for.

It was decided that Heine himself would insert the information inside the slit of the machine and would not disclose the identity of the spirit to anyone. Not even to the two of us. It would be a complete surprise. Crole and I agreed to this scheme. Though he is young, Heine is a very promising scientist and he has the ability to think on his feet, an ability which is always valuable especially during this kind of experiment. After Crole finished his speech and sat down, Heine stood up and welcomed everyone present in the audience. He said, "We have informed you all that we will call upon a spirit with the help of our Compudium. All I want to say is that I'll not reveal beforehand whose spirit will appear now. When the spirit arrives you can see it with your own eyes." Heine took out a card from his pocket and inserted it inside the head of the machine. He

then indicated to one of his workers to put out the lights.

I don't normally get nervous or restless, but for some reason I felt my heart skipping a beat or two. Whose spirit would appear at Heine's call?

Nothing for five minutes. Pitch-dark room. All the windows were draped in black curtains. Someone controlled his cough. Silence once more. I could feel everyone waiting with bated breath. My attention was fixed towards the middle of the platform.

Hey ho ... I thought I could perhaps spot a red dot.

Yes, no mistake. A red light glowed from the machine's heart. Does that mean ...?

I suddenly heard a sound in the silent hall.

The sound of a storm. No, not a storm. The flying pair of wings of a bird. There's the bird. Is it a

bird? The one flying across the entire hall. What is it?

I finally comprehended we could see the bird because of the shining phosphorous on its body. A cross between a bat and a reptile, this being emerged from the middle of the room and was circling across the hall, while producing a cry through his mouth wide open, baring his pair of fangs. Pterodactyl!

This fanged and ferocious

creature had existed on this earth 15 million years ago. Heine had put in this description in the card. This creature's eyes were sparkling green, the very symbol of aggression. On top of this, the light emanating from the body added an even more dangerous edge to the vision. There was much chaos in the hall. Sheer terror.

Drowning all noise, Heine shouted into the mike, "Are you convinced now?" The response echoed in unison across the hall, "Oh yes! Please remove this being. Right away."

Heine must have switched off the machine's light. The other lights came on in the hall. Amongst the present audience, seven had fainted in fright. A black-suited man in the front row had even fallen down from his chair.

When I went close to the figure I realized it was Professor Schultz.

Holding his wrist and checking on his pulse, Crole blurted out abruptly, "He is no more."

Against this backdrop of death was an incessant clapping.

"Hail, Compudium! Hail, Science!"



EXCERPTED WITH PERMISSION, FROM *THE FINAL ADVENTURES OF PROFESSOR SHONKU* BY SATYAJIT RAY, TRANSLATED FROM THE BENGALI BY SATYAJIT RAY AND INDRANI MAJUMDAR, PUBLISHED BY PUFFIN BOOKS, AN IMPRINT OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE.

LIFE'S

Like That

“When I’m with my wife and a thought enters my head, the first thing I think is, “Well, I know I can’t say that. Maybe, I could say I heard someone else say it. And then she and I can share a warm moment together, agreeing on what an idiot that person must be.”

—JERRY SEINFELD,
comedian

Since it was my first time in a Las Vegas casino, I asked an employee to walk me through how the slot machines worked. He showed me how to insert a note,

A cousin recently lamented to my wife,
“It may take a village to raise a child,
but I swear it will take a vineyard to
homeschool one.”

—BACCHUS JOHNSON CHARLOTTE



hit the spin button and operate and release the handle.

“And where does the money come out?” I asked.

He pointed to a far wall. “From that ATM, most of the time.”

—JAY JANI AMERICUS

Home Workout Fails

I signed up for a Zoom workout class that was too advanced. So, when the instructor said, “Do a plank and bring your knee to the opposite elbow,” I did a modified version where I turned

CARTOON BY *Scott Masear*

off the computer and made pancakes.

—[@MORGAN_MURPHY](#)

A home-exercise video for parents, where all the lunges are just you going around the house picking up juice-box straw wrappers.

—[@RODLACROIX](#)

We get it, people on Instagram. You have enough clear floor spaces to do yoga.

—[@BANANAFITZ](#)

I opened the door on Halloween to find a superhero in our midst. Admiring his colourful outfit, I asked, "Are you Spider-man?"

Clearly concerned I'd lost it, he said, "I'm a kid. This is a costume."

—CATHY MUMAW
POLAND

Reader's Digest will pay for your funny anecdote or photo in any of our humour sections. Post it to the editorial address, or email: editor.india@rd.com

I was shopping with my sister when she bought a 'belated birthday' card.

After a pause, she grabbed four more.

Seeing my confused look, she explained, "I like to think ahead."

—KAREN STRAND LACEY

CHEF BOY-AR-JEEZ!

It looks so easy when the pros do it. So why do your versions of baked goods come out looking like this?



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY TAMIKA WHITE. COURTESY DANIELLE LARKIN. COURTESY HOLLY PUTNAM. COURTESY KAROLINE SMIŠKOVA. RUTHBLACK/GETTY IMAGES. ISTETIANA/GETTY IMAGES

BORN for the Stage

A veteran in films and web shows, Radhika Apte is now trying her hand at directing too

BY *Suhani Singh*

Was there a defining moment when you knew acting was meant for you?

I have always wanted to be an actor for as long as I can remember. I wanted to act in films because I was obsessed with Bollywood cinema. I did a lot of theatre acting and was introduced to world cinema in college. Then I did a Konkani Marathi film, *Gho Mala Asla Hava*, which was my first. I remember feeling so comfortable in the presence of a moving camera. That was when I decided that I really want to pursue acting.

You recently directed *The Sleepwalkers*. Tell us about the experience.

I have been wanting to make a film for the last three to four years. Somehow,

I never had the time or the confidence because I have never written anything before. It's one of the most amazing experiences I have had. I realized how exciting it is to make a film. You want everything to mean something, then you just let it be on the set and accept whatever is happening. You play with real time, address the challenges along the way and the film ends up differently from how you perceived it. I definitely want to direct more films.

In your opinion, has the 'who you know' versus 'how good you are' balance tipped in Indian cinema in recent years at all?

Of course, we have nepotism in our film industry but it's not a black-

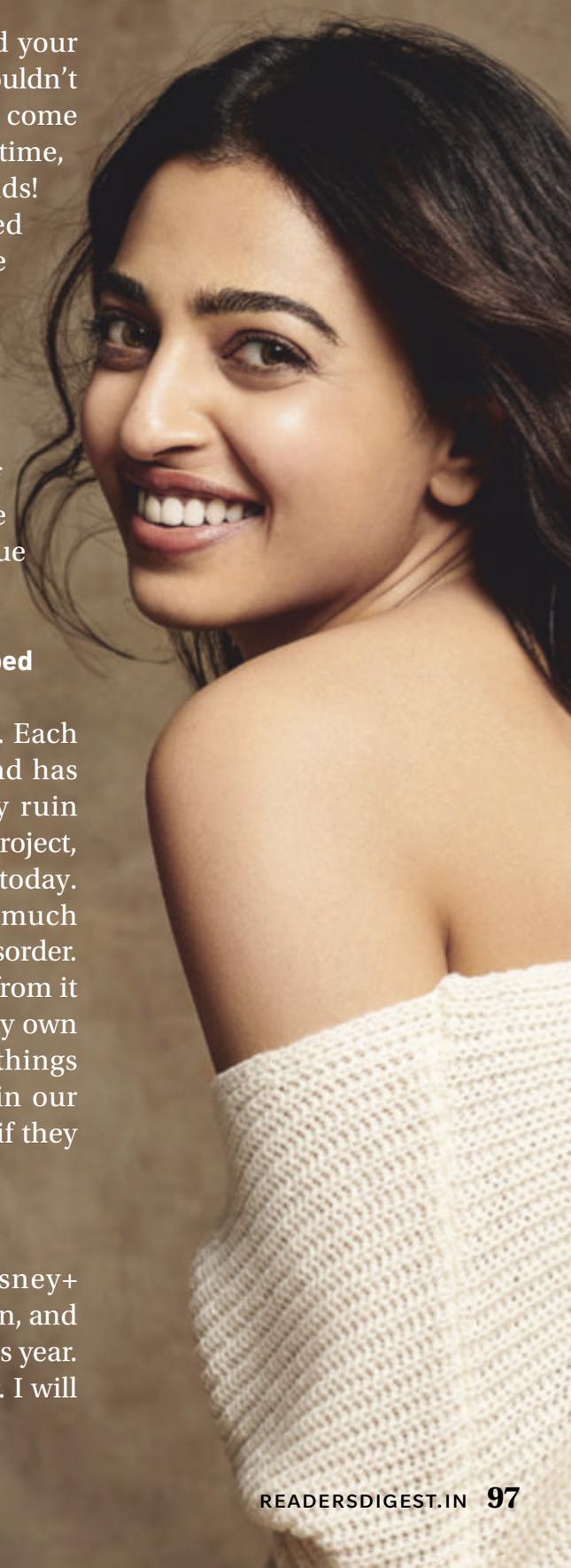
and-white thing. If you have money and your children want to be actors or directors, wouldn't you put the money to make their dreams come true? People blame the industry all the time, but the audience is also crazy for star kids! Over-the-top (OTT) platforms have offered equal opportunities—you can choose what you want, you don't pay extra and there are no time restrictions. So, it really depends on whether you can hook the audience or not. If they are bored, they will just change the film and watch something else. The number of writers, directors and actors who have had the opportunity to do better work due to OTT platforms is absolutely amazing.

Has there been a role so far that has helped you grow as a person/actor?

I think, so far, every role has helped me. Each person you meet in life is important and has something to contribute—even if they ruin things, there is something to learn. Every project, director, writer has influenced who I am today. For instance, with *Phobia*, I learnt so much about anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. My empathy towards people who suffer from it increased, as did my understanding of my own mental health. With *Parched*, I learnt things about my sexuality, how we look at it in our country and how liberated one can feel if they decide to fight their demons.

Tell us about your upcoming projects.

There's a futuristic web series on Disney+ Hotstar, alongside Vijay Varma. It's very fun, and I had the best time shooting for it early this year. Otherwise, I have taken a break this year. I will start working in January, next year. **R**



RD RECOMMENDS

Films

ENGLISH: Set in 1973 USA, **UNCLE FRANK** will see a teenaged girl, Beth, travel from her rural hometown to study at New York University, where she meets with her beloved Uncle Frank, a respected literature professor. Skeletons tumble out of the closet when Beth discovers that Frank is gay and in a longtime relationship with Walid 'Wally' Nadeem—unknownst to his family. The death of his father, however, forces Frank to return home, Beth and Walid in tow, for the funeral, and in the process, confront a trauma he has desperately tried to flee. This heartfelt road movie will see standout performances



A scene from the film *Chhalaang*

from Paul Bettany, Sophia Lillis and Peter Macdissi, and streams on Amazon Prime on 25 November.

HINDI: In **CHHALAANG**, actor Rajkummar Rao will essay the role of Montu, a PT master at a semi-government-funded school in northern India. Montu takes his job easy till he meets Neelu (Nushratt Bharuccha) whom he comes to love. The stakes are suddenly raised, when another man vies for Neelu's affection, and Montu

is forced to do the one thing he has never done: teach. This social comedy on the importance of sports education releases on Amazon Prime on 13 November.

LAXMMI BOMB, releasing 9 November on Disney+Hotstar, is a horror comedy with a vengeance-seeking ghost haunting members of a family with hilarious results.

Akshay Kumar will star in the film, depicting a man possessed by the ghost of a transgender person, alongside Kiara Advani.

#WATCHLIST: ON OUR RADAR



Dafne Keen
as Lyra in
*His Dark
Materials*
season 2

His Dark Materials Season 2:

The second season of HBO's adaptation of Philip Pullman's acclaimed and award-winning fantasy-fiction trilogy will stream from 16 November. In this season, Lyra, an orphan girl, search-

ing for a kidnapped friend and a mysterious phenomena in a world where science, theology and magic intertwine, is joined on her quest by Will, a boy who has a knife that can 'cut windows' between worlds.

Dark 7 White: Streaming on ZEE5 from 24 November, this dark-humour, political, murder-mystery series will see seven friends of whom one

decides to take advantage of the others and outdo them.

Mum Bhai: This action-packed series will depict

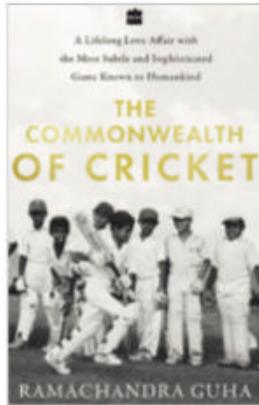
the clashes between Mumbai's underworld and its police force in the 1980s. It will stream on AltBalaji and ZEE5 from 6 November.

Books

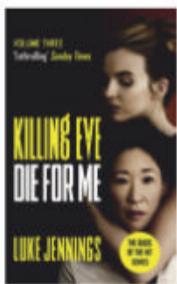
***The Commonwealth of Cricket: A Lifelong Love Affair with the Most Subtle and Sophisticated Game Known to Humankind* by Ramachandra Guha, HarperCollins Publishers India**

In this first-person account, Ramachandra Guha traces the history of cricket in India from the 1960s onwards.

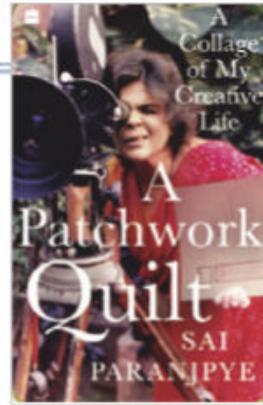
While at the time, India had not even won a single Test match overseas, today, it's one of the cricketing superpowers. Guha describes this ascent in vivid detail by taking into account all the levels at which the game is played: school, college, club, state and country. He peppers the narrative with memoirs, anecdotes, reportage and



critiques, as well as vivid portraits of local heroes, provincial icons and international stars. He also explores the social and historical changes embedded in the fascinating journey of this sport in India.



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE ... *Killing Eve: Die For Me* by Luke Jennings, Hachette India: The third segment of the trilogy on which the hit series is based, this fast-paced thriller has investigator Eve Polastri and assassin Villanelle take refuge in St Petersburg with the 'The Twelve' hot on their heels. Amidst conspiracy and murder, Polastri and Villanelle must learn to trust each other, or face doom.



Scope Out

***A Patchwork Quilt* (HarperCollins):**

Film and television personality Sai Paranjpye recalls her colourful and successful journey in this memoir of a life well-lived.

***The Law of Innocence* (Hachette):** In Michael Connelly's latest, defence attorney Mickey Haller is accused of murder and must prove his innocence and find the true culprit from behind bars.

***Avasthe* (Harper Collins):** Narayan Hegde's translation of an U. R. Ananthamurthy novel, deals with issues of gender, class, caste, religion, culture and politics.

Moviemaker

Vishal Bhardwaj

As a director, Vishal Bhardwaj is something of an institution in Bollywood. He is most recognized for his compelling, unconventional and masterful adaptations of the Shakespearean dramas *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*, which he made into *Maqbool*, *Omkara* and *Haider*, respectively. Over the years, Bhardwaj has developed a penchant for lyrical and crime dramas as well as dark comedies.

It may come as a surprise, though, that the veteran filmmaker sees himself as a music composer at heart. In a 2019 interview, Bhardwaj says that “If I’m not appreciated as a music com-



poser, I really don’t care if they appreciate me as a writer and filmmaker.” He has composed music for around 50 films including *Satya*, *Ishqiya*, *Sonchiriya* and *Haider*. He even takes special care to incorporate in the songs elements of the region the films are set in.

Whether it be composing music or directing films, Bhardwaj is not one to shy away from challenges. Sticking to his forte of adapting literary genre classics, he is now planning an entire franchise of films refashioning Agatha Christie’s novels for an Indian audience. We, for one, can’t wait to find out what the maestro will dish out with this one.

THROWBACK

Milestones in films, inventions and criminal history

◆ **The premiere of *Titanic*:** James Cameron’s film, one of the most widely viewed of all time, premieres at the Tokyo International

Film Festival on 1 November 1997.

◆ **An iconic staple patented:** Businessman King C. Gillette patents the famous, bestselling Gillette Safety Razor on 15 November 1904.

◆ **The Nuremberg Trials:** The International Military Tribunal sessions of the Nuremberg Trials starts on 20 November 1945. It would sentence 12 high ranking Nazi officials to death.

REVIEW

Blumhouse Blues

Welcome to the Blumhouse may be competently made, but it is not essential viewing for horror aficionados

BY Shougat Dasgupta

OF COURSE, the Indian(-ish) segment of Amazon Prime's horror-lite *Welcome to the Blumhouse* series would have to be titled *Evil Eye* and tackle the subject of arranged marriage too. It begins like one of those bland American-desi romantic comedies—replete with clichés such as the Indian mother who thinks and talks about nothing other than getting her daughter married off, the rational, relaxed father who appears to devolve parenting entirely to his wife and the equally amused children, rolling their



Sydney Sweeney in *Nocturne*

eyes at their mother while going along with her every wish. But there are hints of disquiet and past trauma: Sarita Choudhury, too often relegated to roles that belie her talents, plays the mother whose daughter resists her nuptial nagging, eventually meeting a handsome, ostensibly perfect, man, but ...

The other new feature, *Nocturne*, is more promising—pairing together the intensity of a sibling rivalry and that of a concert pianist aspiring to life. But, atmospheric as *Nocturne* can sometimes be, it seems

to think that it is enough to gesture at infinitely superior films such as *Rosemary's Baby*, *Carrie*—and Michael Haneke's profoundly unsettling *The Piano Teacher*—to be ranked in the same company.

The Blumhouse production company's reputation rests on its sharp, schlock-savvy horror movies, particularly the acerbic *Get Out*. But, despite being competently made, it is hard to think of a reason to watch any of these films, especially when there are so many better genre classics on the same platform. **R**

STUDIO

Rajdhani Train Arrives in Mumbai**by Santosh Verma****C-type print, 10.47 x 3.81 in, 1990**

OLD-TIMERS WILL fondly recall the classic red-and-yellow painted carriages of the luxurious Rajdhani Express trains from years past. Even though the colour of its compartments has since changed, the history of this long-running train is steeped in the memories and experiences of its passengers down the decades.

This nostalgic sense is suitably evoked by Santosh Verma in his 1990 photograph of the Rajdhani Express arriving in Mumbai. The shot captures the just-arrived train when tired passengers have not yet disembarked. The remarkably languid atmosphere in the photograph, with the vacant platform and the absence of massive crowds or rushing people, even at the moment the train pulls in, takes us back to a quieter, but arguably imaginary, time and space.

However, what you will notice even on today's station platforms are the coolies—immortalized by their characteristic red-and-white attire. Despite the relaxed scene, there is an air of expectancy too on the platform, as the coolies stand uniformly apart by the windows of the train carriages, in wait for their fares. **R**

PHOTO COURTESY: MUSEUM OF ART & PHOTOGRAPHY, BENGALURU

— BY SAPTAK CHOUDHURY

ME & MY SHELF

Avni Doshi is an American novelist based in Dubai. Her first novel, *Burnt Sugar*—titled *Girl in White Cotton* in India—has been shortlisted for The Booker Prize 2020. She is also the recipient of the Tibor Jones South Asia Prize 2013. Her writing has appeared in *Granta* and *The Sunday Times*.



Pride and Prejudice

BY JANE AUSTEN,
Maple Classics, ₹195

I read this book in middle school for the first time and immediately wanted to read it again. I picked up on something in Austen's writing that I couldn't articulate back then—something sly, sardonic and irresistible.



The Portrait of a Lady

BY HENRY JAMES, *Wordsworth Classics*, ₹235

I did an independent study about Henry James in high school with an English teacher I adored. Through a close reading of this book, she explained to me that by excavating the mind of his heroine, James had done something revolutionary with

his novel. I realized that I found this interiority thrilling to read.

Lolita

BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV, *Penguin Books*, ₹399
Reading *Lolita* was game-changing for me. It introduced me to the idea of unreliability in a story. I didn't know a narrator could be both repugnant and persuasive. It was the first time I read a novel where I had to question my reactions and assumptions.

Dept. of Speculation

BY JENNY OFFILL, *Vintage Contemporaries*, ₹699
Jenny Offill writes breathtaking sentences. They are clean, sometimes clipped and get to the heart of the matter with emotion and honesty. The style of this novel struck me more than its subject. When I read it, I was inspired by the

fragmentary form, by the white space around her words.

The Argonauts

BY MAGGIE NELSON,

Melville House UK, ₹999

There's a kind of bravery in the way Nelson approaches writing. She claims various forms as her own and brings them together in a way that is unexpected and illuminating. In *The Argonauts*, Nelson marries myth, personal accounts and academic study to suggest that pregnancy can be understood as a queering of the body. This book is radical and beautiful.



Light Years

BY JAMES SALTER, Penguin Modern

Classics, ₹499 This novel was effortless to read, and there is a lightness of touch in Salter's writing. For me, his books are pure pleasure. I don't like to think too much when I come to his work—I just let the beauty of his prose wash over me. He is an absolute master.

The Days of Abandonment

BY ELENA FERRANTE, Europa editions,

₹934 I love the Neapolitan Quartet, but this book is remarkable for its brevity and intensity. It's the story of a woman whose husband leaves her, and Ferrante starts the novel with a masterful first sentence.

Book prices are subject to change.

I read the book in one sitting—it's tightly composed and meticulously edited.

S. S. Proleterka: A Novel

BY FLEUR JAEGGY, translated by Alistair McEwen, New Directions, ₹2,876

I was introduced to Jaeggy recently and felt betrayed that no one had led me to her sooner. Her books are short and remarkable. This novella, which tells the story of a young girl on a cruise with her father, weaves in and out of different perspectives and walks a tenuous line between the real and surreal. On a syntactic level, it's just perfect.

Family Life

BY AKHIL SHARMA, Penguin Books,

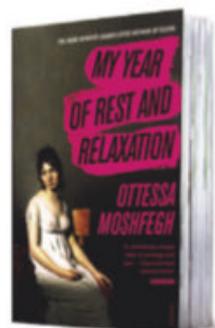
₹399 This book haunted me for a while after I read it. Sharma's writing is economical and determinedly un-sentimental. In the mind of the narrator, the everyday is ferocious and the tragic is mundane.

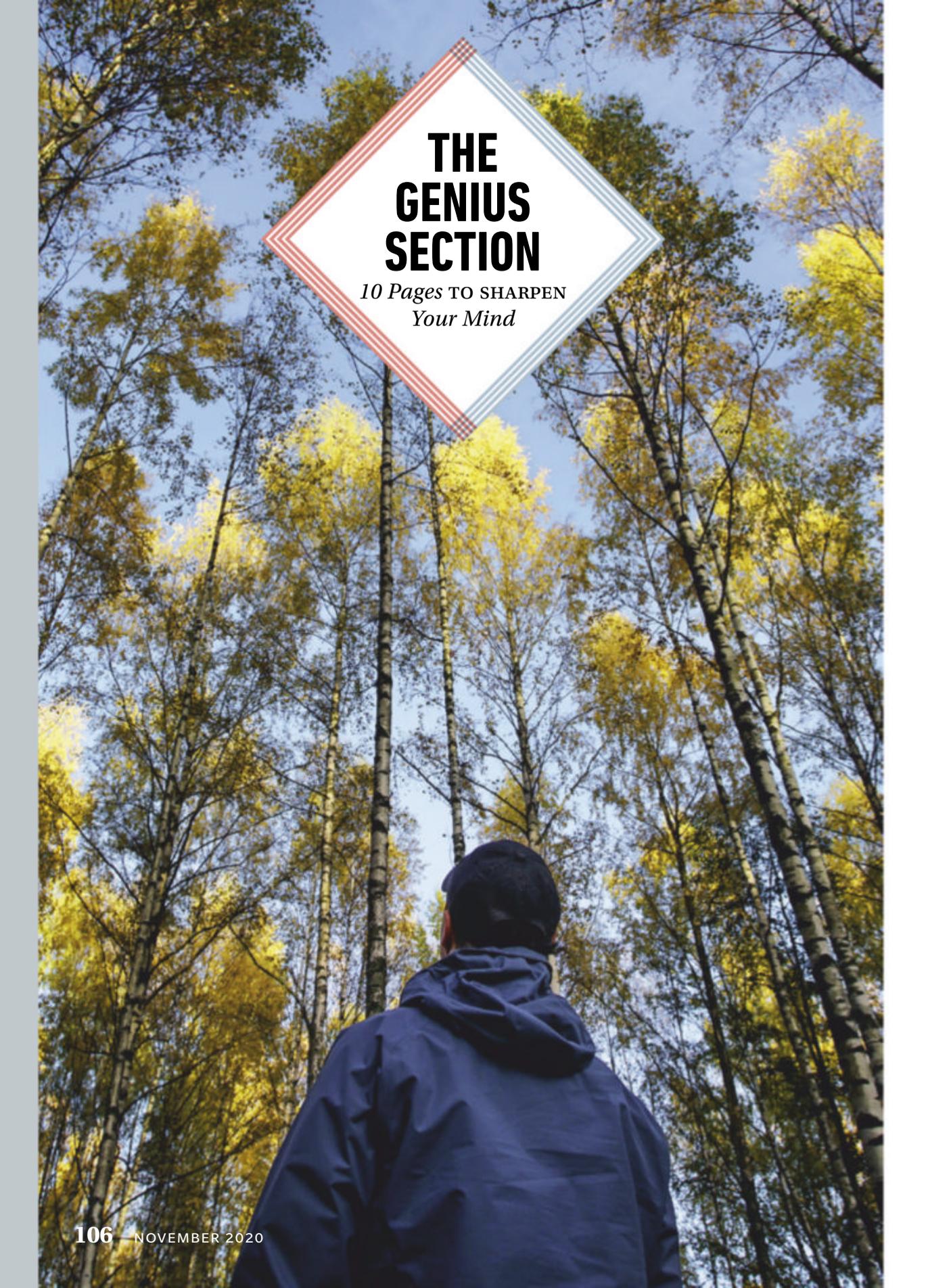
My Year of Rest and Relaxation

BY OTTESSA MOSHFEGH, Vintage, ₹650

How do you write an entire novel about sleeping? I wondered this when I opened Moshfegh's brilliant book. She tells the story of our world through our disengagement with it. This was probably my favourite read in 2019.

—COMPILED BY SAPTAK CHOUDHURY





THE GENIUS SECTION

*10 Pages TO SHARPEN
Your Mind*

YOUR BRAIN WAS MADE FOR WALKING

Creative inspiration is only a short stroll away

BY *Jeffrey Davis*

FROM *PSYCHOLOGY TODAY*

IF A PRESIDENT, a legendary philosopher and one of the best-selling authors of all time credited the same secret for their success, would you try to follow it too? What if the secret was something you already knew how to do? In fact, you probably do it every day.

Here's what Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: "It is only ideas gained from walking that have any worth." Thomas Jefferson: "Walking is the best possible exercise. Habituate yourself to walk very far." And Charles Dickens made his point with uncharacteristic brevity: "If I could not walk far and fast, I think I should just explode and perish."

Are you still sitting there reading this? Get walking! It's not just these three great minds who made a case for it as a prime creativity booster. Researchers have traced

numerous connections between walking and generating ideas. A Stanford University study found that participants were 81 per cent more creative when walking as opposed to sitting. According to the study, walking outside—versus on a treadmill—produces the most novel and highest-quality analogies in participants who walked and then sat down to do creative work. Another famous-person example: As part of his daily writing routine, Kurt Vonnegut would take a mid-morning break from his office to walk and then swim before eventually returning to work. I would argue that this habit wasn't just a habit, but an intentional, necessary element of his creative process.

The movement aspect of walking is obviously key. You've probably heard the phrase *exercise your*

creativity, which refers to the brain as muscle. Our creative mindset is triggered by physical movement, which is exactly why walking—with your dog, a friend, or alone—feeds creative thinking.

But the scenery is almost as important as the sweat. Being inside, you're more prone to stagnation, the antithesis of energy. Without energy, you can't wonder or create. Disrupting your routine with a walk can be a catalyst for garnering fresh insights into problems or projects. Just by going outside, you are stepping out of your habitual surroundings and your comfort zone, which is necessary if you want to open your mind to new possibilities.

You can walk through a tree-filled neighbourhood. You can walk through a park and observe people sauntering or birds singing. Even when you walk down a busy street, you can't help but get distracted by the sweet cinnamon smells wafting from a food cart or the child pointing to a building you hadn't even noticed before.

Our brains work harder to process in different environments, so walking outside fosters our ability to glean new ideas, to take in new sights,

sounds, smells and flavours. *Shinrin-yoku*, or 'forest bathing', is a common form of relaxation and medicine in Japan. It was developed in 1982, and recent studies demonstrate that being in the forest and walking among the trees lowers your stress levels. The effects are so powerful that *shinrin-yoku* is now a government-endorsed policy in Japan.

But you don't have to live near a forest to receive the psychological benefits. Research has shown that immersion in nature, and the corresponding disconnection from multimedia and technology, increased performance on a creative problem-solving task by a full 50 per cent in a group of hikers.

So instead of setting a fitness goal, why not set a creativity goal that starts with walking? Engage more closely with your surroundings for the next four weeks. Turn off your phone and give yourself the chance to be present in the world, to hear conversations and natural sounds, to notice the way people move, the way the sun reflects in a puddle. Walk not just for exercise. Walk for wonder. 

Psychology Today (28 December 2018), Copyright © 2018 by Jeffrey Davis, psychologytoday.com.



Did I Turn Off the Stove?

A journey of a thousand miles begins with running back
in the house for something you forgot.

 @STEVEMOEHLER22

LAUGH LINES

If you don't have a panini press, just heat up your corduroys and sit on your sandwich.

—[@BoogTweets](#)

Bought quick oats, then my roommate showed up with instant oats. I will not be humiliated; I must find an even sooner oat.

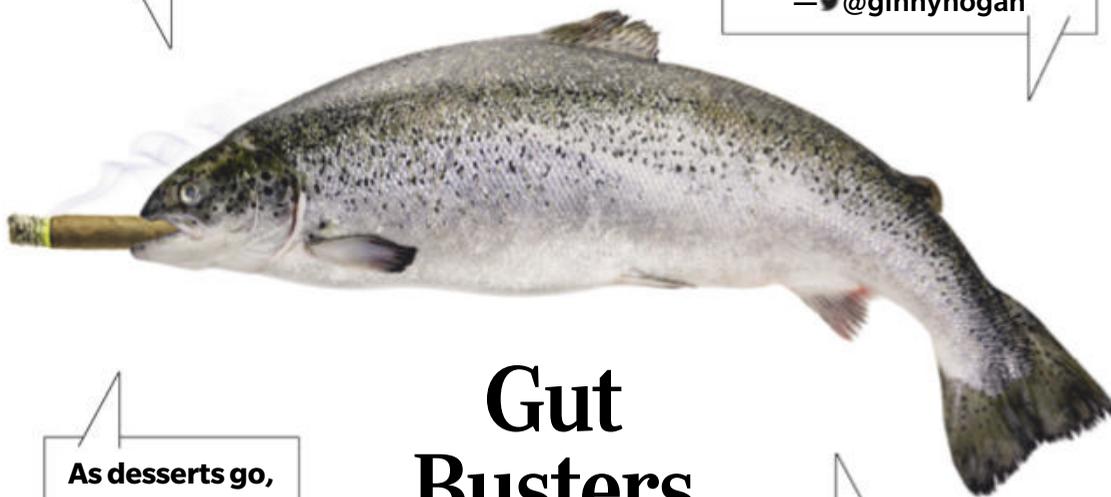
—[@ChrisThayerSays](#)

If smoking is so bad, then why does it cure salmon?

—[@ARSONDOER](#)

Grateful to the visionary who saw beans that had only been fried one time and thought, *This isn't enough.*

—[@ginnyhogan](#)



Gut Busters

As desserts go, you can't beat a cobbler. Tastes good, makes shoes.

—[@williefitz](#)

You cannot glue a tomato back together with tomato paste. Believe me. I've tried.

—[@walruslifestyle](#)

GETTY IMAGES (2)

BRAINTEASERS

O	O	X	O	O	X	X
X	O	O	X	O	X	X
X	X	X	O	X	O	O
O	X	O	X	X	X	O
O	X	O	O	O	X	X
O	O	X	O	O	X	X
O	X	O	X	O	X	O

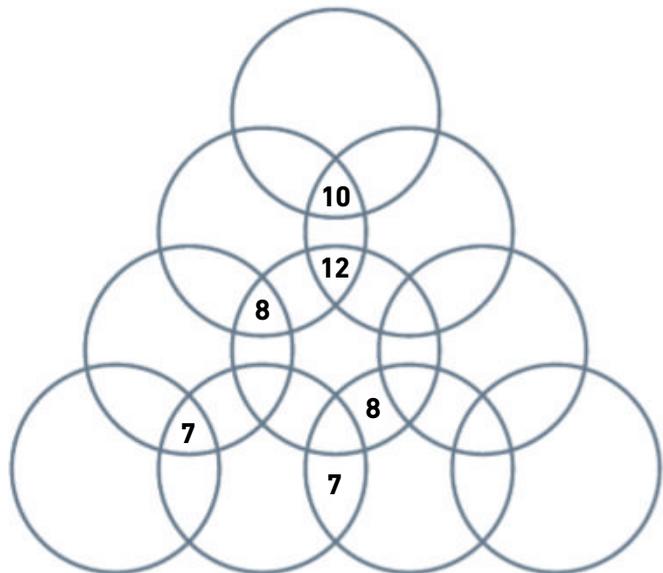
Herding Cats

Easy There is one three-by-three arrangement of squares in this grid that forms a 'cat's game'; that is, a game of tic-tac-toe in which neither X nor O has three in a row. How fast can you find it?

Bubble Math

Moderately difficult

Assign a whole number from 1 to 5 to each of the 10 bubbles, using each number exactly twice. The sums of some of the numbers are revealed in the areas where their bubbles overlap. No two bubbles with the same number are touching. Can you figure out which number goes in each bubble?



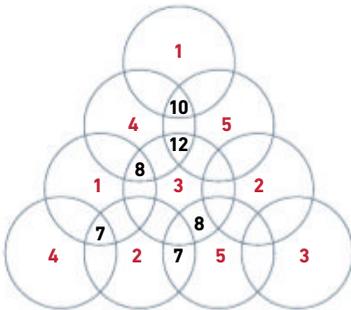
BRAINTEASERS ANSWERS

FROM PAGES 110 & 111

Herding Cats

O	O	X	O	O	X	X
X	O	O	X	O	X	X
X	X	X	O	X	O	O
O	X	O	X	X	X	O
O	X	O	O	O	X	X
O	X	O	O	O	X	X
O	X	O	X	O	X	O

Bubble Math



Spymaster

7631.

Speedy Spoilage

At around 11 a.m.
on Tuesday.

Rubber Room

	2	1	2	3	
2					2
1					3
1					5
2					2
	2	1	5	2	

JIGSAW SUDOKU

BY Jeff Widderich

			4	7				
3		5			8			1
	4			5	1		2	
9	5					2		
1								8
		4					1	3
	8		9	1			5	
6			5			7		9
				4	7			

To Solve This Puzzle

Put a number from 1 to 9 in each empty square so that:

◆ every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them;

◆ each of the outlined 3 X 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.

2	8	1	7	4	9	3	6	5
6	4	7	3	8	5	1	2	9
6	5	3	2	9	1	6	7	4
3	1	9	5	2	8	4	6	7
8	9	5	4	9	2	7	3	1
7	4	2	7	6	1	3	8	5
7	2	9	1	3	5	6	4	8
1	6	2	8	9	2	6	7	3
5	3	8	9	6	4	7	1	2


WORD POWER

What a difference a letter makes! This month's words come in pairs—plus one triplet—that are nearly identical, save one character that has been added, removed, shifted or replaced. Can you tell these look-alikes apart? Turn to the next page to find out.

BY *Emily Cox* AND *Henry Rathvon*

1. apprise v.

(uh-'pryz)

- A** force open.
- B** inform.
- C** honour.

2. appraise v.

(uh-'prayz)

- A** evaluate.
- B** compliment.
- C** bid on.

3. gaffe n.

(gaf)

- A** camera operator.
- B** social blunder.
- C** hunter's boot.

4. gaff n.

(gaf)

- A** special favour.
- B** comedy routine.
- C** metal hook.

5. inculcate v.

(in-'kull-kayt)

- A** add up.
- B** instill.
- C** hit a dead end.

6. inculpate v.

(in-'kull-payt)

- A** file down.
- B** swallow.
- C** incriminate.

7. mantel n.

('man-tull)

- A** straw wreath.
- B** handsaw.
- C** fireplace shelf.

8. mantle n.

('man-tull)

- A** baseball cap.
- B** cloak.
- C** flowering tree.

9. factious adj.

('fak-shuss)

- A** split into cliques.
- B** inaccurate.
- C** self-serving.

10. fractious adj.

('frak-shuss)

- A** irritable.
- B** splintered.
- C** buried deep.

11. averse adj.

(uh-'verss)

- A** unrhymed.
- B** opposed.
- C** skilled.

12. adverse adj.

(ad-'verss)

- A** unfavourable.
- B** upside-down.
- C** commercial.

13. jib n.

(jib)

- A** bad attitude.
- B** tomcat.
- C** triangular sail.

14. jibe v.

(jyb)

- A** agree.
- B** terrify.
- C** dance.

15. gibe v.

(jyb)

- A** lend a hand.
- B** ridicule.
- C** take a bow.

That Sinking Feeling

Don't let this oft-confused pair get you down: To *founder* is to sink, like a ship, or to fail utterly at something. To *flounder* is to thrash about helplessly, either literally or figuratively; think of a flapping fish. Both words likely come from the Latin noun *fundus*, meaning 'bottom'. You can do both, unfortunately—but in logical order, you'll probably flounder before you founder.



Word Power ANSWERS

1. apprise (B) *inform*.

Has anyone apprised Cinderella of the midnight curfew?

2. appraise (A) *evaluate*.

As part of the review, employees will be asked to appraise their own performance.

3. gaffe (B) *social blunder*.

I admit, gargling with the table wine was a bit of a gaffe.

4. gaff (C) *metal hook*.

Samantha used a gaff to haul the 50-kilo marlin into the boat.

5. inculcate (B) *instill*.

Coach Singh works to inculcate confidence in her young players.

6. inculcate (C) *incriminate*. "I advise you to keep

quiet, or you risk inculcating yourself," the lawyer warned.

7. mantel (C) *fireplace shelf*.

Malik hung his grandmother's portrait over the mantel in his study.

8. mantle (B) *cloak*.

Pulling her black mantle around her shoulders, the witch scurried through the dark forest.

9. factious (A) *split into cliques*. "The city council has been factious in recent years, but now is a time for unity," said the mayor.

10. fractious

(A) *irritable*. Like most toddlers, Timmy is fractious when he's tired.

11. averse (B) *opposed*.

I'm not averse to trying new things, but you'll

never persuade me to go skydiving!

12. adverse

(A) *unfavourable*.

Lexi stopped taking the medication after she had an adverse reaction to it.

13. jib (C) *triangular sail*.

The captain lowered the jib and mainsail, and let the boat drift with the currents.

14. jibe (A) *agree*.

"That doesn't jibe with what your sister said," Dad said suspiciously.

15. gibe (B) *ridicule*.

The crowd gibed the referee for botching the call.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: good

10–12: gold

13–15: gold



QUIZ

BY *Paul Paquet*

1. Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) is a very sturdy plastic. That's why it hurts to step on what Danish-designed ABS toys?

2. You may know her better as a nurse, but who became the first female member of the UK's Royal Statistical Society in 1858?

3. Who described Simon Bolivar as "the dastardly, most miserable and meanest of blackguards"?

4. Which movie star's first claim to fame was being part of a hip-hop duo called DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince?

5. According to peer-reviewed research, wearing what colour might give an advantage to boxers?

6. Besides his most famous portrait, what artist also painted others that included *Lady With an Ermine* and *Ginevra de' Benci*?

7. Greta Thunberg's mother, Malena Ernman, represented Sweden at what event in 2009?

8. Which former German chancellor gave Angela Merkel her first cabinet position—and the rather patronizing nickname "*mein Mädchen*" (my girl)?

9. Not counting cheese or tomato sauce, what is by far the most popular pizza topping among Americans?

10. Omura's whale, the Lord Howe stick insect and the New Zealand storm petrel are all examples of what kind of animal?

11. Although Bea Arthur hated cheesecake, what TV show's cast ate some 100 of them on camera?

12. Which Disney character's family name is Fa, even though it was Hua in the source material?

13. By what name is the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences better known?

14. In early 2020 in Hong Kong, armed men stole 600 of what coveted item?



15. Who's won two Grammys for comedy recordings and three for playing the banjo?

Answers: 1. Lego. 2. Florence Nightingale. 3. Karl Marx. 4. Will Smith. 5. Red. 6. Leonardo da Vinci. 7. The Eurovision Song Contest. 8. Helmut Kohl. 9. Pepperoni. 10. They're Lazarus animals, meaning they were thought to be extinct only to be rediscovered. 11. *The Golden Girls*. 12. Mulan. 13. The Nobel Prize for Economics. 14. Rolls of toilet paper. 15. Steve Martin.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.

J. Krishnamurti, *writer*

I'm not showing my pretty face, perfect voice ... no. I give you a life experience. That's what people want to see, the truth.

Jin Xing, *China's transgender TV star*

... there is still a small voice you should always listen to and that is your conscience. If in life you wonder what to do, just listen to it.

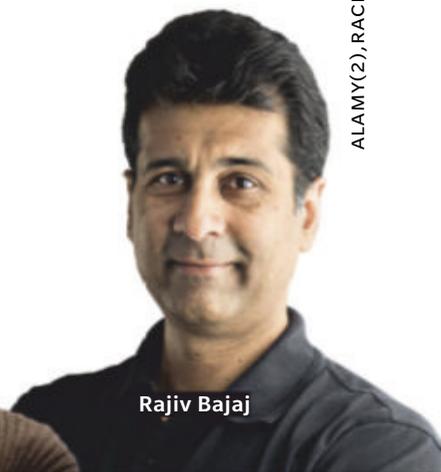
Rajiv Bajaj, *industrialist*



J. Krishnamurti



Jin Xing



Rajiv Bajaj

ALAMY(2), RACHIT GOSWAMI



Kya aapka dhyan bat gaya aur sales ghat gaya? In brand building, dhyan is as important as gyan. JAGDEEP KAPOOR, brand guru


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Dare. Dare the odds.

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