


EDITED
BY
JASON ERIK LUNDBERG

FISH
FATS
LION
REDUX

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LION
REDUX



Previous praise for *Fish Eats Lion*

“Lundberg combines accessibility with a uniquely Singaporean flavor in his selections. SF readers looking to expand their horizons will enjoy visiting new worlds from an unaccustomed point of view.”

–*Publishers Weekly*

“I doubt I’ll read a more engaging collection this year. [...] There’s a rich optimism to be found here that speaks of lesser-known spec-fic writers rising to a challenge, and that challenge being more than adequately met.”

–*Big Sky*

“Entertaining in this postcolonial era, it hints at how storytellers can become mythmakers, with the power to change the world.”

–*The Straits Times*

“Lundberg should be congratulated for bringing these works together and seeing the project through to completion. On the whole, this collection of short stories heralds a bright future for speculative fiction in Singapore.”

–*Cha: An Asian Literary Review*

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the authors' imaginations or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

First edition, November 2022.

FISH EATS LION REDUX

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MORE NEW SINGAPOREAN
SPECULATIVE FICTION

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EPIGRAM

An abstract, monochromatic ink splash graphic in shades of grey and white, occupying the left side of the page. It features fluid, organic shapes that resemble smoke or liquid in motion, with some darker, more defined forms and lighter, misty areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Jason Erik Lundberg

Back in 2012, I released *Fish Eats Lion*, not knowing what a game-changing landmark publication it would be for speculative fiction in Singapore. I had been living here for five years by that point, my eyes still wide with wonder and novelty, and I wanted to put together a book that took local SF seriously, while also being a lot of fun. There had been anthologies previously published in Singapore that contained SF—including *Singapore Science Fiction* edited by R. S. Bhatia, Dudley de Souza and Kirpal Singh, published in 1980 by the Rotary Club of Jurong Town and Singapore Science Centre—but none that really treated SF as bona fide literary work, as opposed to “that genre stuff”.

I went out of my way to invite authors who didn’t normally

write SF to give it a try, as well as a number of poets who didn't normally write prose. What resulted was a significant assemblage of work that examined many facets of life in Singapore, all through a fantastical lens. The anthology sold out in 2016, but its UK edition (identical except for the removal of "The Story of the Kiss" by Stephanie Ye, at the author's request) has been available since 2014.

The book was also intended as a catalyst for more speculative fiction to be written and published in Singapore. It signalled that SF was as valid as any other genre for literary exploration; I later heard from several friends who taught at Singaporean universities that *all* their students wanted to write in this mode, which produced in me nothing but delight. This signal was also thankfully taken up by a number of publications. Anthologies such as *This Is How You Walk on the Moon* (2016) and *Singa-Pura-Pura* (2021) pushed the short story form, and my own *LONTAR: The Journal of Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction* (which was focused on the larger region of Southeast Asia, but always had a heavy Singaporean component) released ten issues between 2013 and 2018. A number of single-author works expanded the field, including (among others) *This Side of Heaven* by Cyril Wong (finalist for the 2021 Singapore Book Award for Best Literary Work and the 2022 Singapore Literature Prize for Fiction), *The Formidable Miss Cassidy* by Meihan Boey (co-winner of the 2021 Epigram Books Fiction Prize, winner of the 2022 Singapore Book Award for Best Literary Work, and selected by *The Straits Times* as one of the Best Books

of 2021), *The Keepers of Stories* by Suffian Hakim (longlisted for the 2020 Epigram Books Fiction Prize), *Lion City* by Ng Yi-Sheng (winner of the 2019 Singapore Book Award for Best Literary Work and 2020 Singapore Literature Prize for Fiction), *The Gatekeeper* by Nuraliah Norasid (winner of the 2016 Epigram Books Fiction Prize and the 2018 Singapore Book Award for Best Literary Work), *The Infinite Library and Other Stories* by Victor Fernando R. Ocampo (finalist for the 2018 International Rubery Book Award for Fiction), and *Kappa Quartet* by Daryl Qilin Yam (longlisted for the 2015 Epigram Books Fiction Prize, and selected by *The Business Times* as one of the Best Books of 2016). (You can find contributions from all these authors, and many more, in the book in your hands.)

Many writers who appeared in that initial volume were early in their fiction careers (or even at the start), and went on to produce more wonderful fiction. One of these was the aforementioned Victor Ocampo, who has been a close friend during all that time. At some point in early 2017, we met up for coffee and shop talk, and a sequel to *Fish Eats Lion* came up; it had been five years since the release, and Victor noted that it would be nice to have another collection of solely Singaporean SF. But at that time, I was still deep into running *LONTAR*, which (as said above) already included Singaporean authors and stories, so it felt like there would be too much overlap to bring out an anthology as well. I demurred and the topic shifted to other things, but after returning home that evening, I found myself agreeing that a

sequel would indeed be a cool thing to assemble, whenever I happened to snatch any free time.

The following year, the final double-sized issue of *LONTAR* was released, and I said goodbye to a serial publication of which I was tremendously proud. Afterward, I was in talks with a number of people about starting up a new literary journal, or guest editing for an existing publication, but I was just too exhausted. I had spent years helming a literary journal that occupied all my creative and logistical energy, and I needed a rest, followed by a return to my own writing. Yet that conversation with Victor kept pushing itself into my conscious mind.

So in late October 2020, I emailed a proposal to the Epigram Books boss man, Edmund Wee, for *Fish Eats Lion Redux*, a brand new anthology of original speculative fiction to come out in late 2022, a decade to the month after the publication of *Fish Eats Lion*. I spent the next several months reaching out to a number of writers, many of whom I had previously edited, gathering a group of “anchor contributors” with name recognition. In March 2021, he agreed to publish the book, and we were off.



These stories are concerned with four distinct time periods (past, present, near future and far future), but are arranged in a purposefully jumbled way that presents a more holistic approach to the reading experience, rather than a chronological one. The only concession to this format is the

bookending of the anthology, with the first story taking place in Singapore of the distant future, and the final story in the distant past. In this way, time becomes a flat circle when all eras are presented in this shuffled manner, which allows for a more open-minded acceptance of the many fantastical premises you’ll find in this book.

In the past, you’ll experience a young scrivener facing the perils that come with the discovery of her reclusive matriarchal community, and bearing witness to a terrible truth (“Tiger Girls”); Sang Nila Utama encountering a deranged alchemist during his search for the mythical janggi for which Singapore is named (“Blood Double”); a young woman sneaking away from a ceremony before her wedding, which sends her searching for an exiled childhood friend (“Asha Hanar’s Dowry”); and a Chola emperor from the year 1025 conquering Temasek (an early recorded name of a settlement on the site of modern Singapore), and planning an expedition for a fantastical underwater empire with countless treasures (“Sejarah”).

In the present day, you’ll follow a teenaged girl who falls into a magical storm drain that is home to creatures needing an escape (“Longkang at the End of the World”); a man searching for the mermaid he spied as a boy, and reckoning with a familial history of misogyny (“Down Into the Waters”); an otter-selkie captured against her will and forced into matrimonial slavery, but seething with revenge (“Wife, Skin, Keeper, Slick”); a haunted bus in Serangoon that keeps taking on passengers, but no one gets off (“315”); and dogs

communicating directly with their owners, and establishing a sanctuary where they can feel free (“The Dog Frontier”).

In the near future, you’ll see a grieving mother hacking the gaming network that led to her son falling fatally during a viral challenge (“L’Appel Du Vide”); a new pandemic unmooring its victims in time and memory, for which there is no cure (“Blue”); and a cuckolded man yearning to search the multiverse for a version of his girlfriend who still loves him (“Multiversal Adapter”).

And finally, in the far future, you’ll witness a young woman braving a voyage filled with searing heat and shadow-dwelling demons for a land that will accept her and her unborn child (“Stay in the Sun”); a dystopia in which a man must do back-breaking labour to pay for his wife’s continued survival (“Insert Credit to Continue”); and a group of friends in an environmentally devastated and socially segregated Singapore taking a vehicular journey to Malaysia (“Road Trip”).



It has been a profound pleasure to both curate and edit the stories in this collection. A number of the contributors will be familiar to many readers, but I’ve also purposefully tried to take into consideration newer voices; along those lines, I’m pleased to include Izzy Liyana Harris’s very first published story, as well as Felicia Low-Jimenez’s first published short fiction for adults (she’s known much more for being one half of the writing duo behind the wildly popular *Sherlock Sam* series of children’s books).

The world has gone through a number of tectonic shifts in the past decade; sometimes it feels like there is less hope nowadays, less room for optimistic imagination. We are after all still, *still*, in the middle of a global pandemic nearly three years on, as well as a time of increasing political instability. But it is specifically in these times when speculative fiction is more important than ever, to show us alternate ways of viewing the world in order to better understand our place within it. This year of publication marks the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Merlion statue as a symbol for Singapore (and also the inspiration for the title of this book and its antecedent), a mythological creature embodying all that this country can offer. And with this anthology, it is beyond doubt that SF is still alive and strong in the Lion City, and the realm of the imagination has never been so strange or so local.



L'APPEL DU VIDE

Victor Fernando R. Ocampo

Three Javan mynahs jump impatiently around the RO/RO ferry's deck, which was very clean save for the odd spots where thoughtless passengers had left small piles of orange rinds and the crumpled wrappers of salty snacks. Green waves spume under the round bow of the ferry, skidding on the morning tide. For a split second, Jing Yi thinks about jumping into the water.

"Just disappear now," she tells herself. "Forever."

The very idea of falling pulls her back. She shudders as she thinks of what must have run through her son's mind as he fell headfirst off the top of their HDB block. Kenneth, her only child, now dead for two interminable years.

Death by misadventure, the coroner ruled, but she knew better. Her sweet, bookish Kenneth was a happy child who was

neither physically inclined nor much of a risk taker. Someone killed her only child, and today she is going to prove it.

She adjusts her ID mask and fixes her stare at a JC Decaux media tile idly hovering on the forward rampway. It spools up excitedly and begins to play a video for penimpilan baru Indomie cheese pepper instant bakmie cup noodles. She checks the fine print spooling on the screen below and notes that the ad is targeted specifically at “busy middle-class women aged 35 years old and under”. The media tile asks if she wants to know where the cup noodle vending machine is, and if she wants to share additional demographic data in exchange for Big Cup credits.

Jing Yi dismisses the chirping annoyance and climbs down towards the deck, where the big vehicles are berthed. She momentarily ducks into a blind spot under the stairwell and removes her ID mask, quickly replacing it with one whose dazzle pattern fools face recognition algos with a fake ID. As a final touch, she tucks her long hair under a boy’s beanie.

She spots another media tile hovering near the lower rampway and beckons it to come. After scanning her face, and a few seconds of confused system idling, the media tile starts to play a generic ad for klasik Indomie instant mie goreng cup noodles. She checks the fine print spooling below: “student, mass market”. The tile inquires: “Apakah anda ingin memenangkan mie cangkir gratis?”

Jing Yi bats the tile away and walks along the railing towards the ferry’s front apron.

Kenneth would have loved this boat ride, she tells herself

as she scans the vehicles parked in the cavernous Roll On / Roll Off ferry, looking for the AV bus that used to bring her child to school.

It doesn’t take long for her to find the old self-driving shuttle, sandwiched between a Blue Bird charter and a Tesla delivery van. The AV now belongs to an SG AV-DAO, a self-owning Distributed Autonomous Organisation that owns and operates public driverless vehicles. It has now been repurposed as a hop on / hop off gaming service between the Tanah Merah terminal and several e-sports arenas around Lagoi Bay.

To double-confirm, she checks its autochain ID on the illegal sweeper she modded on her phone.

“Got you,” she hisses under her breath.

Jing Yi hates Bintan, but she knew that the dead area between the telco coverage of Singapore and Indonesia is the perfect place for her trap. The patchy network will force the shuttle’s AI to run locally. There will also be fewer witnesses, human or machine, who could figure out what she’s up to. Not that she has much to worry about. All the other passengers in the parked vehicles have been engaged in the free casual games that serve as mindless, on-board entertainment. Winners are rewarded with tokens, free food and drinks, while the ferry’s AI is busy surreptitiously harvesting their personal information (and building individual behavioural profiles to be auctioned off to data brokers later).

She takes a short-range signal jammer from her pocket and turns it on, as she discreetly slips between the vehicles towards the unsuspecting AV. As she swipes the screen, the band of

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In 2012, author and editor Jason Erik Lundberg released *Fish Eats Lion*, the first anthology of literary speculative fiction to be published in Singapore, a groundbreaking work that opened the floodgates of acceptability for the genre in the island-nation, forever changing the landscape. Now, a decade later, he returns with *Fish Eats Lion Redux*, proving that SF is still alive and strong in the Lion City, and exploring Singapore from the distant past to the far future and many points between, as well as alternate versions along the multiverse. This new collection shows beyond doubt that the realm of the imagination has never been so strange or so local.

Featuring new and original stories by:

CYRIL WONG • DARYL QILIN YAM • FELICIA LOW-JIMENEZ
INEZ TAN • IZZY LIYANA HARRIS • KIMBERLY LIUM
MEIHAN BOEY • NG YI-SHENG • NURALIAH NORASID
SITHURAJ PONRAJ • STUART DANKER
SUFFIAN HAKIM • VICTOR FERNANDO R. OCAMPO
WAYNE RÉE • WEN-YI LEE

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