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IAM HEAR ME

Fearless, forthright, formidable and fiercely independent. These female celebrities born during the Year of the Tiger are at the top of their game and ready to attack the year ahead



Born: Sept 26, 1986

Rebecca Lim's Chinese zodiac animal sign may be the tiger, but she is far from

it comes to her big Last November. the local Mediacorp actress posted on Instagram about her

engagement to Mr Matthew Webster (above, with Lim), a 35-year-old Singaporean, after dating for less than a year. But Lim, 35, calls herself a "too-chill bride" who has not planned anything. She tells The Sunday Times: "We are hoping for the wedding to be this year, but the challenge now is to find a venue that can hold as many guests as possible, and in these times, that's difficult. "One step at a time. Matthew is a much better planner than I am." Neither is she feeling any pressure to start a family soon. "It's productions, hosting, overseas not something that comes when you want it. A life is a miracle and I hope we will be blessed with one. "I won't be surprised if I do become a Tiger Mum in the future. After I get married, I'll be able to share more about that more accurately," she says with a laugh. Chinese New Year celebrations will also be "special" this Tiger year who I am and allow me to be me." because of her new plus-one.

Lim has a huge extended family – her father has nine siblings and her mother has four. Due to the pandemic, only her

grandmother and maternal side of the family has met her fiance. So this year, the couple will probably be visiting all of the relatives. "Also, it's our last year to be receiving hongbao," says Lim, who journey has been most unexpected will appear in a collaborative performance by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra and Singapore National Youth Chinese Orchestra as part of the live Lunar New Year's Eve Special 2022, showing tomorrow at 10.30pm on meWatch and Channel 8.

Not much is known about Mr Webster, except that his dad is British, his mum is Chinese Singaporean, he studied at UWC South East Asia, earned a journalism degree at Monash University in Melbourne and is now assistant vice-president of corporate branding at PSA Singapore. He plays the guitar, bass guitar

and drums and drives a Porsche 911. But Lim assures the couple "look forward to sharing more of our lives with everyone".

She says: "I've always been quiet about my personal life, especially my love life. But my stand has been that if one day I should get married, I'll definitely share the



news with everyone. "I was very nervous yet excited to share the news of my engagement because I hardly share anything private and this is

such a huge part of my life. She adds: "Unveiling Matthew will be a slowly-but-surely kind of situation. I'm easing him into my world and he's been amazing at comes along with it."

But Lim did not just get lucky in love. Like many women born in the Year of the Tiger, she is at the top of the food chain, the newgeneration Ah Jie of the local entertainment scene, flush with meaty roles, awards and endorsements.

The latest Gucci and Valentino tiger-themed fashion campaigns, for instance, have her decked out in tiger prints. But Lim would like to believe this

is not her peak. "There's so much more for me to discover, to grow, to improve on and reach greater heights.

"I've been blessed with many different kinds of opportunities -**English and Mandarin** assignments, winning awards

locally and overseas. I've been given more than I ever imagined. "I'm really not the most talented or most gorgeous, but I'm thankful that there are people in this industry who noticed me and people in and out of the industry who appreciate and love me for And for Lim to become the biggest Singapore female star

since Zoe Tay and Fann Wong is something not even the most savvy fengshui master could have predicted. "Never in my wildest dreams,"

she says. "I believe I'll never be able to get used to it. But in a way, I want her heart. to never get used to it because this and I don't wish to hold on to it too much and expect everything to be handed to me.

"I'll just keep working hard to be better and reaching all the new goals that I set for myself."

The last Tiger year, in 2010, she was 24 and such celebrity was a pipe dream. She recalls: "I was nowhere, a nobody, and had no clue what I was doing or where I was heading. I was at the crossroads. In fact, 12 years ago, I actually gave myself only one year to 'play in this entertainment world' and then find a 'proper job' after because this acting career didn't seem feasible.

"It was also disheartening and discouraging seeing how actors who entered the industry later than I were doing much better than I was. But I'm glad I stayed on." It has been exactly one zodiac

cycle since she started acting full time in English-language Channel 5 shows

She credits the 2009 to 2010

period series Fighting Spiders for giving her a role that made her fall in love with acting, even though she was "extremely reluctant" to play the prostitute Susie Woon as she was afraid of being stereotyped early on in her career. "But that character taught me to

have an open mind and have empathy, and to not judge someone from what you see, for everyone is fighting a battle."

Meanwhile, 2010 legal drama The Pupil was Lim's first lead role – which won her a Best Actress trophy at the Asian Television Awards – so it has a special place in

It is not surprising that Lim identifies with certain Tiger traits that have got her this far and has been given many tiger-related monikers by her family.

"I always give my dad and grandparents massages. They are always amazed at how strong I am and gave me the nickname 'Tiger Claw' from a young age.

"I'm also very strong-willed. When I set my mind on something, I'll work hard to achieve it. My mum will say it's just pure stubbornness though," she says with a laugh. "But I wish I had more fierceness

in me. I've been told I can be too nice and taken for granted." And where does she envision herself when the next Tiger year

rolls around, when she turns 48? She savs: "I hope to be at peace and surrounded with the ones I love. To be happy and healthy. To be contented yet still courageous enough to step out of my comfort zone. And to be a good role model to the vounger generation."



She is one of the main stars of the series Lion Mums, which revolves around a group of mothers who

Born: May 6, 1974

of giving their children the best. Off-screen, Lina Ng embraces being a Tiger Mum to her three sons aged 18, 16 and 11. At The home-grown freelance

from

and sports.

ownlife

actress says: "Someone has to be the 'fierce' figure. When children are still young and immature, you have to be firm and stern. "Instilling discipline is necessary, especially in boys, to

build routine and build them up to be responsible." Ng, 47, does not believe in sparing the rod. Even though she

are "out of control". She once caned her

was in lower primary then, 30 times in a row. "Some of my friends were

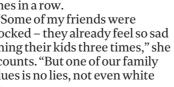
shocked – they already feel so sad caning their kids three times." she recounts. "But one of our family values is no lies, not even white

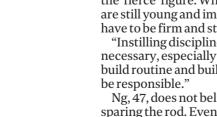
"He didn't tell the truth over something and covered it up, and caused someone else to be blamed, so it's a double offence." She adds: "Of course, my heart

share the same goal least, she was one when her two older boys were in primary school.

loves her cubs fiercely, she punishes them harshly when they

"mischievous" second son, who









Born: Jan 17, 1963

Intelligent, independent, strong, courageous, bold, decisive and charming.

While scanning the line-up of Tiger traits, Tan Kheng Hua thinks she is pretty much "the

quintessential tiger" More specifically, a Water Tiger, which refers to those born in 1962 and this year, who are said to be more careful and calm, with a strong sense of self-esteem and

learning ability. The 59-year-old home-grown actress jests: "I think I am exactly what I was born to be - a watered-

down tiger." Tan is now living her best life in North America and enjoying a second wind, sinking her teeth into a new Hollywood career and devouring the roles thrown her

way – never mind the issue of ageism. She says: "I think I am given these wonderful work opportunities because I am my age. I feel seen and heard for all the right reasons,

both at home and abroad. "Growing older makes me much happier. I know better where I am, who I am, what I am and what else

needs to be done, or not. "I know when to leave things well alone and go for a walk. When to go home. When to stop thinking, close my eyes and go to sleep." The veteran thespian is in Vancouver, Canada, filming the second season of martial arts action-adventure television series Kung Fu, a reimagining of the

1970s show of the same name starring David Carradine. Featuring a predominantly Asian cast, its first season

premieres on Warner TV (StarHub TV Channel 515 and Singtel TV Channel 306) on Feb 14 at 10.40pm

Tan plays the sti vigilante protagonist Nicky (Olivia people inside and out, with talent Liang), who uses her martial arts skills to protect her family and community when her home town of San Francisco is overrun with

crime and corruption. She is also a voice talent on Paramount Animation's

much-anticipated The Tiger's Apprentice, slated for a 2023 release, which features her co-stars from the 2018 romantic comedy Crazy Rich Asians, Henry Golding and Michelle Yeoh. She says: "I love voicing. I find it very freeing to be in a sound studio

with just the directors and a microphone, and breathing life into an animated character. I get to play, sing, scream and try out all sorts of things and be so imaginative.



actress Tan Kheng Hua (above) is in Vancouver filming martial arts actionadventure television series Kung Fu (right). PHOTO: SHAVONNE WONG, HBO

e they are beautif

oozing out of every pore."

Lim Yu-Beng.

a delinquent mum."

parenting her 23-year-old

daughter Shi-An, whom she shares

She declares: "I am the opposite

She remembers how a full zodiac

cycle ago, when Shi-An was 12, she

did not want the Primary School

Leaving Examination (PSLE) to

Tan savs: "I've seen too many

parents stress their children out

because of PSLE and I saw that as a

"I mean, how tragic it is for any

rule her only child's year.

waste of a good year.

of a Tiger Mum. I often call myself

with her ex-husband, local actor



year of life and just remember the "It is wonderful to be reunited with Henry and Michelle on another horrors of an exam. with lots of short fun trips to create great memories. We Tan's other job is long-distance went rock-climbing in Krabi,

camping in Boshack Outback in Perth and hiking in amazing Bhutan. It was one of the best parental decisions I have ever made." Shi-An eventually "made it through PSLE fine" and got into the

school of her choice, School of the Arts Singapore. She recently graduated from the National University of Singapore with a double major in business and theatre studies. So how will Tan feel when the next Tiger year creeps up on her in

her early 70s? Ever the fearless go-getter, she says: "I can't wait to child to look back on his or her 12th be a funky and fit grandmother."

bled and I teared when applying medication for him. But after that, he never did it again. When he was older, Ng asked

Channel 5 drama him if he remembered the incident and he replied he did because "it hurt so much". She then apologised. She says:

> "As a parent, it's also important to acknowledge that you didn't find a better method back then and apologise for it. I was touched when he said he didn't hate me and he understood where I was coming

"That's why your relationship with your child is so important that no matter how harsh the punishment, he or she will take it the right way and know you are doing it out of love."

Even though Ng is the queen of the household and makes decisions on home matters and the children's education, she cedes the final say to her husband - former national bowler Mike Lam, a deputy director at Hwa Chong International School - when it comes to co-curricular activities

When her older boys transitioned to secondary school. she learnt to "let go" and relinquish

control "They now know when it's time to study and play, but I still insist on seven to eight hours of sleep." Her tough-mum love was also the reason she could identify with the strict, uptight and perfectionist character Chae Lian, when she was asked to join the cast of the second season of Lion Mums (2017). There were many parallels to her



Lina Ng (above left and above right, with her family) was a Tiger Mum in real life to her two older boys when they were in primary school. PHOTOS: LINA NG

Primary School Leaving Examination and used the Direct School Admission scheme for water polo at the time, and Chae Lian advocated for DSA in the storyline.

"The only difference between us is the extent of academic focus. I don't expect my kids to be very smart or elite or get into the Gifted Education Programme, but to just enjoy learning."

Even though she entered show business after placing second in the Star Search talent competition in 1993 and was active mainly on Channel 8, it was her crossover to Channel 5 that boosted her popularity.

Ng – who left full-time acting in 2000 at the peak of her popularity, taking on only cameos and minor

supporting parts on Channel 8 shows from 2010 – was initially stressed over Lion Mums as it was her first English drama and a lead role, no less.

"I put in a lot of effort, doing my homework two to three days earlier. It was like back to Star Search days and starting my career all over again," she says. Her effort paid off. "After Lion Mums, now, when I walk around,

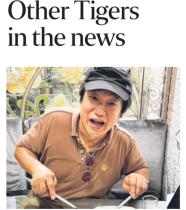
both young and old recognise me," she savs. She also won Best Supporting Actress awards from the Asian TV

Awards and Asian Academy Creative Awards for the English-language Toggle drama Last Madame (2019), which she says is "encouraging and rewarding".

She says: "I spent my youth and golden years being a full-time housewife and stay-home mum, and I used to feel useless, that I was not contributing much. My self-worth was not there. "Acting is something I love doing

and I'm confident I do well." Ng plays Pierre Png's mum in the Channel 8 family drama Home Again, which is now airing on weekdays at 9pm, and hopes Lion Mums – whose fourth season concluded earlier this month - will return for a fifth.

She is also counting on the verve and vitality of the tiger coursing through her veins this year. "I want to stay strong, energetic, lively and positive. And I hope to work for as long as I can – to do more, and not less."



K.F. SEETOH (1962) When it comes to local hawker

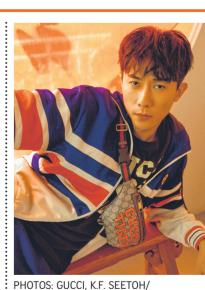
food, it is really a jungle out there. Guiding people through it over the decades is veteran food reviewer and Makansutra founder K.F. Seetoh, who goes on the prowl for cheap and good street grub. And whatever he hunts down, you can bet it is a "die die must try". Seetoh is also partnering

Urbanspace, which operates multiple food halls in the United States, to open a Singaporean hawker centre in

New York this year. The unnamed food market will be located within walking distance of Times Square.

AMOS YEE (1998)

Tiger terror alert. Who would have known that when Yee appeared in Jack Neo's movie We Not Naughty (2012) 10 years ago as a 14-year-old, the title would be so ironic?



DAVID GAN (1962) The flamboyant hairstylist is "Ah Bu" (Hokkien for mother) to the stars, so come for any of his "cubs", such as actresses Zoe Tay, Fann Wong, Joanne Peh and Jeanette Aw, and his claws will show. On Instagram, Gan has unleashed his savagery at

everything from Mediacorp's talent management arm to a local aesthetic doctor who commented on Wong's alleged cheek fillers.

Is the controversial Internet troll living up to his predator zodiac animal sign? In 2020, Yee was arrested in Illinois, United States, on

possession of child



Last July, a 23-year-old Singaporean magazine intern made headlines for scoring a sixfigure two-book deal with Berkley Publishing, an imprint of Penguin Kyla Zhao's debut novel

Born: May 21, 1998

Random House.

been pitched as

meets The Devil

Wears Prada. It is

release in January

master's degree in

communications and

a bachelor's degree in

Covid-19 pandemic.

Readers, in 2024.

expectations.

Valley, California.

psychology from Stanford

University, and wrote the book

while alone and homesick in

California at the height of the

And she is not done earning her

The young author's Year of the

Tiger is off to a roaring start, as she

recently sold her third novel to

Putnam's Sons Books for Young

A tween fiction titled May The

a young Chinese chess prodigy as

she prepares for the biggest

tournament of her life, while

navigating her team's boys' club

drama, her first crush and her

immigrant parents' weighty

Zhao is now working as a

marketing analyst in Silicon

culture, middle-school friendship

She wrote May The Best Player

Win in a month in late 2020 as part

of National Novel Writing Month,

organised by a United States-

Best Player Win, it revolves around

Penguin Random House to be

published by its imprint, G.P.

scheduled for

Zhao has a

next year.

stripes.

Crazy Rich Asians

The Fraud Squad, has

based non-profit group that promotes creative writing around the world. She says: "I think it's important

to explore more serious themes of mental health, racism and sexism even – or maybe especially – in children's books. Pre-teens are at the age when they are

growing an awareness of the grittier side of humanity and literature is a way

for them to develop a perspective on those issues." Zhao found

herself reflecting on those subjects subconsciously because it was also

during the US presidential elections, contested by Mr Joe Biden and Mr Donald Trump. The anti-Asian racism she read about in the news and witnessed

inspired her to make Asian representation a core tenet too. She says: "I've always joked that writing is like free therapy for me, since I use crafting fictional characters and worlds to try to figure out my own emotions and

concerns. The entire story just felt very personal." That could be because Zhao, who is a big fan of the 2020 Netflix series The Queen's Gambit, has been playing chess since she was six

She was in the chess club at both Nanyang Primary School and Nanyang Girls' High School. representing the former at individual and team competitions. She was a member of the National Junior Squad and interned with the Singapore Chess Federation in Secondarv 4.

In 2017, the Hwa Chong Institution alumnus even organised the Singapore Youth Girls' Chess Championship, the country's first national all-girls tournament. Studying and working in the US

since she was 19 has made her more independent, a Tiger trait she happily claims.

She is the type who is determined to see a task through to the very end. "However, I sometimes worry that I might be so focused on completing a task that I risk burning out, but it's also one of my goals this year to do more non-work activities," she

Some of the predictions for the Year of the Tiger for those ornundert sound like music to her ears. She says: "I love the idea that 2022 will be the time for me to step out of my comfort zone. So, yes, I hope I pick up new skills at my day job as well as experiment more with my

writing "I would also love to expand my social circle. I find it tougher to meet people now that I'm out of school and everyone's working remotely, with the ongoing pandemic."

Kyla Zhao received a six-figure, two-book deal for her debut novel. The Fraud Squad. PHOTO: KYLA ZHAO

DESMOND TAN (1986)

The popular actor and Mediacorp heart-throb is one

tiger who is burning bright.

Early last month, he married

his university sweetheart of 12

years in a romantic, intimate

The usually well-groomed

ceremony at a chateau in

Tan is now sporting an

unflattering "mushroom" haircut in the Channel 8 drama

He plays a man who is reunited with his vegetable-

farming family 25 years after

year-old and forced to work as a

being abducted as an eight-

child labourer in Thailand.

southern France.

Home Again.

INSTAGRAM, DAVID GAN/INSTAGRAM

charges of solicitation and



pornography. He pleaded guilty to two charges of child grooming and child pornography in exchange for a sentence of six years in prison, which he began serving last month.