



Observed every year on October 8, World Octopus Day honours the mysterious and highly intelligent octopus, a creature known for its remarkable problem-solving skills, colour-changing abilities, and unique three-heart circulatory system. The day highlights the importance of marine conservation and the need to protect delicate ocean ecosystems where these fascinating animals thrive. From their incredible camouflage techniques to their ability to squeeze through tiny spaces, octopuses showcase nature's creativity and adaptability. World Octopus Day encourages people to learn more about ocean life, reduce plastic waste, and support sustainable seafood practices to safeguard marine biodiversity for future generations.

#ARAPAIMA

The Fish with Armor-Like Scales

Against powerful predators, such as piranhas, the arapaima evolved an extraordinary defense system: its highly specialized scales



Deep in the rivers of the Amazon lives one of the most extraordinary freshwater fishes on Earth, the Arapaima. Known for its enormous size, ancient lineage, and incredible physical adaptations, the arapaima has fascinated scientists for decades. Among its most remarkable features are its scales, which are so strong and flexible that researchers have studied them as inspiration for modern protective materials, including body armor.

A Giant of the Amazon

The arapaima, often scientifically referred to as Arapaima gigas, is one of the largest freshwater fishes in the world. It can grow over 3 meters (10 feet) long and weigh more than 200 kilograms. Native to the Amazon Basin in South America, this fish lives in slow-moving rivers, lakes, and floodplain forests.

Because the waters of the Amazon contain many powerful predators, such as piranhas, the arapaima evolved an extraordinary defense system: its highly specialized scales.

The Unique Structure of Arapaima Scales

Unlike ordinary fish scales, arapaima scales have a layered, composite structure that combines hardness with flexibility. Each scale contains:

- A hard, mineralized outer layer that resists penetration.
- A softer, collagen-rich inner layer that absorbs and disperses energy.
- Overlapping arrangement that acts like natural armor.

This combination allows the scales to withstand attacks from sharp-toothed predators. When a piranha bites an arapaima, the teeth may scratch the surface, but the scale structure prevents deeper penetration.

Inspiration for Modern Protective Materials

Researchers studying arapaima scales discovered that their design provides an ideal balance between strength and flexibility. Traditional armor materials are often very rigid, which can make them heavy and uncomfortable. The arapaima scale, however, demonstrates how layered natural materials can stop sharp impacts while still bending



Asif Ullah Khan  
A veteran journalist who has written for The Khaleej Times and The Brunei Times

किताबें झांकती हैं अलमारी के शीशों से, बड़ी हसरत से तकती हैं, महीनों अब मुण्काते नहीं होतीं, जो शामें उनकी सोहबत में कटा करती थीं, अब अस्सर... गुज़र जाती हैं कंप्यूटर के परदों पर।

his poem by the famous Indian poet Gulzar sums up the plight of books, which seem to be crying for attention as they gather dust on the shelf. Finally, the doomsday prophecy has come true: doomscrolling has spelled doom for books. One doesn't need



Conservation and Sustainable Study

Because the arapaima is such a large and valuable fish, it has historically been overfished in parts of the Amazon. Today, many conservation programs regulate fishing and promote sustainable management so that the species can continue to thrive.

Studying the arapaima and its scales not only helps scientists develop better materials but also highlights the importance of protecting biodiversity. Nature often holds solutions to complex engineering challenges.

Paid To Savour The Magic Of Reading



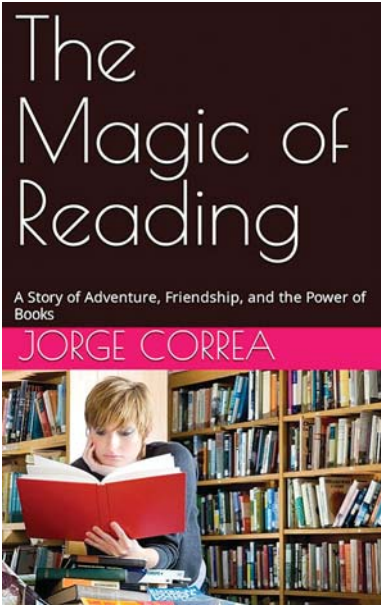
British author and actor Stephen Fry said: "Books are no more threatened by Kindle than stairs are by elevators." The elevator may take you faster to the next floor, but stairs require you to slow down and make an effort. In much the same way, reading a book requires concentration and patience, while a smartphone offers instant gratification with minimal effort.

the fireman named Guy Montag, who, in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, is entrusted with the job of burning books. Bradbury said: "You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them."

Today, social media has done something far more effective with the help of the smartphone. It has not banned books or burned them. It has simply made them harder to pick up.

The reason for this is simple. A book requires time, concentration and patience. A smartphone demands none of these. It offers an endless stream of short videos, breaking news, messages, photographs and provocative headlines, each one competing for our attention. The moment one piece of content becomes boring, another is only a swipe away.

Recent studies on reading habits, including a 20-year analysis of data from the American Time Use Survey, show that the percentage of people reading for pleasure in the United States fell from 28 per cent in 2004 to 16 per cent in 2023, a



decline of roughly 40 per cent. This points to a profound change in the way people spend their free time. Earlier, in India, railway stations and bus stands used to have book stalls stacked with all kinds of books, both in English and Hindi, as they were considered to be the best companion for a traveler.

Things have come to such a pass that Singapore has started a campaign to encourage book reading, in which anyone who reads a book for 15 minutes on a government website will be paid.

The affluent city-state is now paying its citizens to pick up a book for at least 15 minutes a day in an effort to counter the rise of doomscrolling and encourage reading.

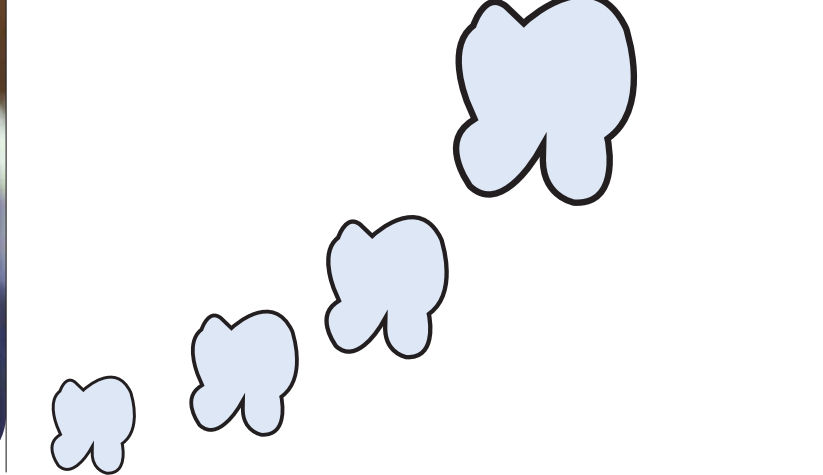
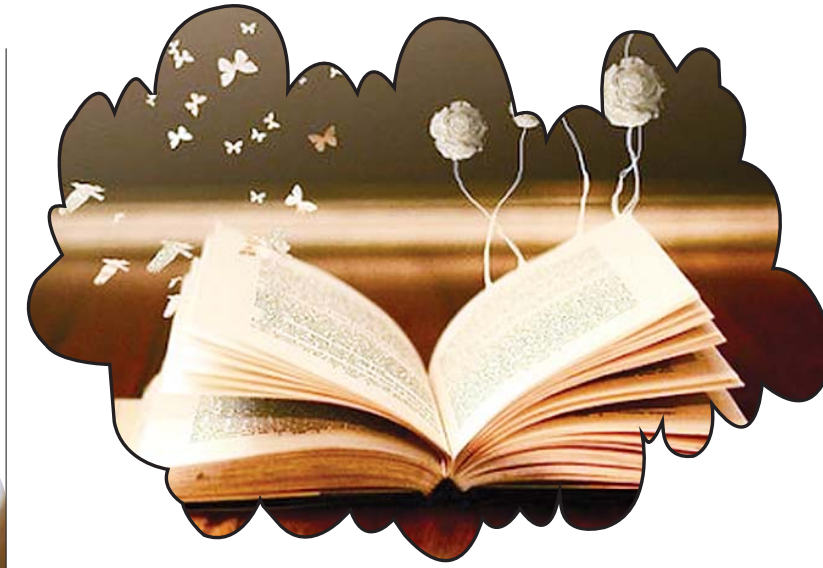
The scheme, launched last month, uses a gamification technique. Instead of simply telling peo

#DOOMSCROLLING



is also considering ways of making social media less harmful for young people, including the possibility of daily time limits. A recent study found that doomscrolling and digital addiction cause particularly serious harm to young people.

If one goes by the reading habits of Singaporeans, the situation is not alarming. The National Library Board's 2024 National Reading Habits Study found that 89 per cent of adults read something more than once a week. But when it comes to books, the figure falls sharply: only about three in 10 adults read books weekly. News, websites and social media account for a much larger share of people's reading time. The survey also found that 62 per cent of adults tended to spend their time on other activities instead of reading, while 38 per cent said that they became



bored after reading for a while. Singapore is trying to protect the more demanding habit of reading books from an increasingly crowded digital world, where a smartphone can offer an almost limitless supply of faster and more immediately rewarding distractions. The experiment raises an amusing but important question: if people need to be paid to read, what does that say about the future of books?

In this regard, British author and actor Stephen Fry said: "Books are no more threatened by Kindle than stairs are by elevators." The elevator may take you faster to the next floor, but stairs require you to slow down and make an effort. In much the same way, reading a book requires concentration and patience, while a smartphone offers instant gratification with minimal effort. Books have survived television, radio, cinema and every previous technological revolution. The problem today is different. Technology is no longer simply competing with books for entertainment time. It is competing for attention itself. And attention is perhaps

the most valuable commodity in the digital age.

That is why Gulzar's poem feels increasingly prophetic. The books are still sitting patiently behind the glass doors of our shelves. They have not gone anywhere. They are waiting for us to return.

The question is whether we still have the patience to open them. Singapore's experiment is based on a modest proposition: perhaps, we don't need to rediscover the joy of reading for hours at a time. Perhaps, we only need to begin with 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes cannot turn us away from smartphones, but it can be a small step towards bringing back the joy of reading. The journey is not easy; it is arduous. The famous opening line of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's masterpiece, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, recalls Colonel Aureliano Buendia going with his father to discover ice. In Macondo, a mundane substance like ice is treated as a rare, magical wonder to be "discovered." So, it's time to rediscover the magical wonder of reading.

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#SYMBOL OF POWER

Samudragupta's Horses

According to the Prayag Prashasti by Harisena, the horses of Samudragupta's cavalry are said to have drunk water from the four major seas: the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Caspian Sea



Samudragupta, often regarded as one of the most powerful and accomplished rulers of ancient India, is celebrated for his military prowess, vast territorial expansions, and the strategic use of horses. His reign, which spanned from 335 CE to 375 CE, is documented as a period of unparalleled expansion, during which he conducted over 100 wars, forged alliances, and established his dominance across the Indian subcontinent.

One of the most fascinating aspects of his rule involves the symbolic and practical role horses played in his empire, and the significance they held in his victories and rituals.

The Horses that Touched the Shores of the Indian Subcontinent

Samudragupta's military campaigns were legendary, and the horses he used were instrumental in his conquests. According to the Prayag Prashasti (Allahabad Pillar Inscription), which was composed by the renowned poet and courtier Harisena, the horses of Samudragupta's cavalry are said to have drunk water from the four major seas surrounding the Indian subcontinent: the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and



even the Caspian Sea. This metaphorical claim emphasizes the vast extent of Samudragupta's empire and military influence. His cavalry marched from the southern tip of India, near the Indian Ocean, all the way to the northern frontiers of his empire, possibly including areas that reached the edges of the Caspian Sea. The reference to horses drinking water from these seas suggests the incredible territorial reach and the strategic importance of cavalry in Samudragupta's army. It signifies not only territorial conquest but also the cultural and political significance of the emperor's control over vast lands stretching from the coasts to the interior of Asia.

The Prayag Prashasti: A Monument to Samudragupta's Power

The Prayag Prashasti, or Allahabad Pillar inscription, is one of the most important sources of information about Samudragupta's reign. This inscription, etched into a pillar at Prayag (modern-day Allahabad), describes the king's achievements, victories, and military campaigns. The inscription provides evidence of his prowess in battle, detailing how he led numerous campaigns in both the northern and southern parts of India, taking over vast territories. Samudragupta's ability to command respect and fear from neighbouring rulers is vividly captured in the narrative of these kings bowing before him.

The Ashwamedha Yajna: A Ritual of Power and Authority

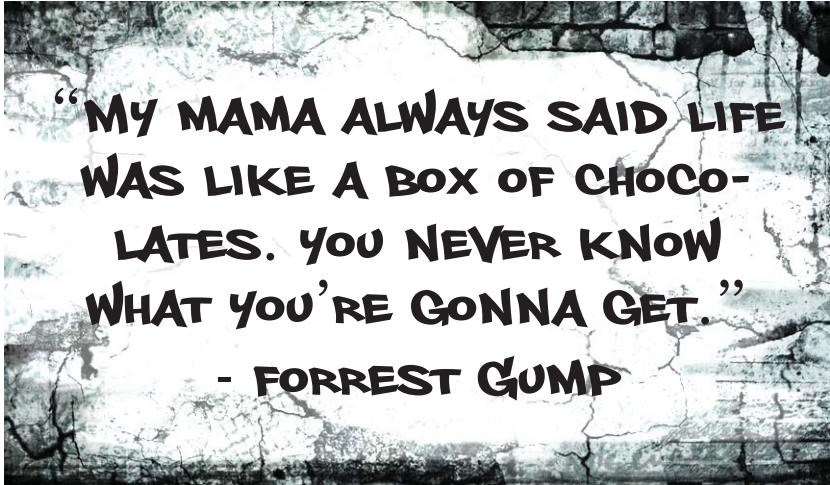
Samudragupta is also renowned for performing the Ashwamedha Yajna (horse sacrifice ritual), a sacred Vedic ceremony that was traditionally performed by kings to assert their supremacy. A white stallion was consecrated by priests and released to roam freely. This horse was protected by a contingent of royal warriors. Any rival ruler who stopped or captured the horse was making a direct challenge to the king's sovereignty and was immediately plunged into war with the accompanying army.

The Conquest of 100 Wars: A Testament to Military Genius

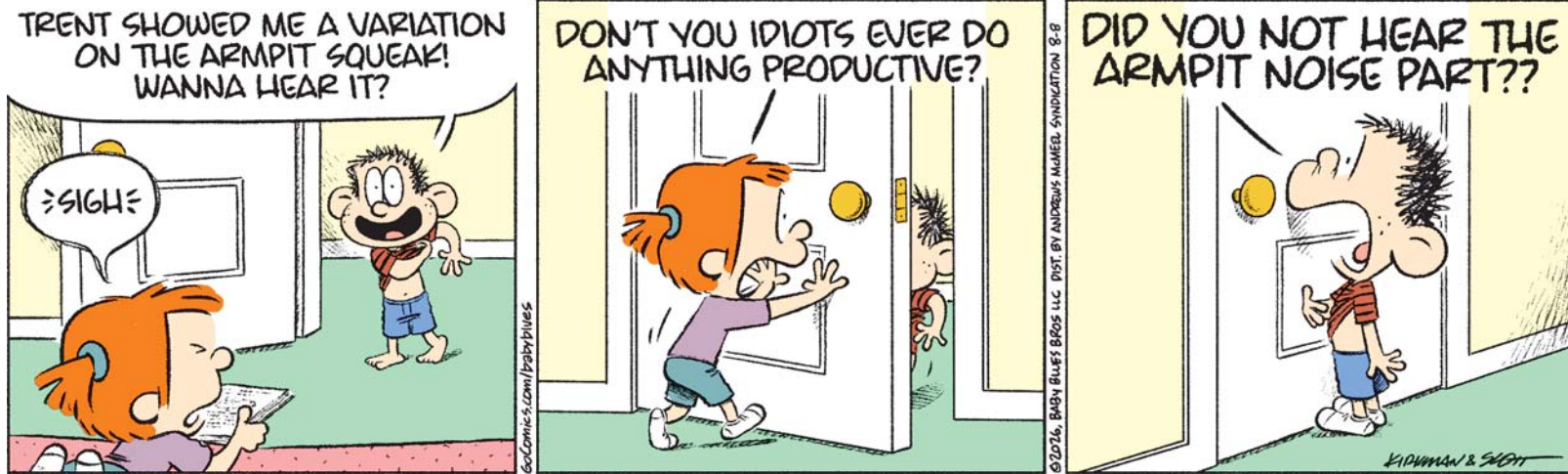
Throughout his reign, Samudragupta fought and triumphed in more than 100 wars. His military campaigns, which are mentioned in the Prayag Prashasti, were spread over many years and took him across diverse geographical regions. Whether it was defeating foreign invaders or subduing rebellious rulers, his ability to conduct successful military campaigns was unmatched. He established a reputation for being a brilliant strategist, whose armies could swiftly and decisively crush opposition.



THE WALL

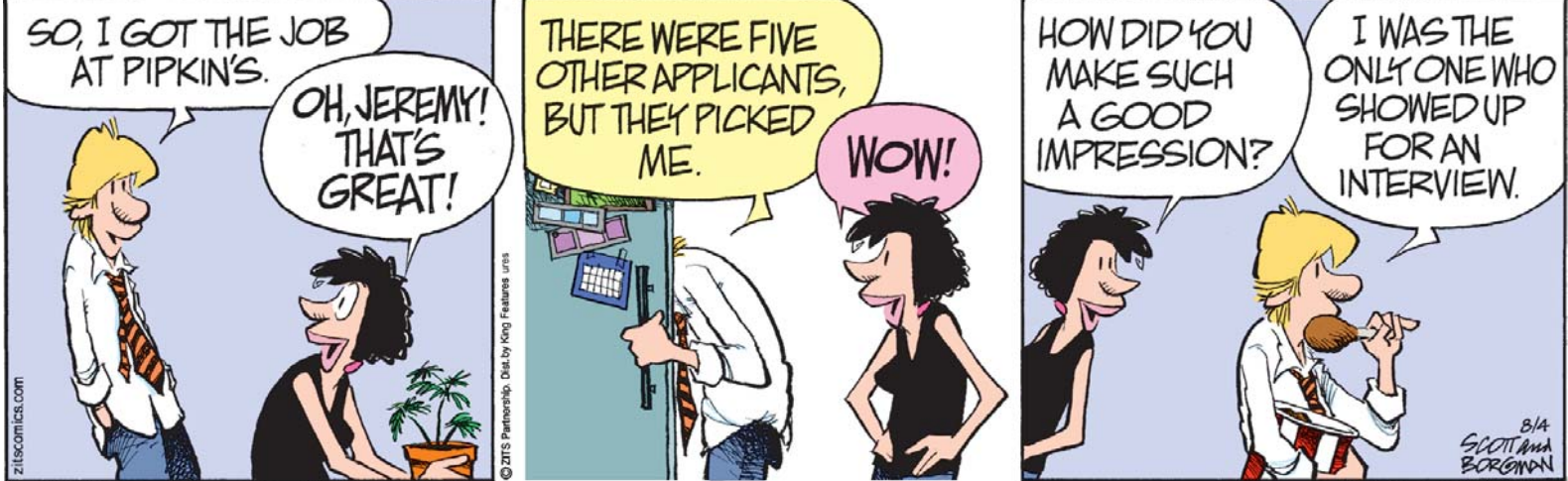


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

