

"A brave, complex, crazy, funny, weird, uncompromising coming-of-age film for the facebook generation."

Graiwoot Chulphongsathorn, Bioscope

"A Singapore New Wave that actually warrants the term because of the innovations made."

Mayo Martin, TODAY

# IN THE HOUSE OF STRAW

A film by Yeo Siew Hua



WHERE CAN YOU RUN  
WHEN ALL IS BLOWN AWAY?

## Synopsis

Over the term break, Zhi Wen decides to move out of his parents' house to live with two friends. After discovering that Ah Pin and Mark are professional bicycle thieves, Zhi Wen slowly finds himself entrapped in a strange world of vice and deception. A magical personality game they play will finally cause them to switch identities with one another. The film is the tale of the three little pigs set in the modern landscape of urbanized Singapore. Will the three little pigs live happily ever after?

Singapore, Malaysia, Nepal | 130 min | English, Mandarin | English Subtitles | HDV

In Competition for the Golden Kinnaree Award, Bangkok International Film Festival 2009  
(World Premiere)

Official website: [inthehouseofstraw.com](http://inthehouseofstraw.com)

## **Director's Statement**

When I was younger, a bicycle was stolen. Owing to the fantastical imaginations of my youth, I was at once broken and intrigued. I wondered who the thieves were and how they lived their lives. It became real to me that they were friends whom, after spending so much time together, started to speak and behave like one another. I was interested in actors switching the parts they play which created an interesting identity situation. The film takes the form of a surreal absurdist piece that is seen darkly through the futility of our young hero's attempt of escaping his crumbling reality to seek refuge in the comfort of friends.

## **Director's Biography**

Yeo Siew Hua graduated among the top of his cohort in Ngee Ann Polytechnic's School of Media Studies, winning the Kodak Singapore Prize for Cinematography and the Cathay Organisation Gold Medal. He wrote and directed short films such as AIK KHOON (in competition for the Silver Screen Awards - Singapore International Film Festival 2005) and WAKING MONKEY (The Substation's Best Film Award for the Best of First Takes 2007). He is also an award-winning director of photography of THE BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY PROJECT and the LUCKY 7 PROJECT. He is currently reading Philosophy at the National University of Singapore. IN THE HOUSE OF STRAW is his debut feature film.

## Reviews

“I watched *Straws* earlier today and it got me wondering if we’re witnessing a new kind of aesthetics being forged in Singapore cinema today – a **Singapore New Wave that actually warrants the term because of the innovations made and not just referring to the “next generation”**....*Straws* is structurally adventurous, unapologetically discarding the checklist of what a “proper” movie should have (the acting is so wooden it’s practically brittle) and, I suspect, Yeo treats the various elements of his movie the same way one assembles chess pieces in a game....Narrative-driven dramas/comedy/horror/action may still be what’s the favoured approach to filmmaking in Singapore, but ***Straws* is one example of the more exciting things to come from the real New Wave that’s percolating underneath the mainstream.**”

- Mayo Martin, TODAY: <http://blogs.todayonline.com/forartssake/2009/09/30/bangkok-film-fest-day-7-straw-dawgs-robert-yeo-independence/>

“In *The House of Straw* (A+++++) this might be my favorite film of the festival besides *35 Shots*. **A brave, complex, crazy, funny, weird, uncompromising coming of age film for the facebook generation.**”

- Graiwoot Chulphongsathorn, NETPAC Juror and writer for Bioscope

## Interview with the Director: Yeo Siew Hua

**What is the film about? What are you curious to explore?**

The central idea of this film is identity: who we are and how we fit into the bigger picture. The main character, Zhi Wen, living under the shell of a protected life, is suddenly faced with the reality of not knowing himself. Moving out of his parents' house and meeting two other troubled youth did not resolve his problems, instead this identity crisis takes the literal form of the actors switching roles after a magical personality game. And at this point the actor has to play another character in the movie. So we can see that both the character in the movie and the actor who plays different characters are suffering identity splits. This is very interesting as an experiment on performance for me, and because they are non-professional actors drawing characteristics from their real off-screen lives, I am able to observe the effects of the relation between the roles we play in society and roles we play on screen and how they affect correlatively. The other issues in this film spawn from the idea of identity in crisis. But in short, this is the impetus by which this film took shape.

**The treatment of the film is unconventional, how do you try to challenge film conventions?**

There is a lot of assumption these days to what a film should and should not be. I do not agree with these strict conventions and it is in reaction to this that I decided to experiment with certain aspects of the form. *Straw* presents itself as a structured narrative, with chapter markers clearly defining the scenes strung by a kind of causation between events, but they are soon defamiliarized. What is seemingly naturalistic performance starts to deconstruct itself to become a series of gestures; even the heavily improvised dialogue turns itself into theatrical recitals. For the characters in the film, they are starting to become aware of the sublime in their mundane routine of games and which parallels the audiences' experience as their familiarities start to take on a different form.

## **What are the characters about?**

The film shows slices of their everyday life, whiling their time away in games we play in our youth. But they are not carefree. This is the great trade-off of our generation. They are burdened and heavy even while the future is bright, and maybe too clear. They reveal a certain kind of anxiety I have about my life as a young man living in Singapore and that is why I consider my films as very personal meditations. I think the three ideas of identity, religion and masculinity can be traced more succinctly amongst others. There are all sorts of cares and concerns that plague my characters. This is more real to me than single-minded characters that only have one focused agenda. Simply put, you can say that the characters are about the wearied youths in the society I live in.

## **But the film is not realistic.**

It is admittedly surreal. In a way I am not interested in the “realistic” surface of situations. What I try to capture here is a kind of mental state. The representation of mental states is surreal, but these that lie underneath the realistic surface are very real to me. The challenge for me is to represent it on screen and so it is very important that it is well rooted to their realities. Sometimes that on the surface and what lies beneath fuses into each other which create certain confusion. This is a very peculiar situation, but not entirely impossible. Things that defy realism happen to us everyday, it is whether we keep our eyes and minds open to it. I am tempted to say that *Straw* is a more realistic film than at first glance. Nothing is arbitrary and because the film follows hard causation, one event leads up to another, and by this, the surreal elements in the film holds itself tightly to the plot.

## **Why is the title called “In The House Of Straw”?**

The title apparently refers to the famous children fable The Three Little Pigs which the narrating Wolf recites at the beginning of both Parts of the film. This is my adaptation of the fable. It is a story of escaping collapsed spaces to seek refuge in more stable environments, except the film shows that there is really no safe refuge even when the three friends seem to have come to a very stable arrangement between them.

## Credits

Production Company	13 Little Pictures, Animapictures
Partners	Batch:ten, EQ Ward, Edit Lounge
Directed and written by	Yeo Siew Hua
Produced by	Aaron Ng, Kent Chan, Tan Bee Thiam, Yeo Siew Hua
Director of Photography	Aaron Ng
Camera Assistant	Looi Wan Ping
Visual Effects	Yeo Kwan Hua
Art Director	Cain Chui
Production Manager	JD Chua
Assistant Director	Leon Cheo, Vel Ng
Line Producer	Norainah Abu Bakar
Editors	Aaron Ng, Chris Yeo, Kent Chan
Composers	Benjamin Lim, Chen Chien Chi, Debbie Ding, Felix Huang, Giuseppe Giunta, Mark Wong Wenwei, Teo Wei Yong, Ying
Music Coordinator	Kent Chan
Supervising Sound Mixer	Lim Ting Li
Sound Designer	Felix Huang
ADR Recordist	Felix Huang
Foley Artist	Lim Ting Li
Location Sound	Lester Koh, Wayne Xu

## Cast

Zhi Wen	Daniel Hui
Mark	Eustace Ng
Ah Pin	Felix Huang
Lee	Lynn Chong
Sister	Tian Low
Wolf	Robert Yeo

## Press / Sales Enquiries Contact

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