

Lifestyle | Features



Street vendors Jung Jung-soon (left) and her husband Lim Chang-joo (right) make dalgona, a crisp sugar candy featured in the Netflix smash hit series Squid Game, for which they were hired to be on set to make during production.



Street vendor Lim Chang-joo stamps an umbrella shape onto a dalgona.



Street vendor Lim Chang-joo makes a dalgona for wrapping. — AFP photos

Sweet taste of Squid Game success for South Korean candy couple

Simple, sweet, and fictionally fatal: The stallholder who makes the traditional South Korean children's treat featured in the global cultural phenomenon "Squid Game" and once associated with post-war poverty has hit a real-life jackpot. The Netflix smash hit series features a group of South Korea's most marginalized and deeply in debt, who compete in children's games for the chance of 45.6 billion won (\$38 million), with lethal consequences. In one particular challenge, the contestants try to cut out shapes including a star and an umbrella from a crisp sugar candy called a dalgona, without it cracking-

and those who fail are killed. The life-or-death game was inspired by director Hwang Dong-hyuk's experience growing up in Seoul in the 1970s: But then, the prize for a child who successfully removed the shape was another free dalgona. Hwang was always determined to win an extra treat and remembers employing multiple tactics in his efforts, including licking the candy to loosen the shape and using a needle heated over briquettes-techniques repeated in the show's nail-biting dalgona challenge scene. "I would make the dalgona maker extremely perplexed by succeeding on the most difficult



Street vendor Jung Jung-soon makes a dalgona.



In this picture wrapped dalgona are seen at the street stall of Lim Chang-joo and his wife Jung Jung-soon.



Customers wait in line as street vendor Lim Chang-joo (back left) and his wife Jung Jung-soon (front left) sell dalgona.

shape of umbrella," the director recently said in a YouTube video.

But the candy was a difficult prop to manage on set as it softens easily, especially during South Korea's humid rainy season, so Hwang and artistic director Chae Kyung-sun hired "dalgona experts" to have the candy freshly made on location. Those specialists were Lim Chang-joo and his wife Jung Jung-soon, who produced between 300 and 400 dalgona over three days of filming. Now, their humble roadside stall in Seoul's theatre district little more than an umbrella, an awning and their equipment-is one of the hottest spots in the South Korean capital.

Orders for the 2,000-won (about \$1.70) sweets start piling up as soon as it opens, and before long, customers face six-hour waits, with some giving up and leaving empty-handed. In about 90 seconds, Lim melts an individual portion of sugar above a burner, before adding baking soda, flat-

tening it into a circle, and punching it with the customer's preferred shape. He offers a wider range of choices than the four forms in the show-and has a newly added "N" for Netflix. "I never imagined it would become this popular," Lim told AFP of the series, adding that his life has now become "super hectic". "Of course, I'm happy because my business is doing well and how dalgona has become famous in other countries." He hopes they make and eat their own dalgona, he added.

Financial crisis

Historians say dalgona first emerged in the 1960s when the South was still assailed by post-war poverty while desserts-such as ice cream or chocolates-were not widely available and prohibitively expensive. Very sweet, with hints of nuts and bitterness, the candy was hugely popular, with many vendors setting up their stalls near schools. Lim and Jung started their dalgona opera-

tion with 30,000 won after closing their tailoring business of 20 years around the time of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The sweet endured throughout the South's rise to become the world's 12th-largest economy, following decades of rapid economic growth during the authoritarian rule of the post-war period.

And "Squid Game" is the latest manifestation of the ever-widening influence of the country's popular culture, epitomised by K-pop sensation BTS and the Oscar-winning movie "Parasite". "South Korea has always been at the nexus of the modern and pre-modern, Western tools and Eastern ways, and preserving the past while sacrificing everything for the future," said Michael Hurt, who teaches cultural theory at the Korea National University of Arts. "Dalgona is a nexus item in a nexus culture." — AFP

Clooney feels philosophical about growing old

The Hollywood star turned 60 in May and George accepts his career has moved into a new phase over recent years. He explained: "The only thing you can do that's dumb is try to hold on to things that you aren't anymore, right? You know, there was a picture, I was in Italy and somebody took a picture of me - I think it was a paparazzi picture on the boat, and I saw this old, grey-haired guy on the boat and I was like 'who is that?' And it was me! "If you don't really have some understanding of time and ageing, then I think you'll constantly try to do things that you know are past your due date." George also admitted that his life has changed markedly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The award-winning star - who is married to barrister Amal Clooney - told Sky News: "It changed everybody, right? Suddenly, we think Zooming is OK, I haven't seen anybody in person." George also explained how the pandemic has changed his life as a filmmaker. George - who has four-year-old twins Ella and Alexander with Amal - said: "It changes a lot, it's harder as a filmmaker because you're not able to communicate in the same way because you're wearing all this crap (PPE). "But you know, it's a funny thing, it also reminds us of how resilient we are - I just saw a picture of all these kids during the London Blitz, and they're all wearing those huge gas masks, 500 kids with those gas masks, and you go 'well, if they could do it, we can do it - we'll figure it out!'"



Iggy Azalea can't wait for Halloween

The 31-year-old rap star - who was born in Australia, but moved to the US during her teens - has taken to Twitter to reveal she's already looking forward to the annual celebration on October 31. Iggy - who has a 17-month-old son called Onyx Kelly with her ex-boyfriend Playboi Carti - wrote on the micro-blogging platform: "I just got back from a haunted house and I had SoOOoO much fun!!!! "I'm ready for it to be Oct 31st already [pumpkin emoji] (sic)" Iggy also revealed via Twitter that she's



currently having a trampoline built for her baby boy. The blonde beauty admitted she loves online shopping and is looking forward to the Cyber Monday sales on November 29. She tweeted: "Why am I already excited for cyber Monday sales and it's still October lmao something is wrong with me. (sic)" Asked if there's something she's particularly keen to buy, Iggy replied: "New outdoor furniture." Asked whether Onyx has a big playground, she shared: "They have one walking distance from my house so he plays on that but I'm building him an in ground trampoline." Meanwhile, Iggy previously insisted that she's enjoying her life as a single woman. The "Work" hitmaker split from Carti last year, but suggested she's not living her life with any regrets.



Stewart felt under pressure playing Princess Diana

Kristen Stewart felt the weight of responsibility playing Princess Diana in "Spencer". The 31-year-old actress portrays the late princess in the new psychological drama film, which focuses on Diana's decision to leave the Royal Family, and Kristen has admitted that she felt under pressure in the role. She shared: "I felt I wanted to protect her. I had to just not focus on other people's idea of her, and really focus on my own. And that in itself was just so distinct and specific to me." Kristen studied Diana's behavior and mannerisms in preparation for the role. And she admits that the late princess - who died in Paris in 1997, aged 36 - was "unpredictable" in many ways. She told the BBC: "I think to do her justice is to allow her to be impulsive. "Anything I watched her in, whether it was an interview, or even in a still photograph, it always feels unpredictable. Like you don't know what's going

to happen. "And it's because she has this vulnerability and this raw emotion that she cannot conceal. There's no way to do a perfect impression of that. "You have to feel it, and it has to be yours. So I think I just had to relax." The movie touches on Diana's eating disorder and struggles with her mental health. Reflecting on the project, Kristen shared: "The movie is very surreal. I think that when you go through extreme trauma in life, there are times where you feel crazy. I never felt the implication of Diana, losing it. "There are there are times where you are at odds with communication and therefore feel because of this muzzled energy, a bit locked in your own head. "And she spoke about that. I mean, that was something that she talked about all the time. And so I felt to be honest, it felt truer than the truth." — Bang Showbiz

Lovato shares new song in memory of their late friend

Demi Lovato has dedicated their new song to a friend who died of a drug overdose. The 29-year-old pop star has taken to social media to dedicate their new single, 'Unforgettable', to Tommy Trussell III, who died in October 2019. Demi - who has battled drug and alcohol addiction - wrote on Twitter: "Two years ago I lost someone who meant so much to me. His name was Tommy and he was such a beautiful, special man. I wrote this song the day after I found out that he had lost his battle with addiction. This disease is extremely cunning and powerful.. (sic)" Demi's post featured a 20-second clip of the new track. The singer also revealed that proceeds from the record will go to The Voices Project, a grassroots recovery advocacy organization. Demi wrote online: "I'm beyond grateful and proud to announce all net proceeds of this song will



be going to the Voices Project founded by @RyanForRecovery if you know anyone who is struggling please call 1-800-662-HELP (sic)" Demi previously paid a tribute to their late friend, who passed away at the age of 31. Demi wrote on Instagram at the time: "Devastated. Please hold your loved ones tight. Tell them they are special and that you love them. Make sure they know it. RIP to my boo @sirtruss. (sic)" The "Sorry Not Sorry" hitmaker also described addiction as a "terrible disease".