

## The Finger Players' Fiend's Diary is A Paradox: Both Simple And Elaborate



*By Victoria Chen*

The grayscale set is simple and elaborate at the same time. Designed by **Oliver Chong** who also directs and acts in **A Fiend's Diary**, it is completely embellished on every corner, surface and windowpane with words from the text written in white chalk. This might be the work of either a genius or a madman, but definitely of someone with too much time on their hands—the unnamed protagonist. He lies on a single bed under the duvet, eyes closed, as the audience enters.

Eventually he rises, his skin stretching, almost straining as he breathes deeply, as he observes his space and turns his neck, as if his physical being is in itself a kind of prison trapping the mind and soul within. He sits at the table, takes a piece of chalk, and traces a date that he has already written. Before a single word is uttered, it is already clear that no person is more fitting for this role than Chong himself.

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Perhaps the previous comment is unnecessary. After all, Chong is the main creative voice behind the artistic process that drives this production, drawing heavily from personal life events. Adapted and inspired from 局外人 by 柳明九, A Fiend's Diary depicts the absurdity of life and the futility in one's search for its true meaning. The story begins with the protagonist's mother's passing, but through a series of perfectly reasonable actions that somehow come across as unusual to society, he starts being viewed as an outsider, and his refusal to conform eventually contributes to his death sentence after he commits a crime with no intention.

Nothing moves in this show except for the actor, who sits on a chair, sometimes the bed, or the rocking chair. There is no set transformation, the lighting (**Lim Woan Wen**) is barely noticeable, and apart from the monotonous piano key pulsating throughout the show, there is little variation in the soundscape (**Darren Ng**).

Nothing changes in this show, and yet everything transforms. The devil is definitely in the details. Chong conjures various characters through a slight but distinct shift in vocal register and tonality, sometimes with gestures as well. At one point, he puts on a white tank top-normal enough, until one realises that the seams are slightly misaligned.

Thanks to Lim, at times the set glows amber, at times the lights dim-the change is subtle and yet adds character to the space, as if it is active in caging the character within its walls. Ng's single piano note is like a dull pain in the head, its unrelenting monotony pressing into your temples to the point that one feels release-

(relief)-when the gunshots pierce through the air.

Despite being the storyteller, Chang's main character is detached, speaking evenly, recounting events sterilely-in any other situation, a person like this would bore its listeners. However, the audience remains engaged. Chong is compelling and the story is effectively conveyed, and it is definitely due to evocative lighting and sound combined with **Max Tan's** costume design that supports the actor's masterful performance.