

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



Just a Janitor in Jakarta by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | Aug. 2019

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by Mike Bozart
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A rusted-sheet-metal-clad shanty in Kebon Malati. That was the slum where twenty-year-old Angkasa and her mom, who now worked as a day maid for a wealthy family, and younger brother lived in central Jakarta. Her father's tragically cruel, lightning-strike death while harvesting coffee beans in East Java nineteen months prior precipitated the family's move to Indonesia's massive capital for income replacement. They joined the throngs of poor rural families who, via the inducement of employment, even if for meager wages, migrate to the burgeoning Southeast Asia metropolis.

On an archetypical, equatorial-sauna, hot-flat-yellow-sun-disk-beginning-to-rapidly-dive, late Wednesday afternoon (5:02 PM on August 24, 2016), Angkasa began walking to work down a paver-stoned service alley. She soon came to a sidewalk-less, curb-less, asphalt street (Jl. Tenaga Listrik) and turned left. She looked to her right over a mound of trash that was propped against a meter-high (39") floodwall. A sediment-laden, tempeh-brown, polluted-with-plastics Ciliwung River was barely moving. Angkasa then glanced up at the skyscrapers looming ahead. She mused. *Two distinctly different worlds so close together: lavish prosperity and extreme poverty. Wonder if one of those richies [sic] could make it through a single week down here. Or, a single night. I'm sure that they would freak out to live like we have to. Do they view us as an inferior subspecies? Lesser humans? Because we're less sly? Hmmm ... I wonder. Maybe just negative thinking. Need to stop it. Papa constantly said that nothing positive comes from negativity.*

She passed an odd assortment of vendors in makeshift, blue-tarpaulin-covered booths. Then she paused to read the headline of a local newspaper: Sulawesi governor named suspect for bribery. *Graft and corruption. Papa always told me that it is what holds our country back. Gosh, I miss him so much. Why did he have to die from such a freak act of nature? Why?! What are the odds of that happening? Probably better odds for winning the TOTO. [Singapore's lottery] God, what did our family do wrong? None of us ever wronged anyone. He was a good man. Why can't I be in college like Farah? [a friend] She'll have a good job in a year with a nice salary. Oh, this life – it's just not fair.*

Angkasa then passed an improvised, river-spanning, lumber-strewn-about footbridge. She noticed that someone had

installed a galvanized metal gate. *Guess the local gang leader will soon be collecting a toll. Or, the government will demolish it. Sometimes I think that they would love to demolish us. Just bulldoze us into the river, and have us flushed out to sea during the next typhoon. But, who would do the dirty work for crumbs? Certainly not any of their family members. That's the only reason they allow us to stay: They need us. Well, until the robots are advanced enough to do the work.*

Just after passing a second footbridge, one that was made of concrete and looked official, Angkasa saw a flash of pixelated colors in the shape of a phantom just off to her right. She had seen this before, and had no idea what it was, or what it meant, or when it would appear again. *Is there something wrong with my right eye? Is a cataract forming? Or, is it my brain? Am I about to have a seizure or a stroke? Oh, dear God, I hope not. Please, no.*



Figure 1: Angkasa's pixelated phantom

She quickly stepped off the pavement to make way for a pack of motorcycles. The phantom-flash suddenly occurred again. *Does this mean that this day is special? Is it an omen of imminent disaster? Or, is it a propitious portent? I hope it's the latter, but I never have any luck.*

As Angkasa passed a strand of hemp-rope-supported, earth-floor tents, she noticed that the pixelated blob was following her, just behind her right shoulder. Looking straight ahead, she caught it out of the corner of her right eye. It was

unnerving to say the least. *I'm going mad. I'm hallucinating! Why is this happening to me? Why?!*

When she turned her head 90 degrees to the right to view the gate at the start of the third footbridge, which was made of wooden timbers like the first one but in a much more orderly fashion, the pixelated zone was like a holographic troll. *Ketut [a male classmate from high school] said that there may be adjacent worlds that sometimes intersect with ours. Maybe that is an interface that he so often spoke about. Should I try to touch it? No, that would look weird. The passersby would think that I'm crazy. It's obvious that I'm the only one who can see it; everyone else is proceeding along their merry way, completely oblivious to it.*

The next roadside distraction was an abandoned, dull-as-lead-gray, *Polsex Patroli*-stencilled hatchback sedan. It had been spray-painted with graffiti and the front windows and windshield had been broken out. The wheels were half-buried in the soft earth. It looked like a monument to something – something unforeseen. *Sure would be nice to have a car someday. Though, this 20-minute walk is good exercise. But, the walk back at night is dangerous. I'm gambling with my life at two AM. Should probably start taking the bus. But, it still leaves a walk down this dicey street. Wonder what happened to this car. What part broke? Probably an expensive part like the engine or the transmission. I bet that's why it was left for the scavengers.*

After passing stacks of used tires and a steel-bar cage of old motorbikes, Angkasa saw the Polisi (Police) sign with the funny, cartoon-like figure. *This police precinct keeps the wolves at bay. If it wasn't here I bet that I would've been picked off by now.*

She then turned right onto a sidewalk next to a busy boulevard (Jl. K. H. Mas Mansyur) and crossed the until-the-next-deluge-contentedly-lazy-and-bored-to-evaporative-tears Ciliwung River. At the next street intersection (Jl. Penjernihan 1), she walked under a large, steel-girder overpass and continued southeastward along the riverside. Three tall skyscrapers were just off to her right. The one in which Angkasa worked was just eight minutes away; she was 60% of the way there. And the pixel monster was no more. *So glad that whatever-it-was is gone. Maybe it has to*

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