

A n a k S a s t r a

Issue 18

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Contributor Bios

[C.G. Fewston](#) is an international writer/university professor who currently holds a post as visiting fellow in the English Department at City University of Hong Kong. He earned an M.A. in literature with honors from Stony Brook University and an M.F.A. in creative writing and fiction from Southern New Hampshire University, where he had the privilege and honor to work with *New York Times* Best-Selling novelists Matt Bondurant and Wiley Cash. Among many others, his stories, photographs and essays have appeared in *Bohemia*, *Tendrils Literary Magazine*, *Driftwood Press*, *The Missing Slate*, *Foliage Oak Magazine*, *The Writer's Drawer*, *Moonlit Road*, *Nature Writing*, and *Travelmag: The Independent Spirit*; and for several years he was a contributor to Vietnam's national premier English newspaper, *Tuoi Tre*, "The Youth Newspaper."

[Tilon Sagulu](#) was born and raised in Sabah, Malaysia—the North of Borneo Island. He is a Dusun—one of the indigenous ethnic groups in Borneo Island. His short story "Spirit of the Sun" won first place in the 2013 Marjorie Stover Short Story Award. He graduated from the University of Nebraska Lincoln with a Bachelor of Sciences in biological science and English. He is currently working on his M.A. in English literature at University of Malaya.

James M. Fajarito works at Colegio de San Juan de Letran in Manila, where he teaches English and literature subjects. He has contributed articles to major Philippine publications and to *Ani*, the literary journal of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. He hails from Gloria town in Mindoro Island.

A native New Yorker, **James Penha** has lived the last quarter-century in Indonesia. He has been nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and in poetry. *Snakes and Angels*, a collection of his adaptations of classic Indonesian folk tales, won the 2009 Cervena Barva Press fiction chapbook contest; *No Bones to Carry*, a volume of his poetry, won the 2007 New Sins Press Editors' Choice Award. His earlier chapbooks of poetry include *Greatest Hits* (Pudding House 2001) and *On the Back of the Dragon* (Omega Cat Press 1992). He edits *The New Verse News*, an online journal of current-events poetry.

[John C. Mannone](#) has work in *The Southern Poetry Anthology* (Volume VII, NC), *Negative Capability*, *Still: The Journal*, *Split Rock Review*, *Agave*, *Tupelo Press*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Poetica Magazine*, *Synaesthesia*, *3Elements Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Rose Red Review*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Prairie Wolf Press Review*, *The Pedestal*, *Motif v2 & v3* anthologies, and others. His collection, *Flux Lines*, was a semi-finalist for the 2014 Mary Ballard Poetry Chapbook Prize. He's the poetry editor for *Silver Blade* and *Abyss & Apex*, and

an adjunct professor of chemistry and physics in eastern Tennessee. His work has been nominated three times for the Pushcart.

Subashini Navaratnam (@subabat) lives in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and has published poetry in *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *Poetika Malaysia*, *Aesthetix*, and *Sein und Werden*. Her writings on books have appeared in *The Star* (Malaysia), *Pop Matters* and *Full Stop*, and she has published nonfiction in the anthology *Sini Sana* and the ebook *Semangkuk INTERLOK* as well as fiction in *KL Noir: Yellow*.

Christopher Rose is an instructor of English and writing at Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon. He attended both the University of Washington and Central Washington University. However, his mother is from the Philippines, and he spent his childhood there until later moving to the United States. His poetry often deals with the memories of his childhood and his experiences growing up as a Filipino in the United States. His poems have been published in *Watering Hole Poetry*.

Mark Anthony Rossi has written poetry, fiction and criticism for the following publications: *The Antigone Review*, *Another Chicago Review*, *Bareback Literary Journal*, *Death Throes*, *Deep South Journal*, *Japanophile*, and dozens of others.

Catalina Rembuyan lives in Kuala Lumpur, where she teaches literature, performs poetry, writes fiction and daydreams.

Lana Bella has her diverse work of poetry and fiction published and forthcoming with *Atlas Poetica*, *First Literary Review East*, *Cecil's Writers' Magazine*, *Deltona Howl*, *Thought Notebook*, *Earl of Plaid Lit*, *Kiki Howell for a War Anthology: We Go On*, *Undertow Tanka Review*, *Wordpool Press*, *Global Poetry*, *Family Travel Haiku*, *The Voices Project*, *Eunoia Review*, and now *Anak Sastra*. She resides on some distant isle with her novelist husband and two frolicsome imps.

Anna Ojascastro Guzon's poems have been published in *McSweeney's*, *Bone Bouquet*, *The Best American Poetry* blog and *Glass Seed Annual*. She is a Filipina born in St. Louis, Missouri.

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January 2015 featured author interview with C.G. Fewston

Q. What motivates you to write? What do you hope to convey through your fiction?

I have recently begun to seriously consider this question of my own personal motivations towards writing. A banker or lawyer works to gain money, and so they chase that green-eyed dragon on and on. But what am I chasing? I honestly do not know. It is not for money nor for fame why I write. It is not for awards nor applause. I cannot further say it is writing alone that holds the sole purpose for me to have become a writer and to devote my life to the art of writing; that would be the same to one saying a banker works in banking simply to work in banking or a lawyer is in law simply to be in law and they have no further motivations other than that, and this would sound, as I think it does, ludicrous. Bankers and lawyers, granted, have motivations other than money and power—or so I would hope upon their souls they do. But what of my motivations? If I am to dig down deep and answer truthfully, I must admit I write to live a full un-wasted life, to become a good friend to all, a good father to my children, and a good man to the woman I love. I write to create—and to convey if you will—music for others to hear long after I am gone, and for me that is all the motivation I will ever need.

Q. Talk a little bit about your writing process. Do you have any unusual writing habits?

The only consistent habits I have for my writing process are non-stop reading and giving myself free time to contemplate my stories and ideas and to write them down when they've matured into memories. First, I usually read three or four books at a time, and this can include non-fiction and fiction. Two years ago I began writing my thoughts down about a book to help me further learn the material and review it for myself which later led me to start [a book review site](#) and maintaining this site further developed into a habit. Reading for me is the oxygen to the flame of my writing; without one the other cannot exist. In addition to my passion for reading (always print books), I have established a career in higher education which further allows me ample time to separate myself from others in the world and to let myself daydream, as it were, of ideas and stories. Once I have an idea for a story I may write a few lines down and then stop myself. I want the story not to be a story but to allow the events and characters to unfold naturally and become a vivid memory. Once I have this memory I give myself space and time to write it down, which is usually done in one sitting—no matter how long it takes. Then revisions and rewrites and additions come later and this can take days or months, depending on the life of the story itself. Some stories come out fully formed and others take mental-dynamite to blast them into place.

Q. You teach English literature in Hong Kong. How does teaching literature influence your own writing and vice versa?

Teaching literature allows me to see what great writers did before me and further understand their skills by teaching the stories and the craft elements to students. Understanding literature, however, consists of analyzing additional elements, such as historical placement of a text, cultural and behavioral meaning and accuracy, plot points, character motivations and believability, and interpretations regarding symbols and minute references often obscured and unintentional. When students read novels and short stories and poems, however, their eyes awake and light with a fire that fuels their dreams and passions and spurs me to create newer, better stories than the ones I have written in the past. My writing influences my own teaching (in any university course) by showing students that one's passion can be treated as a professional trade rather than a dream to abandon in youth. Likewise, my understanding of literature, and stories in general, is heavily influenced by my studies for the craft of writing, such as in Joseph Campbell's all-influencing works *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and the four volumes of *The Masks of God* which later inspired George Lucas to create the Star Wars legacy and influenced Christopher Vogler to help other writers shape how movies are structured and written in Hollywood through his titular book *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. For me, literature and writing are like a uroboros, each eating the tail of the other and neither has an end nor a new beginning, but each feeding upon each.

Q. What advice do you offer to your students that you follow in your own writing? Any standard 'rules' that you don't personally follow?

For the most part I try to teach my students all the rules I follow for myself. With that said, however, one cannot feed a babe heavy meats when it still feeds on mother's milk. Students have their levels of acquisition and a well-seasoned instructor will know when each student is ready to evolve in their learning. Some of the main pieces of advice I recommend for my students are to read as much as they can and to heavily revise their works. William Strunk Jr. and E.B White's *The Elements of Style* is one book I recommend my students to learn by heart, but I doubt many students take me seriously—any serious writer, however, would be wise to know this book well. Some aspects of writing I try to instill in my students are the sheer passion and joy and the ability of specificity one can take from writing and reading in this era of smartphones and mobile games and where writing is truncated to images and incomplete phrases.

Q. What is your most vivid memory about having lived or travelled in Southeast Asia?

One of my most vivid memories involves Bali. On the last night of my five day journey I sat on a pebbled beach filled with smooth stones and reminders of the nearby active volcano, Mount Agung on the east side of the island. For the first time in years I could see the stars, which was something I never took for granted back in Texas. The waves washed dark up to the *jukungs* (sailing canoes) safely anchored to land as falling stars or meteors shot across the speckled horizon. The reason this moment stands out so clearly in my mind was because I had been separated for over a year and knew I could not remain in a toxic marriage but I did not know what my future entailed. I could not go back to my old life and I did not know what awaited me in the depths of the unknown future. I sat for hours looking at the stars and listening to the waves wash up to my bare feet only to recede back. I thought of my past. I thought of my present. I thought of my future. And in that moment, somehow, I knew everything would be okay.

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"Meditation Bali"

by C.G. Fewston

Based on true events

“The real treasure from traveling is not the souvenirs, but the lasting inner change and learning.”

-from Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey*

If you really want to know the truth about it, then I'll tell you. About a year ago I had an awful mess of things. Twice I came home to an empty apartment where my wife and kid should have been. My daughter was only three then and it really knocks something out of you when you come home after a hard day's work and find that the place is empty. No notice. No warning. And twice I had to go through with that. Each time I cracked open the whiskey, cursing my wife under my breath, ordered Mexican takeout—and this was in Saigon, mind you—and over a period of a few months became a drunken slob, gained about thirty pounds to peak at 210. One night after my Vietnamese mistress had come and gone, I woke in the middle of the night with my heart pounding something fierce and I had to grab my chest and really hold on to whatever it was I still had left.

A few weeks later I had a second heart attack. Though I went to the cardiologist several times for check-ups and ECGs—not EKGs like some people say—and each time the moron would tell me that my heart was fine but I was a little over-weight. I knew my heart wasn't fine. And then one afternoon, I remember well, the sun was setting through the great open bay doors in my flat, which was eight stories high, and I had just taken some vitamin-energy mix in a glass of water and I stood up too fast and turned to see that beautiful sun dropping over the Saigon-city landscape and felt the grip of death on me. I dropped to my knees and I could sense my heart—the one that was all fine and dandy—was about to explode. What I can remember of it—if you really want to know about it—was

that I feared an artery was clogged, and I could feel it too, and one side of my heart swelled with too much blood and I dropped to my knees with pain beyond anything I had ever experienced, and because I was afraid I was going to die I said out loud, 'God, please help.' And you wouldn't believe what happened next. The blood that had kept swelling and swelling inside one of the arteries just shot up and clean through to wherever it was headed, which was up my left pectoral muscle, up and around my left shoulder, and down my left arm. I could really feel the blood travel and my heart deflated back to its original size. I stayed on my knees for a moment just thanking God for sparing me, and I wasn't sure why because I was still alone and separated from my wife and child. And so that was what led me to go to Bali, and try to make some sense out of my life, and try to heal my heart in some way.

So on September 21st, 2013 at 2 a.m. I found myself in Singapore's airport staring mindlessly at the Redemption Booth where you could win \$1,000,000 dollars which amounts to something like 800,000 U.S. dollars. 'Be a Changi Millionaire' the sign read in front of giant teddy bears seated on a castle. I had about five more hours until my flight to Bali so I just walked around the airport where a man and woman were huddled and wrapped together on the floor near the entrance to the Sunflower Garden on the roof of Terminal 2. Most couples were like that. Even some dads with their sons. And so with the strap of my bag wrapped around my leg I dozed fearful of loss. Especially here and now on the eve of Bali. With fits of five minutes or so of sleep, spurts of sliced dreams and images of new travelers sitting down next to me, I saw an older woman peel an orange. Eyes close. Open. Close. Lifting heavy lids to a man in his twenties with a pony tail and I kept drifting to the flight over from Ho Chi Minh City where from the moment Pi said 'hi' and sat down next to me we talked the entire flight. Pi was a French-Vietnamese intern working in marketing at GlaxoSmithKline in Saigon and we talked the entire flight of some two hours and down the connecting tunnels and even as we parted to go our separate ways—she heading to immigration and I to transfer—we paused not knowing what to say. Not wanting to say goodbye. Not really. And then she was gone down the escalator. I watched from the deck above, followed her every movement as a mother does a child on the first day of school. And I never saw her again.

Bali Flight 835 held a resemblance to Steinbeck's *The Wayward Bus*, an eclectic people from around the world: a reggae guy with tats and a multi-colored headband; lesbians in gray shirts and matching short hair; a guy with a straw hat and an expensive camera next to some honey Asian doll; an elderly couple, likely returning to Bali, holding hands; and me the outcast, the lone writer in a gray cardigan and cargo pants. And if you must know about it, I felt quite alone being in that airplane with those people who seemed to have someone close to them at all times. And as I stepped down from the plane to where three dark men were chalking cracks in the tarmac by hand, I swear to you I saw a massive sign with the red letters that read: 'You'll never have to walk alone.' I can't make this stuff up. When I read that sign—the early morning sun rising over Bali—I thought of God and how I was really alone despite what I could try and fool myself into believing.

The new international airport in Bali had just been open for about two days prior to my arrival and the hotel manager was there to greet meet with a sign that had my name scribbled on it. Wayan was his name, and he drove a black minivan with the steering wheel on the right side as we drove on the left side of the road. His friend Ramaht would also be joining us, he said. I nodded and said that was all fine but didn't feel like it was going to be. I looked out the window to see 'Miss World Indonesia 2013' plastered on a black billboard in gold lettering, but I was in no mood for women. I just kept thinking how I must be a madman to fly to Bali and then take a ride from two strangers to head to the east side of the island. A death wish was what it felt like to me. But I had already faced some of the worst things a man can ever face in his life. If I had to choose—if you just got to know—I would take a heart attack over opening a door to find all your furniture has been moved out while you were hard at work and your family is just gone. There's something fierce and unforgivable in that treachery and deception. But to tell you the truth, I probably deserved it and much more. I sat in the back of the mini-van thinking these thoughts as scraps of multi-colored cloths to scare away the birds flapped inside corn fields.

I spent the rest of the day by the pool getting a massage and had a quiet dinner alone at the ocean-side restaurant. By candlelight I had mahi-mahi, known as dolphin fish to us foreigners, wrapped in a banana leaf, a side of fish cakes and salad, a refreshing Bintang beer to drink, an iced arak that tasted of honey and lemons, and for dessert I smoked a Cuban cigar. The next morning I had an appointment with White Sand Divers and promptly

at 8:30 they were there in a white minivan to pick me up and head out to the reef. The first dive was a coral reef and the second was at the USS *Liberty* wreck some thirty meters down.

The *Liberty*, with no lives lost, appeared to be at home 30 meters below the surface in the year of its 50th anniversary being pushed into the sea by Mt. Agung's lava flow in 1963. Edging my way through and around the nooks and crevices of the Liberty I challenged myself and my inexperience at diving. To look up and see corrugated-steel above you, bubbles from the exhalation rising around your goggles and to have that one thought of absolute fear to fight down and suppress, to conquer the possibility that if your mask comes off you could so very easily become disoriented and drown.

Deep down there in that calm, I kept thinking of how before I left Saigon my sister Amanda messaged me on Facebook and wrote: 'Enjoy Bali. Don't Drown!' Now peering up and seeing three divers floating-swimming across my new under-water sky of 30 meters, I felt relaxed as if I was supposed to be there, alone at the bottom with only two options left to me: rise or drown.

But with so many tasks set to me while diving, my mind had little time to consider, or even contemplate, life and death. Water in my mask was priority number one. I needed to see, and it came to me how important vision was when set next to abstract concepts of life and death, causes and effects. Only two or three times did I check the depth and oxygen gauges strapped to my dive-vest. My ears I must place as the second priority. The pressure could be so vicious that I would cease my gradual descent. To stop the pain in my ears I had to rise then dive down again. Go back to where I had just come from, if just but for a moment, then the pressure would release and I could proceed to go deeper. A step back to move forward. By the time I got to the bottom, my eyes and ears were fine. I longed to stay there at the bottom.

There is a haunting peace about rising and falling in gradual motions in and out of the sunken warship. Shadows loom down over the divers as they pass into the *Liberty's* broken belly and the questions come as naturally as you must learn to breathe below the surface of the water. Can I trust my dive master Nyoman not to lose me down here? Can I trust the regulator to feed me oxygen? Can I trust my ears, my senses, my mind to hold up beneath all the pressure pushing inward at 15 meters? 20 meters? 30? To be quite honest I

didn't know what or who I could trust anymore. I remember swimming along next to that old ship that no longer had its heart and kept thinking of how I didn't know who or what I could trust. A husband is supposed to be able to trust his wife, but if he doesn't have that, what does he have? And I wanting nothing more than anything to sit at the bottom of the ocean floor, and did for a minute or two, but dive master Nyoman called me up with a tap of his metallic baton on his oxygen tank and a wave of his hand. I followed Nyoman's call. I followed him because I knew the tank on my back had a limited supply of oxygen, and there was still much to see: the bed of slender fish imbedded into the sand with their tails, the brown sweet leaf twice the size of my head, a manta, and the sea turtle luring me out to deeper waters. I would have swum on forever, chasing that old sea turtle if not for a swift tag on my flipper from Nyoman.

As we surfaced and walked up the stony beach a nicely tanned Javanese girl with a tribal tattoo on her left forearm was sunbathing in a black bikini. Oh how I wanted to take her back to the hotel for a few hours—if you really have to know all about it—but I knew she was waiting for another. So instead I paid Nyoman for the two dives and for two more the following day, then I sat at a poolside café near the dive site, divers emerging out of the water like the first tetrapods climbing out of the ocean depths, and watched the tourists as I drank a Bintang while a ringing in my ears came like a constant low-pitched siren. My thoughts drifted to the young girl, Pi, I met on the flight to Singapore. Both of us sitting next to one another, leaving Vietnam for the exact same reason, and from the moment she sat down we never stopped talking despite the fact that she hated people more than I did. We blended for two hours. For a change, that unwelcomed, unexpected, unknown feeling found me welcoming, expecting, and knowing this beautiful woman by my side. I've come to understand, through years of disappointments, such moments, albeit delightful and fulfilling, are fleeting.

For lunch I had *nasi goreng*, which was stir-fried rice with chili peppers, tidbits of chicken and onion, and its special sauce. The *nasi goreng* tasted heavenly as it was light yet spicy. And as I ate alone looking out over the ocean waters, I thought of how East Bali is a spiritual oasis. An oasis not hampered by aggressive sex tourism so often found in other Asian countries like Bangkok, Thailand or Wan Chai, Hong Kong, and it's very likely due to some of its residents' Muslim faith. Some of the women wear *hijabs* to cover their heads

and faces. But Hindu ceremonies for the dead are also frequent and commonplace among the Balinese. And then there are the Javanese girls who migrate with their sexy, smooth-tanned skin and large breasts to get wet in West Bali. The Balinese appear to be a trusting people on the outside—if you must know—but one never knows even about the people closest to you.

Later that night I had dinner at Bali Beer & Grill where I had grilled tuna and prawns with limes and a fried banana dessert called *pisang goreng* topped with honey, which is also a breakfast dish among the locals. Beer & Grill was empty except for a backpacking couple in the corner. A little later two Russians, one wearing a leopard print dress with an open back, entered.

The next day I hired a *jukung*, a small boat named *Pajar*, for \$30 to take me snorkeling at a Japanese warship, and I kept thinking how much of Bali's diving industry prospers from leftover artifacts, which is a better descriptor than 'abandoned garbage from a distant time.'

I sat at the front of the *Pajar* as the boatman steered us up along the coast of East Bali, and I kept thinking—if you just need to know—that I was following the universe. That was what I was really doing. And I didn't have a damn clue if I would make it back alive or where the next day would even take me. I couldn't tell you who I was anymore. I had lived my life the way I wanted for so very long that all the in-betweens were lost to me then. It is true that I never settled as I searched the horizons for my true tribe, only to find myself on the *jukung* facing cerulean waters ahead, the craft splashing through the surf, my skin developing a dark, rough tan from too much salt-water and sun.

Make lemonade, is what they say. Squeeze the lemon dry. Toss away the pulverized peel. Knowing that the world was my companion and that was enough because the world could be as small or as large as one wishes to make it.

I dove down with my snorkel still in my mouth alongside the Japanese ship, my body and senses slowing to a near halt some ten meters down inside the open hull. I swam free, my flippers kicking gently through the water to propel me forward and up to that burst of fresh air, just as my daughter would do when I taught her to swim at the deep end of the pool where she would then push off the bottom to rise like a mermaid into a new breath where I would be there—yes I would be there—to catch her by the waist and she telling

me, 'One more time, *Baba.*' Yes, one more time, my darling, and all I could see was that strange boatman on the *jukung* waiting to take me back to Arya Amed Resort, where the staff constantly sweeps up flower petals that fall from the trees.

In the afternoon I rented a motorbike for \$5 from the resort and headed along the winding east coast to Pantai Putih, which means 'White Beach.' The beach was sandy white, and I swam against large incoming waves and felt the tide pulling me ever out, and I had to fight my way in with each stroke. Afterward I got a massage for \$8 right there on the beach and had a few beers to relax as I sat next to an Asian woman speaking French. In Bali there was something sexy about an Asian woman speaking French.

But the real adventure was when I was on my way back from the White Beach. I pulled off to the side of the road to snap a few pictures of the rice paddies in the valley below. A local man, shirtless where you could see his skin worn thin to the bone, parked his motorbike about fifteen yards ahead of mine. He slipped off the bike and walked back towards me with a small object in his hands. One step closer I could see that he unfolded a portable scythe. He was nonchalant about the cutting blade in his hand. I had my sunglasses on so I knew he could not see how wide my eyes were getting, but I did not look away from him as he drew closer to me. Would this be my last moment in Bali? On Earth? I looked straight at the solemn brown-faced figure that stared back. He had no emotion on his face. He was calm and patient. His steps drew slower. My heart beat faster. Then all of a sudden, he stepped off the side of the road and vanished down a trail leading deep into the jungle alongside the mountain.

Perhaps death was close to me that day, as it was on the days of my heart attacks, but I had to stop and consider how at any time, day or night, my life could be put in jeopardy, or even lost. I knew either way I was ready for the end, or a new beginning if all that that ending turns out to be. Such was that experience on the road from Amlapura to Amed.

If you want to know the real truth of it, I had a wonderful time in Bali. That's not an exaggeration. Life is magic. And I learned that trust grants a powerful spell over people and once that bond becomes broken anger and doubt and fear is allowed to enter and divide even the closest of companions. And I thought of my estranged wife as Wayan drove me back to the airport in Denpasar, and I could see rivulets running on the edge of farms

where men and women bathed and headed back to their thatched huts. I imagined at least they were happily married, happily in love despite having nothing else.

And if you want to know the deep down truth of everything, as the plane that would take me back to Singapore and back home to Saigon—where a home was not really a home—I could see puffs of white clouds like freshly whipped cream hanging low over the rolling mountains, those heavenly green slopes leading to snowy peaks and hidden valleys, the far-off horizon dividing the world below into shades of blue, light above and dark below, I tell you honest: I sat looking out the window and I couldn't hear my heart beating. I could hear everyone's heart but my own.

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"Cigarette Smile"

by Tilon Sagulu

He smiled and said thank you to me after I served him his *roti canai* and *teh tarik*. Dumbfounded, I smiled back and stood by the blue folding table. This young man, probably in his twenties, just smiled at me with his almond, black eyes looking straight into my eyes. This is rare, I thought. Customers don't smile at this *mamak*—they come to eat or hang out with their friends and then leave. I had been working at this *mamak* for almost four years now for the sake of my son's education back in Bangladesh. People in my hometown smile—well, at least the people in my neighborhood, they would always smile even though they were having a bad day. Over here, in Kuala Lumpur, especially at this *mamak*, for twenty-four hours people come and go, but only one in every twenty persons would smile at me. It made me sad when I first started working here because I was not used to being estranged and treated as though I was a heartless robot. And whenever I stretched a smile, most people would look at me like I was some kind of crazy, perverted man. I got used to it after a while though, and I have stopped smiling for years.

"Do you have more of this?" I asked the young man. I took his metallic blue cigarette box that he placed on the table while he took a sip of his steaming *teh tarik*. The box felt cold in my hands. I shouldn't do this, I thought, but the cigarette box was already in my hand. I looked at him with fear that he would burst into anger because I touched his cigarette box.

"More of what?" He said, frowning. "Oh...you mean the cigarette box?"

"Yes," I said. My voice trembled.

"No. Why? Do you want it?" I looked at him, thinking *did he just ask me whether I want this cigarette box or not?*

"Yes," I said. I scrutinized the box like a piece of jewelry. I tapped it, amazed that it was a real metal box—probably aluminum, not metal. Most cigarette boxes are made of paper, but this one was different. *Winston* was carved on top of soaring eagle, and almost

half of the box was covered with a picture of a rotting foot. The picture caption said *Cigarette causes Gangrene, Infoline: 03-8883 4400.*

“Well...” He was thinking hard; I could tell it by his countenance—his eyes moving wildly and his fingers scratching his smooth chin. He looked at his cigarette box and then to me.

“No, you don’t have to give this to me. I was just—”

“It’s my first box of cigarettes,” he said before I could finish saying that I was just kidding. “*Aneh?*”

“Yes?” I said. He pointed to his *roti canai* and then gave another friendly smile. “What?” I asked, wondering if I had brought the wrong food to him. But I was sure he ordered *roti canai* and *teh tarik*.

“You forgot to bring spoon and fork with you.”

“Oh! Sorry!” I whisked to the next empty table and grabbed the silverware bucket. “Here you go,” I said, “sorry, I forgot.”

“You’re fine,” he murmured, still smiling with a white cigarette stick dangling between his pink lips. He lit it up and then coughed after his first puff. He took a sip of his *teh tarik* and then looked at me. I just realized how awkward I must be to him, standing in front of him, with the blue folding table separating us. *What am I doing?* I thought. Bitter smoke poisoned the sultry, city air. With the cigarette in his fingers, he leaned over, resting his elbow on the table.

“Thank you,” he smiled. I smiled back and then walked away, feeling victorious, liberated, and acknowledged.

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"The Goat"

by James M. Fajarito

We called him the Goat. When we uttered the word to refer to him, it was with derision and contempt. We hated him like we hated our holier-than-thou schoolmates. But *they* were another story. Between them and the Goat, they were saints. We could have found meaning in this world even with their presence. But with the Goat, there would have been no meaning at all. Hell, none!

“We”, of course, referred to my classmates and me, twenty-eight freshmen seminarians collectively known as the Unity Class of Saint Ernest College Seminary. A bunch of *provincianos* from across many Luzon provinces, we were wide-eyed on our first month in that seminary located in the heart of the metropolis. Though many of us had vague ideas why we had chosen the path of priesthood over other beaten tracks, we had vaguer ideas of the treatment we would get from our Filipino language professor, whom every old-timer seminarian knew as the Goat.

We freshmen seminarians were housed in the Sacrificial Lamb Building, the oldest edifice in the seminary that featured structures ranging from medieval-looking to pretentiously-modern. The three-storey building clustered offices and classrooms on the first floor, classrooms, study halls and clinics on the second level, and dormitory rooms for seminarians and priests on the third. Thus, we found it so convenient to come to our classes from our third floor rooms.

Days before our first session with Fermin Uban (a.k.a. the Goat), we received a subtle warning from upperclassmen. The only problem was that, back in the day, we had no inkling of the concept known as “subtle”.

It was over lunch when an upperclassman named Candido opened up a conversation topic – the Goat.

“Brace yourselves for a year of Saturday torture, guys,” he warned his freshmen seatmates in the dining table. “The Goat is the type who doesn’t take ‘no’ for an answer.”

We didn’t really believe the swagger of Candido, for we couldn’t accept that a professor of a minor subject as easy as Filipino language would even pose any challenge. But *that* was our undoing. Our own pride would lead to our fall – or something like that.

The Goat’s manner of arrival on the first day was exactly how it had been described days ago by Candido. A stainless owner-type jeep stuffed with *borloloys* and reflector stickers parked itself nonchalantly just outside our classroom. Though the vehicle was screaming for attention, the driver was not. He was a fortyish man of average height with a paunch. The only distinguishing mark on his face was his goatee.

“Must be the Goat,” a classmate whispered to me.

To some upperclassmen’s disappointment, four uneventful Saturdays passed by, and our discussions with the Goat were, at best, hum-drum. Routine attendance-checking. Routine lectures. Routine assignments. Even his constant reminder that on weekdays he was a teacher at some science high school became routine. Surprisingly, his sanitized version of claim-to-fame eventually turned into routine: that he had joined the longest funeral this country had ever witnessed – with a snapshot to boot! He would always show us the coffee-table book about the fall of the dictator: one snapshot of the longest funeral caught him atop a vehicle with a raised, clenched fist. A classmate remarked once that the Goat didn’t look like an anti-Marcos activist in the picture, but actually resembled a man too furious because he couldn’t drive his pathetic, attention-seeking jeep into the sea of people.

But the jarring illusion of a routine awarded us with a false sense of complacency and comfort, with a tinge of smug self-confidence. The carefree sub-culture dulled us that we never saw the arrogance of the Goat coming.

It was a boring July Saturday morning lecture about the significance of communication when, out of the blue, the Goat posed a question so silly but just enough to galvanize the class: “Do animals communicate using languages?”

Instantly, the class became animated, an observer could have surmised the professor had inquired if Marcos was a hero. The question polarized the class –half insisting that animals had their own language, while the other arguing that animals

couldn't possibly utilize language. It was a heated debate, triggered perhaps by our restlessness for some form of action. I, for one, was uncharacteristically animated, even stressing my lungs out that Ernie Baron, a popular media personality, always believed in the "language of monkeys". But none beat the boldness of Rodolfo, a flamboyant classmate, who stood up unceremoniously and raised his voice on his untenable belief in the language of animals – moments *after* the Goat had categorically declared that language was exclusively a human trait. Rodolfo's boldness received loud cheers, which were the last that could be heard from that Filipino language class. For the Goat spoke – with authority – the final words: "Animals have no language, and those who believe otherwise are free to withdraw this subject!"

It was the lowest point of our first semester at Saint Ernest. If at all, we learned humility, tact and clarifying the definition of a term before impulsively jumping into a fight. But I never knew things could get any lower, for when I saw my grade in the subject at the end of the semester, I was disheartened I got only 83. I thought I deserved way better than 83. To add insult to injury, my seatmate who had never recited even once for the entire semester received 84.

That the Goat harbored a grudge against half the class was apparent all-semester long. That he would strike back by handing out unfair grades was really unexpected, at least for us freshmen seminarians. We really thought he had no place in the seminary. But we were too afraid to rock the boat, so to speak. So we were resigned to accept our fate to be yes-men in the Goat's class until March, the end of the semester for the second and last Filipino language subject.

I decided to be a more diligent student, but a yes-man, nonetheless. I hated his subject, but I had no choice but to follow the whims of the Goat. Interestingly, I topped our quizzes and exams, giving me the faint hope that my grades for the second semester in Filipino would be definitely higher than 83.

But as the saying went, life happened while I was busy making plans. A chicken pox outbreak hit the seminary, and a two-minute hurried conversation with a convalescing seminarian was enough for me to receive the unfortunate baton to be the next chicken pox victim.

The morning I felt unwell and saw small red dots in my hands, I knew I would spend the next drudging two weeks in the infirmary. I innocently prayed three Hail Mary's to every red dot in my body, but I later realized that sudden religiosity didn't translate to sudden miracles.

It was late February, the worst time to sport chicken pox marks in the body, with the academic requirements fighting out for attention of a diligent student's time. I was afraid of losing a slot in the Dean's List. But I was more afraid of getting another 83, or lower, from the Goat.

Our infirmary was a six-by-five meter room on the Sacrificial Lamb Building's second floor. Each patient was allotted a cot, even as our population swelled to fifteen. Chicken pox patients like me had nothing to do for two weeks except eat, stare at the ceiling, sleep, wash ourselves, and listen to FM radio. The constant promotion of a Rick Astley song made me memorize the lyrics of "Cry For Help". As the days grew on, I was getting sick of the song, especially since I noticed that we patients were getting disinterested to take care of our looks, which, because of facial hair, ridiculously resembled the appearance of goats.

Francisco, our class president, was sympathetic of our plight and spoke for us with the concerned professors. As a result, we were required to write reaction papers, reflection papers, position papers, and other papers our teachers could conjure. It was fine by me, as long as my grades would not experience any nosedive. I began writing them as soon as I became capable. But the Goat didn't give out any assignments. When he was asked by our president, the Goat responded with a blank stare. Which made me extremely worried: did he want a new book, reflection sticker for his jeep, or something better?

My two classmate-patients had an idea, however pragmatic. They held a brainstorming session between the two of them on how to pass the Filipino subject without the Goat specifying any requirement in lieu of our absences and the Final Test. I overheard them conversing during the second week of our confinement.

"My uncle said there are really, really good reflection stickers in Banawe," said Maximo, the most pious in our class. "Do you think the Goat will like it?"

"Probably not," Simplicio responded, the thinner of the two. "Every inch of his jeep is tattooed with stickers. Brand-new pocketbooks from Cubao might do the trick. Remember:

our previous project was an individual review of a new romance pocketbook, and the pocketbook had to be submitted to him – without any scratch and without expecting to be returned.”

They tried to sell me their idea, which I meekly refused. I was too principled – and broke – to buy my grade from the Goat.

What I did was I studied for the examination like crazy, with the help of Francisco who had tipped me about the exam’s scope. Meanwhile, Maximo and Simplicio pushed through their plan: to be sure, they purchased reflection stickers from Banawe *and* romance pocketbooks from Cubao. However, we were not allowed to meet the Goat come examination day. He was too afraid to catch the disease and had relayed strict orders that we did not see him. Thus, we expected to receive Incomplete grades.

The following Saturday, days after my return to normalcy, word got out that the Goat had arrived supposedly to submit grades to the Dean’s Office. I zoomed from the third floor dormitory to the ground floor, hoping to inquire how I could have my grade converted from INC to something better (preferably higher than 83). Fellow seminarians who saw me immediately gave way, one could imagine I was Moses effortlessly parting the Red Sea. Either they were still afraid to get chicken pox, or I was running too fast to endanger one’s safety.

But the Goat had just left, the Dean’s secretary informed me. (She was not afraid of me, having suffered from chicken pox in her teens.) Cognizant of my situation, she took the list from a brown envelope, and peeked at a bond paper. Her face suddenly lighted up, smiling when she said, “Wow! You have a grade here. 97!”

I was so surprised and delighted. Still skeptical, I asked to see the list myself, and there it was, my name with a glowing 97 printed across it. I thanked the secretary profusely and left the office in cloud nine.

The word immediately spread. I got the highest grade in the subject without taking the final test *or* submitting other requirements. Most of my classmates, including some schoolmates, were happy for me, seeing vindication in the grade.

“You should thank the Goat,” Francisco suggested. “He sympathized with you.”

I thought about the comment and decided that the Goat was not worthy of *any* expression of thanksgiving. I ought to have received a grade higher than 83 the previous

semester. His recent awarding of a high grade was only a belated payment for the injustice of the past.

As for Maximo and Simplicio, they received final grades, all right. But they were barely passing grades, which I reckoned they deserved, considering their sub-par classroom performances. I didn't ask what they had done to the reflection stickers and romance pocketbooks. I wasn't sure how they felt about their grades. What I was sure of was that my latest grade would go down in the annals of Saint Ernest College Seminary's history as just another dubious entry in the checkered career of Fermin Uban, Filipino language professor, grudgingly known in the seminary as the Goat.

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"Cindelas"

by James Penha

Although Raden Putra, Jenggala's ruler, was not an evil king, neither would any of his subjects accuse him of being a great one. Raden Putra was too obsessed with his own pleasures to care for the state of his empire or the welfare of its inhabitants. Such tasks he assigned to his ministers under the direction of his wife, Queen Adjeng, to whom both Raden Putra and his people were devoted for she was a loving and dutiful servant to the people and consort to the King.

Raden Putra would often quip to visitors to his court, "I should be nothing without my Queen or my cock."

The cock to which he referred was Prakoso the Mighty, whose fame as the fiercest fighting rooster ever bred on Java had extended beyond that island's shores across the archipelago. The bird was so feared, indeed, that only by making an extraordinary offer could Raden Putra any longer find cock handlers willing to pit their fighters against Prakoso. "If any rooster can defeat my Prakoso, its owner will be granted half of all my lands and riches! But should Prakoso win, the loser's owner shall leave behind not only his bird's carcass, but his own right arm as well!" Impaled on the fence posts surrounding Raden Putra's castle, many hands waved goodbye to distraught and disappointed losers.

As much as Raden Putra loved Prakoso, he continuously bred other potential fighters who might replace his champion once it showed any sign of weakness.

And as much as Raden Putra loved Adjeng, he collected other women to comfort him while the Queen tended to matters of the state.

Among these concubines was Supadmi, a young, beautiful, and ambitious woman eager to dethrone and replace Adjeng as Queen. Needing a powerful ally to effect her plan, she seduced Angoro, the King's shaman, who confidently told Supadmi that he had magic strong enough to hide their betrayal of the King. But when Supadmi announced to Angoro

that she was pregnant with his child, a more powerful potion was needed to destroy the evidence of their treason.

Early on the morning after Supadmi drank the herbal draught prepared by her secret lover, she screamed in agony for the King. When Raden Putra arrived at her bedside, he brought his shaman with him.

"What ails you, Supadmi?" asked the King, "that you awaken the whole court?"

"I am in such pain, my liege, and bereft," Supadmi cried. She threw off her covers to reveal a pool of blood and sweat. "I have lost your child, Majesty!"

Raden Putra stood speechless, his mouth agape. Angoro did no less. It was some moments before the King asked how such a loss should occur in a young, healthy woman.

Supadmi answered, "It should not have happened, Majesty, but for the Queen. She knew of my condition." Supadmi paused to gauge the King's reaction. It was stern. She continued, "The Queen brought me a drink last night. 'To help me sleep,' she said. The glass . . . it is still on the table there. Let your shaman examine it."

The King nodded to Angoro who fetched the glass, smelled and tasted the residue within it. "These herbs are familiar to me, your Majesty. They are poisons."

Raden Putra had the Queen hauled before him and forced to listen to the testimony of Supadmi and Angoro.

"But, my dearest husband, none of this is true."

Raden Putra turned to his shaman. Angoro pulled a tuft of the Queen's tresses from her scalp and rolled it in his fingers before tossing it in the air where the hairs separated as they fell. "Your Majesty, the Queen is in a state of disharmony. She cannot be trusted." Adjeng fainted, collapsing to the floor. "It is a kind of madness, Majesty."

"Oh, what tragedies are before me here!" exclaimed Raden Putra. He called for Bambang, his most trusted bodyguard, and ordered him to bundle the Queen in a carpet, take her on horseback to the mountain forest, dig a grave, and bury her alive.

As Bambang bore his burden high into the hills surrounding Jenggala, he considered his allegiance not only to Raden Putra, but as well to Queen Adjeng whom he had also sworn to protect. Bambang was fraught with the knowledge of how generous Adjeng had been to all the royal retinue including the security staff. She had lobbied the king to increase their wages, to pay for their medical care, to send their children to school free of

charge. How could he kill this most gracious Queen? How, he asked himself, could he avoid disloyalty to either of his monarchs?

Bambang himself had no schooling, but he possessed a good heart and common sense. He had promised to dig a grave on the mountain, and he did so. He had promised to bury the Queen alive. And he would do so . . . but not in that cold hole in the ground. Bambang rode well past the grave to a field of sugar canes on the other side of the mountain where an old wretch of a leper lived alone in hiding from those who damned her for the bitterness of her disease. Bambang had often purchased, at the behest of Adjeng, shafts of cane from the leper woman at prices purposely exalted by the Queen. Now Bambang arrived to ask the wretch to "bury" the Queen alive in her cabin so that no one would ever know she was there. Bambang gave the leper all the coins he had in his purse. The old woman accepted them, but said, "I should protect the Queen even if she were all you had to give me."

Bambang carried the precious carpet into the leper's house and released the Queen from its confines. He began to explain his plan, but the Queen interrupted, "I heard your conversation, my friends, and I bless you both. Bambang, go back to the palace and tell the King -- truthfully -- that you buried me alive.

Fearlessly, over the next few months, Adjeng attended to the leper's wounds with unguents prepared from forest herbs; in return, the old wretch made as best she could a home for Adjeng and arranged, when it became apparent that Adjeng was pregnant with Raden Putra's child, for a midwife to attend to the birth.

The old leper lived to hear the sounds of new life crying in her cabin, but not long enough to see Adjeng's boy Cindelas crawl, stand, talk, run, count, sing, hunt, and develop into a sweet-looking and sweet-tempered young man.

His mother slowly understood that her neighbors, remote as they were from the cabin and from the palace, would never recognize her as the former Queen, especially as she wore no make-up, dressed in homemade garments, and worked her farm like any peasant. And so she and Cindelas blended into the forest community.

One day in his eighteenth year, Cindelas was gathering firewood for the hearth when he found nestled in a pile of twigs an enormous egg. Cindelas looked into the sky. He saw eagles on high and wondered if one of them might possibly have laid or dropped

this egg. It looked fresh -- fresh enough to crack and cook into a huge omelet. But instead Cindelas carried the egg home and carefully placed it within the clutch of smaller eggs in the nest beneath one his mother's chickens. The broody hen there growled a bit and made to peck at Cindelas, but, recognizing the boy, she calmed, only rearranging her wings to accommodate the new lodger.

Eventually, all the eggs hatched into chicks, but the one who came from the egg Cindelas had found grew quickly into an especially regal rooster. Cindelas, recalling the day he found him, named him Elang, the local word for eagle. Tall, mighty, and fierce, the red and gold rooster also had a unique gift for song. Instead of crowing "kukurukukin" each morning, Elang crooned what sounded like real words -- the same phrases over and over. Cindelas awoke before dawn every day for a week and attended carefully to the rooster's song until he had discerned its lyrics.

"Mother," Cindelas said at breakfast one morning, "I think I know what Elang is crowing, but it makes no sense."

"Why should it make sense, son?" his mother answered. "Your Elang is a bird. Birds do not sing or even speak words."

"Parrots do."

"Parrots repeat what they have heard human beings say. Anyway, your rooster is no parrot." She smiled and patted the hand of her beloved son. "But maybe it is a miracle . . . like you."

"He sings, 'My master is Cindelas, the son of Raden Putra. He lives in the woods with his mother, the Queen.'"

Adjeng blanched and almost choked on the rice she was eating. When she had finished coughing, with the help of her son's firm pats on her back, she demanded to be taken to the rooster.

"Get it to sing, Cindelas. I need to hear this song."

"But, mother, it's too late. We will have to wait for tomorrow's sunrise."

"No, I cannot wait." Adjeng was firm. "Sing to the bird yourself, Cindelas."

"Sing what? The words?"

"No, no words. I need to hear this bird speak for itself. Crow to it, Cindelas. A regular crow. That will usually get a rooster to reply in kind."

"Kukurukukin," cried Cindelasas. The rooster cocked its head toward the boy, but remained silent.

"Again," Adjeng prompted. "Louder."

"Kukurukukin!"

"Again. Louder."

"KUKURUKUKIN!"

The rooster mumbled, "Ku-Ku--" until it belted out, "MY MASTER IS CINDELARAS. HIS HOUSE IS IN THE WOODS. HE'S THE SON OF RADEN PUTRA."

Adjeng turned to her son. "You did not teach Elang these words, did you?"

"Mother, I told you these words make no sense to me."

"But they do make sense. Come, sit with me here on this fallen tree. I have a story to tell you." And Adjeng related all that had befallen her at the palace.

"And so," Cindelasas said slowly, "I am the son of Raden Putra?"

Adjeng nodded.

"Then I must go to the palace to meet this father of mine."

"He will not believe you. He knows nothing of a child. He believes I died in the forest the day he banished me."

"I shall bring Elang with me. His words will give Raden Putra pause, and in that pause, I shall repeat the story you have just told me."

Adjeng knew she could never prevent Cindelasas from following this quest to find his father, and so she told him as much as she could recall of the geography of the palace. With his mother's blessing, Cindelasas caged his rooster in a rattan basket and set off for the center of Jenggala.

At midday, Cindelasas stopped at a hilltop cafe for lunch. With only a few coins in his pocket, he ordered a spoonful of rice and some salt.

"Drink?" asked the café's matron. Cindelasas checked his pocket. "Er, no thank you. But may I help myself to some water from the river there? Is it fresh? Is it clean?"

"Not clean enough to drink without boiling it first." She poured for Cindelasas a glass of boiled water. "No charge," she smiled.

One of the patrons at an adjoining table admired Cindelaras' rooster and wondered aloud if he was a fighter. "A champion can make some good money out back at the cockfights. Enough to pay for a handsome dinner and then some, young man."

"He's never fought another rooster," admitted Cindelaras.

"Why not give him a chance? My name is Prabowo." He shook Cindelaras' hand.

Hoping for guidance, Cindelaras glanced at the matron who shrugged inconclusively. Cindelaras stood, picked up the basket containing his rooster, and asked Prabowo to take him to the fights.

In a barn behind the warung, two dozen or more men in sarongs smoked and squatted around a circle marked with lime. They all turned toward Cindelaras when he entered. Prabowo announced, "This young fellow wants to debut his fighter. Any takers?"

"What's the bet?" yelled a mustached man.

"How much can you wager?" Prabowo asked Cindelaras.

"Money?"

"Of course."

"I have nothing."

Prabowo considered the situation. "Okay, I'll stake you to a bet of 100,00 rupiah. If your bird wins, you will earn that amount from your rival. If your bird loses, I'll pay the winner, but I will own that handsome birdcage of yours. Deal?"

Cindelaras agreed.

Soon after Prabowo tossed 100,000 rupiah on the ground, a bespectacled old man threw a like amount of coins on the pile and brought his rooster to the circle. Prabowo nodded to Cindelaras who removed his bird from its cage and carried him to face the other cock.

"On the count of three, release your birds," said Prabowo. "One. Two. THREE!"

Let loose, the bespectacled man's rooster kicked Elang with its talons and bit his rival on the neck. Taken aback, Elang fluttered upward and away to the edge of the circle, and the crowd laughed at the helpless amateur.

"Defend yourself, Elang," pleaded Cindelaras. As if comprehending the words of his master, Elang went on the attack. The two birds engaged at close quarters. Blood spewed from the circle's center.

Cindelas turned to Prabowo. "When is it finished?"

"When one of the birds is dead, of course."

Cindelas felt sick, but gathered the strength to scream encouragement to his rooster. Elang, however, no longer needed encouragement. He attacked his competitor mercilessly until he was the only bird standing.

"Looks like we can split the pot," Prabowo said to Cindelas. But the boy ran past the pile of coins to his rooster whom he hugged and examined for wounds. Except for a few scratches incurred at the very beginning of the match, Elang was healthy. And proud. He pulled away from Cindelas and strutted around the circumference of the circle absorbing the cheers and applause of the crowd.

Cindelas caught Elang once more and placed him in the rattan cage. Then he collected his winnings.

"Where are you going, boy?" asked Prabowo. "That bird is a natural-born killer. A true champion. He will make your fortune! Stick around. He's got a few more fights in him today. By sunset, you'll have several million rupiah in your purse."

"We're going," said Cindelas. "I will never risk Elang's life again. Not for anything."

"Hey, with a cock that fierce, there's no risk. Trust me."

"We're going."

"Where?"

"To the palace. I need to see the king."

"Hey, kid, no commoner gets to see the king. Except from a distance. Unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless you bring a rooster to challenge the king's champion."

"I told you: Elang will never fight again."

"Okay, okay. But he can gain your entrée into the palace. Let me help. I've brought many fighters to the palace over the years. They know me there. Raden Putra will recognize me."

"How many times did your birds beat the King's?"

Prabowo shook his head. "Not once. Not once. Which is why I'd love to see your bird--"

"That you will never see. But if you can really arrange for me have an audience with Raden Putra, I will accept your help. In return, my winnings, the 100,000 rupiah, are yours."

"Deal!" said Prabowo. "Come. It will be well to arrive at the palace just after sunset."

By the time they reached the palace, it was too dark to discern the many arms swaying on its ramparts. The King's gatekeepers greeted Prabowo warmly for he had been rewarded by their monarch many times for having brought men who would lose their limbs and roosters to Raden Putra's fighting cock. Of course, the Prakoso who reigned as the King's champion now was not the same bird that had fought when Adjeng was Queen. Raden Putra had carefully bred generations of fighters, and he judged Prakoso VI the greatest of all his champions having thus far dispatched seven contenders, each in less than two minutes.

Acknowledging Cindelas and the caged bird, the Captain of the guards asked if they were game.

"Captain Bambang," Prabowo replied obliquely, "these two have traveled from over the mountain to meet the King."

"Follow me," said Bambang, and he led the visitors to the sports hall. "Wait here. You, boy, can take your rooster out of the cage and prepare him for battle. I shall announce your presence to Raden Putra."

When the Captain left the hall, Cindelas turned angrily to Prabowo, "Battle? What battle? I told you that Elang would fight no more!"

"There is no way for a commoner like yourself to speak to the King . . . unless you make him listen. And the only way to force this King to hear you is for your rooster to defeat his. He will want to know how you alone bred a bird capable of overthrowing his fowl dynasty. Then, at last, you will be able to reply with whatever words you have for the King."

Cindelas stood quietly. He had things he needed to say to Raden Putra.

Prabowo sought to parley his advantage. "And, boy, if -- I mean, when your Elang is victorious, you will own half of this realm. That is the opportunity awaiting you."

"But if Elang loses?"

Prabowo stared at Cindelas' right arm, but said only, "Elang is the only fighter I have ever seen who just might win here."

At that moment, Bambang opened the door to the hall, and Raden Putra, Queen Supadmi, Prime Minister Angoro, and a host of attendants entered. The king himself carried Prakoso VI.

"Your Majesty," said Cindelas, "I--"

"Yes, yes," said the King. Place your rooster in the circle. You will never hold him in your hands again. You may," the King turned and laughed to his retainers, "never again hold anything in your two hands!"

Prabowo shook his head insouciantly and then nodded as Cindelas followed the King's instructions. Raden Putra set Prakoso VI a diameter away from Raja.

The Prime Minister intoned, "On the count of three, release your birds: One. Two THREE!"

Elang had learned from his previous encounter in the ring not to hesitate. He flew into his opponent, as did Prakoso. The birds tore into each other with beaks and talons, neither relenting nor retreating. The blood bath continued for more than five minutes until Prakoso fell back on its haunches and rolled over onto its side. Elang stepped back and watched his opponent die.

Prabowo cheered loudly although he composed himself quickly when he saw the King's distress.

Cindelas ran to embrace his Elang, running his fingers through his feathers to examine every wound. The bird was bloodied, but not seriously hurt.

Raden Putra shook his head and spoke to Cindelas. "This champion of yours is no ordinary bird. Nor are you, I think, an ordinary boy. Who are you exactly? Where do you come from?"

Cindelas responded to the King's queries by shouting, "KUKURUKUKIN!"

At that, Elang stood tall and sang, "MY MASTER IS CINDELARAS. HIS HOUSE IS IN THE WOODS. HE'S THE SON OF RADEN PUTRA."

The court was stunned into silence. The assembly glanced back and forth at the King and this daring young man with the presumptuous rooster.

"These words," Raden Putra said slowly, "are even more shocking than the results of this evening's cockfight." He stared at Cindelas. "Explain yourself, lad. Or will your bird elucidate?"

"I cannot explain how my rooster knows to speak this truth. But truth it is. My mother was your Queen Adjeng. I was born months after you banished her from the palace and ordered her death. But she did not die. She lives still on the other side of the mountain."

"BAMBANG!" The King screamed for his Captain of the Guards. "You buried Adjeng alive. How can this boy's words possibly be true?"

The Captain narrated how he had benignly interpreted the King's words two decades ago.

"Have you anything to add -- before I banish you from this kingdom?" Raden Putra asked his Captain.

Cindelas interrupted. "Fath-- Sire. Your Majesty. This man saved my mother's life. If it were not for him, I should never have been born. If it were not for him, you would have killed an innocent Queen -- for never did she poison anyone -- and her innocent babe. Your son. If you are an honest King, then my Elang and I have won half of your realm. And so I beg this good Captain to live happily in my lands."

Raden Putra assented. "You are my son. And you have won half my realm. And, yes, you may protect this . . . this good man." The King turned again to Bambang. "And so should I hear any more of this story?"

"Majesty," replied Bambang, "It was common knowledge among those of us who worked in this palace that your shaman and your Lady Supadmi were sleeping together. We always suspected that they had fomented a plot to exalt themselves by ridding us of our beloved Queen."

Supadmi and Angoro protested loudly. "Guards, seize those two!" ordered the King.

With Raden Putra's own knife to his Prime Minister's throat, Angoro admitted his sins. He and Supadmi were exiled, with only two left arms between them, to the little cabin in the woods where Cindelas had been reared. Adjeng was reinstated in the palace as Queen, and, inasmuch as Raden Putra acknowledged Cindelas as his heir, the great kingdom of Jenggala remained undivided.

Raden Putra asked his son if, together, they could promote Elang as their champion cock fighter. But Cindelas was adamant: Elang would fight no more. "It's a hateful sport, father. I am sure Prabowo can bring other, less cruel activities to the palace for your entertainment."

Raden Putra harrumphed, but eventually became a fanatic supporter of a game Prabowo invented in which shuttlers batted a toy cock back-and-forth over a net. Elang was given the run of the palace and of the capital. When the bird died, having fathered hundreds of descendants, none of whom had ever to fight for sport, Cindelas, who was by then King, had a portrait of the great bird emblazoned on the crest and flag of the nation.

* * * * *

"Scuba Diving"

by John C. Mannone

On a research expedition off West Papua, New Guinea

Its silence eclipses me; its shadow, mackerel-tailed, unmistakably leviathan—no anonymity.

Maybe it doesn't see me, or smell fear; maybe the dull dysrhythmic throb in my chest doesn't panic its lateral sensors. I rise toward the surface—fins scissoring in stealth; boat's shadow looming...its shadow, too. I pray it disdains the taste of adrenaline blood.

"Ghost Crab"

by John C. Mannone

The endless sea conveys
detritus to the hapless crab,

summons meals for it
from the gods,

scrubs ripples of sand while it
parries against prey, claws

folded in prayer. Translucent,
it hides in the open.

The Book of Life speaks of ghosts
but only about the holy ones.

What about the unholy
lurking in this universe

of sand and tide, seaweed and shell?
There, in the enigma of shadows

of dunes steeped with sun,
the sun, crystallized a million times

with a million flames, cavitating
bubbles in the hallow of water's ebb.

When sun abandons day, the ghost
crab haunts the beaches in purpling dark.

I comb the arena in that twilight
searching for her ghost

hidden in wine-darkened waves,
among the green fronds buoyed
by her spirit.

* * * * *

"The Roof"

by Subashini Navaratnam

There is a noise up on the roof. A bird, a beast, God himself, perhaps. We have been waiting in the dark, we're armed and we're ready. This is a family mutiny. We spent a good whole life looking for a home and we are going to stay, even if God himself comes through this roof and cuts you open. You had it coming when you when up to the roof. You, the father of many rooms in many houses. You, the father of the children who swallowed your air and crept like thieves into every corner of your life. You of all people, you should have known better: this God has never showed up on anyone's roof, least of all yours.

So we wait, then. This can't be God, this must be the Devil himself. It is a death wish painted on the souls of all the people who died in a far-away land, in the green heartlands of Jaffna, the place you abandoned to raise a new home here with many rooms, with the children bearing the mark of the class that can afford to rule in the name of absent kings. The spectacle is that what is visited upon us, now, in our inability to talk. In the eyes of people cast out for being of the wrong caste while you sat in the palace and licked the juice of fruits off your fingers. Have they come to exact their revenge?

The stage is set, here, on this roof of this house of thieves. There is a noise. A bird, a beast, the Devil himself, perhaps. Or a mutiny of the dead voices of war that—once, not so long ago—screamed at no one and everyone all at once.

* * * * *

"On the Islands"

by Christopher Rose

In the waterways of Luzon,
hundreds of mothers and daughters
take their baskets of laundry,
scrub until the water
glistens with a layer of soap.

In the hotels across Manila,
hundreds of mothers and daughters
push carts through empty hallways,
change the linens of strangers
in dirty guest rooms.

In my home,
my mother has no daughters.
She eyes a pile of dishes,
points with a knife and warns me
she is not my maid.

* * * * *

"Aerial Reconnaissance of Melancholia"

by Mark Anthony Rossi

Encased

In the foliage

Is an eaten fuselage

Unfound unwanted

An accidental tomb

For a brave pilot

Lost in the war

Of the pacific

Lost to the ages

Like an ancient

Language unspoken

But with much to say

Like Burma

It is embedded

In the blood

Of the disappointed.

* * * * *

"At Night in George Town"

by Catalina Rembuyan

The streets of Lebuah Penang are quiet.
The shops that thrive with chants and music
are closed.
The workers have gone home.
The migrants have gone to rest.
At the shore by Fort Cornwallis
water splashes against stone.
More than a century ago a white man
came to this land, and brought with him
a fort, a faith and a government.
The King of Kedah gave this soil away.
Then the migrants came, arriving all
dirty and underpaid.
Here they built.
The people I stay with talk of rebuilding,
They are employees of gentrification.
They stay long-term, they shape old structures
They give old houses new life.
Places are repurposed.
A building is reincarnated in their hands,
Its room holds new inhabitants,
Their shelves now hold curios where
they once held necessities.
Their pulleys that once carried

gunnies of herbs and cures now carry
my luggage.

The windows and walls are the same.

Electricity flows within these walls like blood,
like fresh blood bearing — breath,
and as the wind sweeps the streets lightly
in this august night air

I hear the ghosts of this town
remembered,
and I hear them chased away.

* * * * *

"Snow's Wake"

by Lana Bella

The biting chill of mid-winter had marooned a heaviness on this gathering universe, and rhythmically turned it into an evening of restless ghosts. The air was frosty and carried that callous bite of rawness in it when the wind rose and picked up with it a stagnant cold. The crisp scent of moist snow-fused pines surged upward and drifted over from the neighboring grounds, made aglow by the brilliant gold of the moon; their shadows stood boldly behind in sharp, tapering silhouettes, gave way to the impression that a silent army hovered perpetually, and ever so in stealth silence, kept armed.

After a steep climb from beneath a deep depression away at the inlet of the cavern, I lingered there, under the lined overgrowth, buried ankle-deep within what seemed like a mountain of virgin white. My left index finger cautiously stretched toward the edge of a jutting limb, poising just above the chalky tips, toying with the tiny droplets of the dew upon the bed of irregular shaped snowflakes. Then out of the thin air with speed at full tilt, a burst of red-tailed hawks and sooty ravens swooped downward from some aloft hanging branches, leaving a great flurry of pale silver in their wake. The discarded crystals scattered all around, buffeted by the wind, spun side to side as they tumbled then at once, sank to the drenched terrain throughout.

For a moment, everything was silent. I stood there heedlessly caved-in, conspicuously lost as to seem utterly posed, deeply unnerved by the otherworldly ambiance. With a large gulp of air dragged in and racked up in my lungs, I fell backward to the snow-veiled earth, where I sensed the ground sloping away beneath my back, uneven and powdery, and where I was found some time much later, staring upward in stock-still silence at the wild blue yonder above me. The distant moon was glowing a saffron-red, gave way to a mosaic slate-gray of

the midnight sky a fluid pane of plexi-glass, sharply cutting in two, the jarring realm of the living from the muffled world of the dead.

* * * * *

"The Island"

by Anna Ojascastro Guzon

The war breaks.

Resources are scarce.

The oldest boy is sent
down the mountain for food.

The house is empty
when he returns.

His family is split
into different camps.

They do all they can
to reunite.

His mother returns
without his sisters.

His father returns
without his brothers.

The boy never loses
his need to apologize.

"Homeland"

by Anna Ojascastro Guzon

What she wanted was
to give her child a way
to live better
a shelter, clothes, a guitar
a way to be human
rather than merely fit
a luxury, some say.
She gave her child her
hairline and detached lobes.
She gave her child her smarts
the kind that severs
one into two
divorces flesh from thought.
She gave her child.