



On Being an Eco-Tourist Guide and Wannabe Eco-Terrorist in Sarawak

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Abstract

In the not-too-distant future, a young woman learns to be an eco-tourist guide in a tamed Sarawak in Malaysian Borneo. Under the guise of a light-hearted, even humorous voice, she guides 22nd century tourists in a familiar and yet not-familiar Kuching, with its tropical dystopian versions of the famous Cultural Village, Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, and Bako National Park. But what starts out as an idyllic tropical eco-tour holiday turns into the chaos of an eco-terrorist attack, the objective of which is to free caged wildlife, including bearded pigs, silver langurs, and proboscis monkeys.

Keywords: eco-tourist guide, eco-terrorist, Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, tropical wildlife, tropical tourism, tropical dystopia

Job vacancy: *Eco-Terrorist. Apply now!*

Su-Lin blinked and captured the notification on her Wrist Band Reader. She read the alert again.

Job vacancy: Eco-Tourist Guide. Apply now!

And so she had applied, even though it was not her dream job. Su-Lin wished it had been for the position of an “Eco-Terrorist”. In the instant when the notification flashed up, she had momentarily thought that the Thirteen Original Malayan States’ Peoples’ Party was seeking the Space Colonisation Generation to impersonate eco-terrorists so that it could deal with them efficiently and effectively, thus gaining the people’s loyalty and confidence. The prospect had excited her, but sadly, that was not the job they were seeking to fill.

Being an Eco-Tourist Guide was neither as dramatic nor as glamorous as being an Eco-Terrorist, but Su-Lin enjoyed the challenges of learning new skills. Firstly, she had to dress the part. This was not hard as the personal Groomer Robot she had been given helped her to upcycle her existing wardrobe into believable outfits every tropical eco-tourist guide would be proud of. She had only had to buy a pair of rubber slip-on shoes to manage the mangroves and riverbanks. Secondly, she had to be fit enough to trek and explore various sites that would appeal to the couch potatoes viewing her efforts on their smart phones or home screens. This was also not that difficult as Su-Lin had been practising Authentic Tai-Chi exercises five mornings a week since Surrogate Grandmother had taken over her upbringing after the Fifth Sulu Rebellion that had brought a wave of Sulu pirates all the way into the Borneo Island hinterland. Even so, the agency required Su-Lin to train on the Reality Rock Climbing indoor apparatus and at the actual Wind Cave and Fairy Cave in Bau on the outskirts of Kuching city for a full month before she could start her first assignment. The training continued in between assignments and when she was on half-day tasks. This was necessary as Eco-Tourist Guides were expected to be fit and tireless.

The hardest skill to learn was all the information about endemic wildlife, Indigenous people, and cultural activities in the areas that had been deemed suitable for eco-tourist education. Nothing was worse than an eco-tourist guide who did not genuinely know how to navigate the terrain or who had to keep looking up information or consulting her Pocket Robot Translator. Actually, there was something worse: an Eco-Tourist Guide might give a careless explanation, an inaccurate historical recitation or deviant interpretation of nation-building activities and the Security Task Force would

have to intervene. The worst that could happen would be the taking out of a recalcitrant Eco-Tourist Guide who might be disseminating ideas that would harm the Thirteen Original Malayan States' Peoples' Party line. No one said that being an Eco-Tourist Guide was easy. There were always new skills to learn, new doctrines to memorise, and new hurdles to delicately overcome.

Su-Lin had survived nine months—the gestation period of a human. Not bad, she told herself, as she prepped for her new Level 3 assignment. She had been assigned to a group of eco-tourists who had a three-day tropical eco-holiday package that took them to the Cultural Village, Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, and Bako National Park. This package was going to stretch her newly acquired skills, but Su-Lin wasn't going to give up or beg for an easier assignment. She had already successfully completed twelve Level 1 jobs but only three Level 2 assignments. It would not bode well during her performance appraisal if it was discovered that she had refused to take on a higher-level assignment. One of her key performance indicators was to successfully complete at least one Level 3 task during her first year of service. This was going to be it. Besides, Su-Lin had set herself the goal to be the first Rookie Eco-Tourist Guide to complete an even higher Level 4 assignment within her first year. This achievement would clear the path for her to break the existing record held by Dian-Fossey13. Secretly, Su-Lin was ashamed for original *Homo sapiens* that a clone held the record for earliest completion of a Level 3 task. In her opinion, that just wasn't right.

Day 1. Su-Lin detested children, so the hardest skills for her to learn and practise had been patience and tolerance of the young *Homo sapiens*. In this eco-tour group, five out of the 24 tourists were children. Su-Lin couldn't decide if she was more revolted by the moody adolescent who was rude to everyone, especially his mother, or the whiny six-year-old who couldn't let go of her puppy, which was, according to her proud parents, the third clone of her original springer spaniel (so inappropriate for the tropics), which she had hounded (pun intended) to death after only two miserable years.

Happily, a ride on the Melanau Flying Fox—swinging from the pole suspended high above the ground—the original zip-line—shocked the moody adolescent out of his superiority complex and gave the six-year-old something to laugh about. The rhythmic music of the Orang Ulu sape string band soothed the adults who had never been out of their City Block before and gave the less fit a chance to catch their breaths. As expected, the blowpipe competition turned adult men into competitive children trying to show off, though the most accurate shooter turned out to be a young mother with a keen eye, a steady hand, and strong lungs.

Buoyed by the morning's success and after an authentic lunch of bamboo chicken, forest ferns, and Bario rice, Su-Lin had taken the group to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. There, the tour had enjoyed the cool forest air and the combination of realistic taxidermied and holographic proboscis monkeys, gibbons, and sun bears. To top it all, the visitors were educated in the air-conditioned museum by the holographic William Hornaday describing the life of the Asian great ape, the orangutan. They even had a chance to watch the competitive holographic Alfred Russel Wallace, who in *Second Life*, was apparently trying to make up for Charles Darwin beating him to the publication post on their theory of evolution with *The Origin of Species* (1872) over his *The Malay Archipelago* (1890). Su-Lin was secretly amused that the Wildlife Centre's curator had given Wallace the chance to shine here instead of his better-known contemporary, Darwin. (Was it more prestigious to have a biogeographical boundary between Asia and Australasia named after you—the Wallace line—or a lonely outpost in the Tropical Australian outback)?

Day 2. After a peaceful night at an Iban family-run homestay (the longhouse decorated with glowing artificial skulls to hint at their headhunter past), choppy waters and crocodiles lurking nearby did nothing to diminish the tour group's enjoyment of the river ride to Bako National Park. Su-Lin made sure they all wore life-vests, even the moody adolescent who claimed he was a lifeguard at the community swimming pool near his home and didn't need one. They had all waited until he had put it on before setting off; three tourists seated one after another in a longboat replica with a boatman. Su-Lin was in the last boat to dock at the jetty at Bako National Park, and when she had paid the final boatman, she saw that another longboat was moored nearby. It bore the inscription *The New Rainbow Warrior 33*. That should have been warning enough.

The eco-tour group had just registered, dropped off their luggage and headed towards the mini zoo to see actual living wildlife—not the tame holographic versions they had seen at Semenggoh—when a bomb blew up the supplies at the national park's canteen. As the park rangers raced to check the damage, a second bomb went off, destroying the park's headquarters. Donning masks of the disgraced Malaysian Prime Minister of the late 20th-early 21st century who had been tried for embezzlement, the Eco-Terrorists freed the bearded pigs, proboscis monkeys, silver langurs, and long-tailed macaques from the mini zoo. Scampering amid screaming eco-tourists and startled park rangers, bearded pigs and nonhuman primates snuffled and grabbed, snatched and ate. When the animals had disappeared into the forest up the Telok Pandan Kecil trail, the masked Eco-Terrorists unfurled a banner that read: "*Let Wildlife Live Freely; Jail the Usurpers who steal Wildlife Homes!*" Then they boarded their longboat and took off for the mainland. The smallest and slightest 'prime minister'—Su-Lin thought she must be a young woman—waved jauntily at the eco-tour group and the park rangers as the longboat left Bako's shores.

Su-Lin realised that these were real Eco-Terrorists and not the Government's models. What would it take to become an Eco-Terrorist? It wouldn't be easy, but she had always found learning new skills a positive challenge. Su-Lin thought she would make an excellent Eco-Terrorist. She had lots of knowledge about the tropical endemic wildlife of Sarawak and believed they should live freely in the national parks (after all, what were national parks for anyway?), and she was as fit or fitter than 90% of the nation's population who were doomed to live in City Blocks, draining the country of its natural resources, and forcing the precious few mobile *Homo sapiens*, alongside clones and robots, to do the real work keeping everyone alive. Perhaps she should change her mind about breaking Dian-Fossey13's record and aim instead to find those prime minster-masked Eco-Terrorists. It wouldn't be easy, but they had skills she wanted to learn.

Afterword

In view of the visible effects of climate change and human intervention in the natural world, concerns have grown regarding the extinction of species, including the wildlife still existing in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. Speculative fiction has engaged readers in many other worlds and possible futures with H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* and Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* being among the earliest classics describing dystopian and utopian futures (Yaszek & Ellis, 2016, p.73). Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, added to the canon of dystopian futures (Mahida, 2011). Today these classics bear uncanny resemblance to some aspects of 21st century reality on Earth. Examples of early works concerning wildlife and human intervention are *The Island of Dr Moreau* by H.G. Wells, and on posthuman sentient beings, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Mahida, 2011).

Some works specific to possible tropical futures involving ecological, human, and posthuman ways of life are discussed in *Tropical Futurisms: Making Futures* (Muñoz-Martínez et al. 2025), while recent dystopian works that have touched on this area in the context of Bornean wildlife include *A Rush Hour Ride on the Dwarf Planet: Neotropical Imaginings from a Postpandemic Colony* (Yin, 2021), *Straddling the South China Sea: Tropical Speculative Futures of Borneo and Malaysia* (Han, 2025) and *Borneo Reborn* (Yin, 2025).

Writers themselves have described dystopia in different ways. Ursula K. Le Guin (1989) has said "A dystopian society is one in which everything is supposed to be perfect, but something has gone catastrophically wrong. The function of dystopian fiction is to show us how bad things can get and to prevent us from allowing that to happen". Roberts (2016) argues that dystopia does not act as a prophecy of doom but is "a disguised version of the present day." For Gupta (2023), the dystopian novel is "a mirror of societal anxieties." Zeb et al. (2023) agree, stating that "the evolution of storytelling approaches together with changing societal worries and concerns can be observed in the development of dystopian fiction." Truby argues that science fiction is not about predicting the future, it is really about "how to create society, and in particular, how to create a better society" (Truby, 2022, p. 241).

In "On Being an Eco-Tourist Guide and Wannabe Eco-Terrorist", Sarawak and its key eco-tourist spots—the Cultural Village, Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, Bako National Park—form the unique geographical location of a dystopian world with endangered endemic wildlife still existing in this fictitious but plausible Bornean future. The Western world views Sarawak as a biodiversity hotspot through a romanticised tropical lens. Ironically, this science fiction work is less fictitious than the earlier Western romantic idyllic depictions of Sarawak and Borneo. In the future Sarawak described in "On Being

an Eco-Tourist Guide and Wannabe Eco-Terrorist”, the protagonist struggles to survive in a world depleted of natural resources, including wildlife, and living in constant competition between humans and posthumans—clones. It is indeed a mirror of present-day social anxieties as well as a depiction of something having “gone catastrophically wrong.”

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