

PARANORMAL SINGAPORE
VOLUME 3

Welcome to my world, dear friends.

As I sit in the black corner of the *kopitiam*, looking out into your world, I hunger to invite you to join me.

Do you feel my eyes watching you from the deepest shadows of day, and from the hollow darkness of the ghostly night? Do you sense me sitting on that empty stool beside you, the one that draws your darting eye? And, yes, that flickering sliver of blackness that slides through the half-light among the tables and chairs and sends a shiver down your spine, it is I.

For those who dare, I invite you into my black world. Sit at my table and we'll share a *kopi* and a tale or two.

Then we'll play a little game.

But beware—if you lose, you will be doomed to stay with me in the shadows of the *kopitiam* forever.

Happy reading!

Andrew Lim

BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

Paranormal Singapore
Volume 1

Paranormal Singapore
Volume 2

Paranormal Singapore
Volume 3

**PARANORMAL
SINGAPORE**

TALES FROM THE KOPPTIAM

VOLUME 3

Andrew Lim



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The shadow

It wasn't my fault. The old man just stepped out in front of me from between two vans. I didn't see him and suddenly there he was, right in front of me. Of course, I tried to stop, but there just wasn't time. I almost stood my Honda on its nose, but I was still doing maybe thirty kilometres an hour when I hit him. It was all over in seconds. He died instantly, lying face down on my passenger seat with his skinny legs sticking out of the shattered windscreen. The autopsy later revealed that virtually every bone in his frail old body was broken. When I turned and looked at him lying there beside me, I went into shock.

The funeral was held at a funeral parlour near Bishan. I went. Something I have regretted ever since. It had been an accident. The police had not pressed any charges. I hadn't been speeding and it was revealed that the old man suffered a form of dementia. He had wandered away from his home and into the path of my car.

It was after the service, as I was leaving, that the old woman confronted me. To call her a crone would not have been too far from the truth. She was ancient. She had only a few teeth left. Her eyes were feverish with hatred and spittle flew as she sprayed

words at me. I don't speak Malay, so while I didn't understand what she was saying, I certainly caught the overall meaning.

One of the mourners took my arm and drew me away, while several others tried to calm the old woman.

"That was his wife," the man looking out for me said.

"What was she saying?"

"You don't want to know."

"I must know."

"Okay. She was cursing you. She said you have a bad soul and that bad luck will dog you like a shadow for the rest of your life."

"Charming," I replied. My heart lurched in my chest despite my act of bravado. I'm not hugely superstitious, but no one wants to take any chances on fate. "She must know it was an accident," I added. The guy with me nodded.

"Yes, but that doesn't make any difference. She's old and she's lost her husband. Now she's angry and hurt, tomorrow she may be calmer."

"Can't take back what has been said," I replied glumly.

"Words," my minder said. We were at the entrance to the MRT. He left me there and I took the train back to my office.

I saw it for the first time when I came above ground at Orchard. The afternoon sun was bright overhead. It was a hot day even for Singapore. People were wilting. I was standing waiting to cross

Orchard Road when I looked down. My shadow, foreshortened by the high sun, was black at my feet. It was a strange colour, very black, very dense. At first, I thought it was just my reaction to the sunlight having just come up from the MRT. But no! The shadows of the other people standing around me were normal shadows.

The traffic lights signalled to cross and I started off, my shadow striding with me. It almost felt tangible. Was there a slight dragging of my feet? Or was that just my imagination?

To keep my mind busy, I worked hard for the rest of the day, but even under the multitude of office ceiling lights, I still had a shadow. I was the only one who did. No one else seemed to notice. Was I quietly going mad? Had the grief-stricken words of the old lady spooked me that badly?

I vowed to forget the woman, her words and this imaginary shadow that was dogging my every step. When the working day was done, a bunch of us headed down to our favourite watering hole. My shadow, as you can imagine, came with me as well. Again, no one else seemed to notice it. Even in the gloom of the bar, with its weak lighting, I still had a thick, black shadow. The others had shadows sure enough, but compared to mine, theirs were faded grey and indistinct.

As I walked home after more than a few beers, I was angry. Angry with the old lady. Angry with myself for being afraid of my own shadow. And angry with the old man for starting this

whole thing.

Under the streetlights, my shadow seemed to play with me, sometimes in front, sometimes behind, sometimes on either side. It lengthened and shortened as I approached every light and passed under it. Car headlights caused it to dance, light from shop windows and doors caused it to skip.

Back home, I turned on every light in the apartment, but still I couldn't banish my shadow. It followed me into the bathroom, into the shower and finally into bed. I swear, lying there I could feel it touching me. There was a cool silkiness on the sheets, something I have never experienced before.

I dreamed and it was the same dream I had been having for days: the old man, grinning through his ruined face, flying through the air, arms outstretched to embrace me. But this time there was another element to the dream. As he flew slowly through the air, his shadow, a shadow as black as pitch, flew with him. The old man crashed through the car windscreen; missing me, but his shadow landed on me. It was cold and slippery.

I woke up screaming.

The next morning, as I took a shower, my shadow, foreshortened by the overhead light, stood with me and mirrored my motions as I washed. Later it did the same as I shaved. Looking in the mirror, I fully expected to see it standing beside me, but it wasn't. It stayed on the white tile floor like a thick black tar figure.

"How do I get rid of you?" I asked it. There was, of course, no reply. Everyone knows that shadows don't speak. I think that if I even contemplated for a moment that they could, I would be a candidate for a padded cell. Perhaps I already was. Was the shadow just in my head? Why had no one else commented on it? I vowed to ask the people I worked with what they thought about it.

"Just a shadow, everyone has one."

"That's not unusual. Just a shadow! We all have one, Melvin."

"Are you nuts?!"

"Too much beer, Melvin!"

That's what everyone said. The black shadow was in my head. Damn the old woman!

A month has passed since the funeral and still the shadow is with me. It gets blacker and blacker and I can feel it dragging at my feet. It is a tangible thing. As I walk, it dances wilder and wilder. I know it is laughing at me.

I really think I am going completely mad. My colleagues have started to give me very strange looks. Whenever I suggest we go out for a few beers, they find excuses not to go.

I have decided that I am going to get rid of my shadow and I have worked out a plan to do just that. I work for a printing

company. Our head office is on Scotts Road, but our printing factory is in Jurong. I usually go there three or four times a week, and today I'm going there again.

My shadow danced across the car park in front of me, leading me into the factory. It weighed heavily as it dragged my feet after it. It was like walking with lead weights around my ankles. In my mind I could hear it whooping, hollering and laughing. It was a crazy laugh.

The factory was huge and noisy, with dozens of huge presses and all sorts of different machines. I didn't know how to work half of them but, of course, I didn't really need to. That was the realm of the technicians who operated them.

I met the print manager in his office and we discussed an upcoming book and several problems we may encounter with it. High-quality illustrated books each bring with them their own complications, it seems.

When we finished our meeting, I walked out onto the factory floor. When I first joined the company, I did a basic orientation in the print process. It had been enough for me to be familiar with the factory floor.

I immediately noted that what I was looking for was unattended.

No one was near me and no one seemed to be looking in my direction; they were used to seeing me in the building. Quickly,

I stood on the bed of the machine. My shadow stretched out ahead of me. The guillotine I was standing on had a safety shield that would come down before the blade fell. I had watched the operators and I knew that there was a way to keep the shield from falling. The operators would lock it when they were making special cuts in over-large pieces of cardboard or similar materials. I locked the shield open, positioned myself and then pressed the button.

The blade of the guillotine fell across my shadow just centimetres from my feet. I swear I heard a scream, but perhaps it was just in my head. I leapt down from the bed of the guillotine, the remains of my shadow flapping around my feet like tattered socks. I quickly took my shoes off and threw them in the waste bin.

I was free. My shadow was gone.

Laughing, I walked out into the sunlight in my socks. I looked down. There was no shadow. I was free. I had no shadow. I had beaten the old woman's curse.

"Free, I'm free," I yelled—and I was.

"Poor Melvin. We knew he was unwell. Ever since he killed that old man, he'd been acting strange. Said he had a black shadow that was always with him."

"Seems it was." The inspector stood and closed his notebook. "In his head. At least it was quick."

“But messy,” the print manager replied. “Putting your head under a guillotine is bound to do that.”

One less for dinner

It was a ritual for the six of us. The last Friday of every month we'd gather at Happy's Restaurant in Chinatown and feast the night away. We'd started this almost fifteen years ago when we were all at university. We were best friends and decided that we wanted to make sure we stayed in touch and didn't drift apart. None of us had any illusions that it would be easy what with juggling careers, wives and children. So we made a permanent booking at Happy's: we reserved the restaurant's prized top table for 8 pm on the last Friday of every month.

Not all of us were able to make every dinner. Because we were a mobile group comprising an accountant, a lawyer, a property manager, an IT specialist, a clothing brand marketing manager and myself, a writer, often we weren't all in Singapore at the same time. That was just the way it was and was something we knew would happen. Danny Chan, for instance, was a lawyer for a firm based in Japan so he spent quite a lot of time in Tokyo. Philip Wong was a brand manager for a European line of sportswear and was in Europe at least twice a year. The rest of us left Singapore less frequently. Despite hectic schedules, however, those of us who were in town on the last Friday of every month made the dinner