

# Jakarta 2039: A Dark Comic's Reflections on May 1998

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The *QB World Books* bookstore located on Jalan Sunda in Thamrin (downtown Jakarta) is one that I religiously visit every time I am in Indonesia. It is a stone-throw away from the famous Sarinah-Thamrin superstore, which is also quite close to Jakarta's Hard Rock Café. Right above the bookstore is a restaurant called Bakmi Gadjah Mada where I sometimes go to have *mie ayam*.



I am particularly fond of buying books from QBWB because for no additional charge, you may request that your books be wrapped in specially fitted plastic covers to protect them from rapid use (assuming you even read your purchased books) and aging factors

such as dust (assuming you *don't* read your books). To get the books wrapped, however, you must allow additional time for the bookstore staff to custom make the plastic covers so that they fit the exact dimensions of your books.

So what I usually do in the meantime is to just hop over to Sarinah-Thamrin and browse or buy CDs at the music store or have a nice cold *teh botol* across the street where the *abang-abang sate* (*sate* sellers) are furiously fanning skinny Solo *sates* over burning charcoal for their hungry customers. After that I come back for my neatly wrapped books, all comfortably slipped in their new plastic coats. I would then leave the store hearing a friendly "*Makasih mbak, datang lagi*" goodbye from the pretty *mbak* behind the cashier.

Books in English are incredibly expensive in Indonesia, to the point where it's almost scary to even browse through them because they're so pricey. Unlike Malaysia's tax system, Indonesia does not allow its book-buyers to claim rebates for books and/or magazines purchased throughout the year during their annual income tax declaration. If it were so I would have gladly handed over my book receipts to my income-earning Indonesian friends. Alas, only the foolish keep on dreaming of such privileges in a country where knowledge entails a skyscraping price, even if it comes in the form of, say, an innocent American surfing magazine (whose price incidentally can get me two brand new Indonesian music CDs).



I purchased one very special book for Rp.25.000 at QBWB called **Jakarta 2039: 40 Tahun 9 Bulan Setelah 13-14 Mei 1998** (40 Years 9 Months After 13-14 May 1998) **by Seno Gumira Ajidarma** with illustrations by Zacky. It is a slim book containing over 80 pages in which the story is arranged and presented in a comic

style. The contents are not only darkly riveting, but also eerily somber and realistic in its recollection of the Indonesian tragedies that happened during 1998.

To understand and appreciate *Jakarta 2039*, one must have some knowledge and awareness of the horrific incidents which took place in Jakarta during that ill-fated month of May in 1998. Amongst the chaos of fatal student riots (*Tragedi Trisakti* and *Tragedi Semanggi* quickly come to mind) and the people's relentless calling for Suharto to step down from his 32-year and overdue presidency, *Jakarta 2039*, in particular, chose to address the barbaric acts of mass rape of (mostly Chinese) Indonesian women conducted by mysterious groups of irresponsible men.

Originally a *cerpen* (short story) entitled *Jakarta, Februari 2039* published in a 1999 edition of *Matra*, *Jakarta 2039* is Ajidarma's imaginary tale of a woman who was born during this dreadful period in 1998. In an added dramatization to the fiction, the woman is the child of a rapist who brutally took advantage of her defenseless mother. In the year 2039 the rapist-child woman, who is then aged 40, discovers and narrates the harsh reality of her dark origins.

The book *Jakarta 2039* is divided into three chapters, all from the perspectives and narrations of three different people respectively:

- The Woman:  
***Ternyata Aku Anak Hasil Pemerkosaan*** (It's True, I am the Child of a Rapist)
- The Mother:  
***Di Manakah Kamu Anakku?*** (Where Are You My Child?)
- The Father (a.k.a. the Rapist):  
***Nak, Ayahmu ini Seorang Pemerkosa*** (Child, Your Father is a Rapist)

The comic book is fiercely poignant as author Ajidarma marries fact with fiction. *Jakarta 2039* carries its message across with vivid drawings that is moving as the text is heart wrenching. For example in the chapter *Di Manakah Kamu Anakku?*, we see drawings of an anguished, victimized mother who cries in guilt and lashes out in extreme anger as she reflects on her refusal to keep her baby. She gives it up for adoption after it was born for she could not bear the pain of being reminded of the ugly rapist who had caused her unwanted pregnancy and unbearable humiliation. Years later in 2039, the mother strangely feels an overwhelming emotion of love and desire to meet her unknown child, a sign that a mother-child bond exists regardless of the odds. Initially in her bitter story, the mother cries out sentences like:

*"Semua jelas aku melahirkan anak iblis anak permekosa entah yang mana..."*  
(It is clear that I have given birth to the

demonic child of who knows which rapist)

*"Selama sembilan bulan aku merasakan ada seekor ular bertanduk dalam perutku..."*

(For nine months I feel like I am carrying an evil snake within me)

*"Anjing-anjing buduk! Bahkan anjing-anjing pun lebih mulia dari pemerkosa..."*

(Dogs! Even dogs are more respectable than rapists)



The final chapter of *Jakarta 2039*, in short, focuses on the rapist in his old age who confesses his evil crime to his (other and legitimate) daughter whom he lives with. This particular daughter is shocked to hear of

her dying father's confessions as the man retells his disturbing tale of sexually abusing a woman by dragging her to a secluded, burnt-down portion of a warehouse. He then left his victim in tears and shreds, the torture continuing as she is "finished" off by other heartless men. As the dying man tells his last tale, his daughter grieves over the horrific revelations and the bed-ridden man quietly dies as she expresses her disappointment in her father.

As I flipped through the pages of *Jakarta 2039*, I read with goosebumps of these chilling situations which were skillfully brought to life in black and white art. It is extremely hard not to feel mournful for the rape victims. From reading this book, I was very much awakened by the realization of the very cruel realities that had happened in Jakarta 5 years ago, back when I was still a 19-year-old sophomore student in the US, working hard on my spring quarter courses while being an ear to my Indonesian classmates who worried sick for their families' safety back home. As Indonesia's capital suffocated beneath the smokes of destruction and political instability, "animals" roamed the city, systematically raping and injuring, if not killing, many innocent women who were crying for mercy at their last cling on their lives. There is no excuse for this kind of exploitation of and disrespect for women, none whatsoever!

Perhaps the simple little summary on the back cover of the book best describes Ajidarma's purpose of publishing *Jakarta 2039*:

***Cerita bergambar berdasarkan kejadian nyata dikisahkan kembali agar jangan sampai terulang***

(A story with illustrations, based on facts, retold so that it may never again repeat itself)

Consider reading or owning this book if you support Indonesia's cause for a renewed and better nation. We must never allow horrors such as May 1998 to ever repeat again. Never. (*fairy@mahdzan.com*)

**Relevant stories:**

Diluncurkan, Komik-Cerpen Tragedi Mei 1998 (Kompas.com)  
[http://land.heim.at/podersdorf/220272/article/komik\\_mei1998.html](http://land.heim.at/podersdorf/220272/article/komik_mei1998.html)

May 1998 Mass Rape: Sexual Violence Against the Chinese-Indonesians  
<http://you.are.at/may1998shrine>

Ten Days That Shook Indonesia  
<http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/98/0724/cs1.html>

Tragedi 14 Mei 1998 (A reporter's recollection of his encounters while on duty 5 years ago)  
<http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0302/08/opini/119648.htm>