



Novel Cover

Flores Girl: The Children God Forgot

By Erik John Bertel

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Preface

Homo floresiensis is a recently discovered dwarf variation of Homo erectus that inhabited the Indonesian Island of Flores some 13,000 years ago. The adult Homo floresiensis stood at three feet tall and they cohabited the island with modern humans, having lived side by side with humans for thousands of years. Perhaps coincidentally, perhaps not, the human islanders have a local folk story regarding a dwarf race of people that they called the Ebu Gogo. The story describes in great detail the life of these dwarf people and their subsequent exile from the island. Anthropologists are now scouring the island trying to find when Homo floresiensis made their last stand when faced with the continuous onslaught from humanity. This novel is a fictional account of their rediscovery and the repercussions of introducing these ancient people to our modern world.

From the Author, Erik John Bertel

The most important scientific revolutions all include, as their only common feature, the dethronement of human arrogance from one pedestal after another of previous convictions about our centrality in the cosmos.

Stephen Jay Gould (1941 - 2002)

Sarah's Nightmare

“**W**hy am I here?” Sarah cried out loud to herself while shaking her head against the spiraling winds. To her embarrassment, she observed the two native guides watching her, and she wondered if they had overheard her lament.

As the guides looked back, they could see that their passenger was uncomfortable, and was doing all she could do to hang onto the side of the small boat. The storm chop was worsening, and the spray washed over the small, open boat in a continuous, unending shower over the boat's occupants. The small American brunette, dressed in her customary long sleeve shirt and shorts, was soaked from head to toe. Her exposed, tanned legs were covered in goose bumps from exposure to the cold spray of the ocean, and she fought hard to avoid shivering. The boat was struggling against the swells, and a dark, pungent diesel smoke poured from the ancient motor. Supar looked back at Sarah, and he observed how sad and lonely she appeared. Sarah caught Supar watching her and she managed, in turn, a small smile for him.

As the boat bounced from swell to swell, Sarah refused to relinquish her grip on the boat. The grey, violent storm was rapidly closing about the small boat, and Sarah was seriously questioning her sanity for agreeing to go on this research trip. What sane primatologist would be caught in the middle of the ocean in a boat that wasn't large enough for safe passage in a small bay, let alone a vast ocean? For Sarah, all of the scientific research and good intentions meant little to her in the middle of this

tempest. It was then that she realized the whole boat trip had become a metaphor for her sad life.

They were traveling towards from Maumere to one of the many local islands that littered the Flores Sea, and the trip would take at most a half-day. It was just Sarah and the two guides aboard a small ancient boat that totaled less than thirty feet in length. As they got underway, the two guides were preoccupied with the operation of the boat so Sarah busied herself with the updating of her journal. The weather was initially fine, but as they made their way into the ocean, the clouds moved in, and the water started to get choppy. She could hear the small motor straining against the waves, and more smoke than usual was filling the clean, ocean air.

They soon spotted their destination, and Sarah gave a sigh of relief. But as they got within a mile of the island, the boat's ancient motor started to sputter. The chop continued to get worse, and to their dismay, the motor failed entirely. The two guides became frantic in their efforts to restart the motor, and the strong ocean waves began their ferocious assault on the small boat. Within minutes, they started to drift away from their island destination, and back into the vastness of the raging sea.

The small boat drifted for about an hour, and the seas continued to pound the boat relentlessly. In the far distance, the guides spotted another, much smaller island. Sarah grabbed the old tattered navigational charts from the hold, and found that the island was absent from their charts. As the weather closed in Sarah continued her tenuous hold onto the side of the boat. Finally, the guides got the motor to start. After much debate amongst themselves, they decided to bring the boat into the small island, and wait out the rampaging storm. Sarah sighed and tried to use the radio to get somebody's attention, but the weather was

playing havoc with the radio as well. Sarah was feeling violently ill from the swelling seas, and felt that the decision to take shelter on the unknown island was as good a choice as any other.

As they approached the island, a small voice within Sarah cried an alarm, “No Sarah, not this island, get away from here!” Sarah ignored the small voice, as she often did, and dutifully noted their location on her GPS device while simultaneously writing the entry into her journal.

The skies continued to darken as the boat made its approach into the relative calm of a small bay. The motor sputtered the entire way as the boat crept slowly towards the shore of the island. After much struggle, the two guides managed to ground the boat onto the beach and Supar helped Sarah out of the boat. The wind had picked up considerably, and Sarah decided to make her way up the dark, sloping sands of the beach. An intense lightening storm lit the skies above the island, but Sarah barely noticed. Instead, she sat on the beach holding her chin to her knees as she fought the waves of nausea that swept over her. She was huddled on the beach for almost a half hour, still feeling the seas riding up and down within her body. The guides struggled to keep control of the boat while they simultaneously worked on the motor. As she sat on the beach, Sarah began to watch the gathering storm clouds swirl about the beach in a maelstrom of angry green and gray colors. In the distance she could see heavy dark rains moving over the distant ocean, but to her relief the rains appeared to be retreating away from the island.

The skies were brightening and feeling a bit better, Sarah decided to help the guides. As she approached the boat Supar waved her away, and Sarah decided instead to take a walk to the tree line that marked the end of the dark beach. The tree line was covered with palm trees, and the ground was covered with a very dense underbrush. As the storm winds subsided, the sounds of

nature began to fill the air. Sarah recognized the calls of some of the birds, and started to make her way into the underbrush to investigate. As a trained naturalist, the petite brunette was very comfortable with exploring a strange forest; it was something she had done hundreds of times before without the slightest hesitation. She ignored the numerous branches that scratched her bare legs as she purposely made her way to a suitable sitting location. The birds sensed her approach, and they quickly stopped their calling while taking the time to spy on the new intruder to their island world.

Sarah found a good spot for observation, and calmly settled down to watch nature. Once her movements stopped, a few quiet moments passed, and the birds resumed their songs. She was almost positive that she could hear the call of the Flores Green Pigeon. Sarah sat and listened to them for a few minutes as she strained to hear if they were singing a different song dialect from the birds she had heard on Flores Island.

Suddenly the birds stopped their singing once again. Strange? Sarah was baffled, since she had been careful to remain motionless in her current sitting position. At that moment she sensed it, the very thing the birds had sensed. Something else was now present, and that something was in close proximity to her. The winds blew in from the beach, and the palm trees began to sway in rhythm to the strengthening wind. Then there was that moment of realization, she knew it was a “someone” and not a “some-thing”! Sarah had spent enough time in the forest to sense when she was being watched, and she could tell if an animal was checking to see if she was a predator, or perhaps potential prey. She could even distinguish the inquisitive glance of an intelligent creature such as a great ape. The forest just sounded different when the great apes stopped and observed her. But there were no

great apes on these islands, and, for all she knew, no people either, “great” or otherwise.

“Mmmrppooohhhh,” a voice called, followed shortly thereafter by the low, hushed tones of several other voices floating in the humid tropical air. Sarah was startled by the sudden onset of the voices. She heard whispering coming from the brush, and felt as if somebody’s curious eyes were focused upon her. But she couldn’t see from where, or for that matter, know how many were watching her.

The voices continued for several minutes, always comprised of several low, hushed tones. She was positive that there was more than one voice, maybe as many as three or more individuals conversing, or rather murmuring about her from only a short distance away. They were hushed, definitely male voices that she couldn’t clearly hear or understand. They were communicating, but there was no perceptible language that she could readily recognize. No, not quite the coherent voices of people, but more like the low, unintelligible mumbling of the insane. They reminded Sarah of another time, perhaps the voices of the damned; souls living in a grey nether world parallel to our own world of light. The voices would rise up and down, grow quiet for a moment, and then continue their hushed dialog among themselves. To Sarah, this went on for what seemed to be hours but, in actuality, it lasted only for a couple of minutes. Like any frightened animal, Sarah’s senses were at a peak as she continued to feel their presence closing in about her.

From her vantage point all Sarah could see was a wall of green foliage, and she felt entirely defenseless. She was desperate to escape, but her limbs had become paralyzed with fear, and she found herself frozen in her spot. The hair on her arms stood on end, and Sarah now knew she was starting to panic. Her breathing became even more rapid, and shallower as fear overwhelmed her

normally rational demeanor. But finally a reprieve; the murmuring stopped.

Maybe the guides were nearby looking for her? Were the voices gone? Yes, but no, she could still sense someone watching her from the depths of the forest. “Who’s there?” she called out in a small, barely audible voice that quivered in the wind.

Sarah was about to cry out when she heard the frantic calls of the guides looking for their missing American guest. “Sarah! Sarah, where are you?” Supar yelled out.

“I’m over here,” she said in a whisper, and her voice was too small to be heard above the rising wind. It was too late. Sarah knew they were very close, almost directly on top of her. She tried to see, but now her vision had become cloudy. She tried to run but she couldn’t feel her legs. So she remained motionless, overcome by a primordial fear that she couldn’t name nor see. This fear bred deep within her bones, a lower form of being that supplanted all traces of the logical human essence that was recognizable as Sarah. Red of tooth and fang, they surged from the brush, attacking her with a bloody fury that tore apart her soft flesh. She couldn’t scream, and she couldn’t escape the horrific onslaught. Each of her senses began to leave her; first her sight, then her hearing and, finally, her sense of self. Her attackers were a faceless, nameless, universal terror that she could only surrender to as her flesh was devoured for the continued existence of others. The weak of the species was giving up to the strong, and she was swallowed whole into the darkness. The feeding was over, and Sarah existed no more. She had become food for another!