



The Boy Called Juan Macario

Juan Macario is a ten-year-old boy residing in the Philippines with his whole family: father, mother, older sister, second sister, third sister, and baby sister. And when you say family in the Philippines, they are not enough. There are still his grandmother, Aunt Linda, Uncle Pepe and his wife, Rosa, their daughter, Rosita, a dog called Keso, and their several chickens named Pakyaw, Bokbok, Praning, and Chicky. Not to mention the several trees and crops growing in their backyard, together with the birds and insects who try to feast off their produce. Really, one photograph is not enough if you want to see all their faces.

Now, let us look inside their humble abode. It is not very spacious nor very small. It is just enough for all of them to watch TV in a living room, dine together in a dining room, two bathrooms, and living quarters for each family which has its own furniture and appliances a family needs further. And since all live together in a single house, mother and grandmother argue over about on which is best or better. Like the time when they squabbled about what they will have for dinner. Or which curtain set matches the wooden sofa in the living room.

Aunt Linda, his father's sister, always does the laundry and one can always hear her scream from the backyard:

"AHHH!" Aunt Linda shrieked. "Why is there always a lot of laundry in this house? You shouldn't just change your shirt every hour or so or when you don't you need. You're wasting clean clothes!"

This is her daily drama rant. But whenever someone would do it for her or even offer help, she refuses and shoos him or her away. Plus, Rosita cries most of the time. She is a baby and she seems to be always hungry for affection. But one look at her and anyone's day can brighten up. Her mother makes sure she doesn't cry too often.

There is a lot of chatter and laughing and his sisters play during the afternoons when he returns home from school. These are the reasons why Juan could not study at home—and Juan loves to study! He is one curious and studious boy and all that he requires is some quiet. Unfortunately, there is the TV which is turned to a louder volume since no one could hear the program much due to the entire buzzing going on inside every room. Also, there are the rumbling of the appliances. Well, they are not exactly new, that's why. Finally, he doesn't own place so he just have to live with it. That is when he thought of going outside and to look for a calmer place to study.

And so he picked the forest. Quite unusual for a young boy to be wandering around thick foliage clumped above gnarly trees. During those lazy afternoons, he takes books and study materials with him. Then, he would sit on the grass, lean on a sturdy tree, and start reading. He feels comfortable there, with the rustling leaves and the chirping birds playing serene tunes in his ears.

However, this does not mean that this young boy is unpopular in his school. In fact, his classmates want to get his attention. Not only is he friendly, he has high grades, and made it to the top ten of the class. To cut it short, he is quite the celebrity there, even to the teachers. Not to everyone, though, for he frequently visits the principal's office. And what is not to like about that?

You see, Juan is the type of boy who gets into fights often. He can bash grade six students who are much taller than him quite effectively. He can give a mean punch, and a strong kick. Good thing he wins most of the time, when not tricked or outnumbered. A bad rebel kid, huh? Oh no... He gets into fights because his concerned and courageous heart won't allow the bullies to corner a helpless kid and harass him. Heroes... It is just that most of the time they are unappreciated martyrs.

Through the rustle and bustle of this young boy's life, in the end, a kid has got to be a kid. Playing with his sisters, helping with the household chores, watches TV with the whole family. And while he loved them sincerely, he is loved by them dearly. But unbeknownst to him, the next night he will spend in the forest will be intriguingly fascinating.

An Encounter in Action

It was starless that particular night in a certain barrio in Laguna when Juan decided to take a stroll outside. The weather was really hot that time and he does not like the idea of sleeping in his sweat. Such is the weather during summer in a country that is near the equator. It shifts from summer to rainy season and from rainy season to summer.

Besides, it was nice to walk outside as he can ponder on what happened to him during the day. Like the time when he got another ninety in their periodical exams. Or when a girl confessed that she likes him during lunch break—and yes, for an innocent boy like him, indeed, this is awkward. Surprisingly though, this girl has a tall, muscular suitor who suddenly attacked him, resulting into a black eye. He repaid him with an uppercut. A definite fight ensues until a teacher came and brought them to the principal's office.

Still, the most touching that took place that day is when he returned home. He failed to hide his injuries to his mother, who seemed to be waiting for him in the living room. She rushed towards him, and embraced him carefully saying:

“Please watch out for yourself, my son...”

Ah, it was such a day. His family, even though noisy and all, is warm and compassionate. And he felt lucky that time, smiling, and whispered a little “thanks” to his Maker. Then, he continued on, walking and walking. Treading his unknown path gently when he suddenly felt looking up, seeing a cloud of heavy smoke out of the forest.

He walked briskly towards it. Soon enough, he saw fire, burning the leaves, slowly consuming one branch and another, one tree and another. All in its path turn into ashes. And then a girl, a girl jumped out. From her looks, she seems oriental, with her black hair in two buns.

What is a girl about his age doing here, he thought. It was getting dangerous and yet, she stays there. With a rush of his adrenaline, he took her hand and ran. He felt that he had to take her out of there. However, she broke away from his hold and turned back. He chased her.

“What are you doing?” He yelled at her. “Do you want to die?”

She glared at him—or at least he saw her glare at him. As soon as they reached the flames again, she immediately pulled a host from her backpack and started extinguishing the fire. But shortly after she took it off, the fire started again. She was astonished.

“Here.” She said to Juan as she handed him another host from her backpack. “On the count of three...”

Upon saying three, they both aimed at the flames that are slowly eating the forest. They almost run out of chemical yet fortunately, the burning came to a halt.

“Whew!” Juan said as he wiped off the sweat off his forehead.

“Thanks.”

She hugged him. He felt embarrassed. So embarrassed so that his cheeks turned red.

“From now on, you’re Terran.”

“Huh? But I’ve got a name. It’s—”

“Don’t! Your personal information’s supposed to be a secret. Terran is your codename.”

“I don’t get it.”

“You’ll find out. Come.”

Juan, now Terran, followed her through the ashes that were left by the flames and into the thick bushes of the remaining forest.

A View of the Headquarters

There are a million questions swimming around Terran's head. For starters, who is this girl? And demanding at it. What does she want? And what is this place?

Indeed, this area is odd. He did not know how exactly they got there but all he knew is that they are walking through the forest and now, they are inside some dark cave with smooth walls and edges. Then, the girl pushed a button from her arm. Soft light emerged from quadrilateral holograms that displayed various images, graphs, and other data. This brightened up the place, revealing its true form which fascinated Terran.

"Welcome to our headquarters. In case you haven't noticed, all holograms in here can be manipulated."

In his amazement, Terran ran towards the curved table just below the holograms. Below it are wires that connect everything on the table to the sockets. Above, it has a polished surface and is hitched to the wall with two keyboards on it. One is smaller than the other, and both have its keys glowing. He was about to touch it but the girl forbid him. On its rightmost side, a mechanical stand for mobile gadgets is attached, which he gazed at admiringly. Then, on the table's left, is a small cabinet that is also attached to the wall. On it is a hologram of earth.

"Can I touch this?" He asked the girl who nodded in response.

As soon as he did, some holographs shoot out of the globe. It contains data of the place, including weather and terrain. He rotated it and as soon as he found Philippines, he touched the little country. Holographs of information sprung out of it. Then he looked to his side. He ran next to it and observed it.

"And what's this?" He asked the girl as he touched one those that looked like boxes with something that seemed like a sewing machine stored in it.

"3D printers." She replied happily with Terran's enthusiasm. "There are two of them here, one's my special design."

"And you've got a microscope too? And electronic at it! And test tubes, flasks—"

"Those are for research and testing. Those are valuable."

"Cool!" Terran exclaimed. "I can't believe there's something like these here."

"My parents built this lab for me. They're scientists."

"Wow! Your parents must be cool."

The girl chuckled.

"I wish." She mumbled.

Then Terran jumped as he sat on the floating netted chair. The girl is about to stop him but too late. Terran already fell on the floor.

"Sorry. It isn't stable yet."

"No... This chair is so cool. In fact, everything in here is so cool!"

Then Terran sat on the chair, this time, gently.

And as soon as he did, he felt something light made contact with his skin. He watched it went from his feet upwards, and to see it was a light of red color.

"Infrared." The girl explained. "It'll take your measurements for me."

After it scanned him from top to bottom, the girl showed him an array of designs for clothes, shoes, pants, and eye wear. When he had picked what he wants, the girl pointed to the 3D printers.

"Look." She said.

Terran watched as the printers literally printed his clothes. It was amazing! He never knew that creating clothes can be as easy as that. Afterwards, the girl went to the printers, took the newly-"printed" clothes, and gave them to him.

"You'll be wearing these during our missions. Wear the eye glasses at all times. They'll serve as your minicomputer as well as our communication device."

"Wow. Thanks."

"And here are their manuals."

She hands him three handbooks.

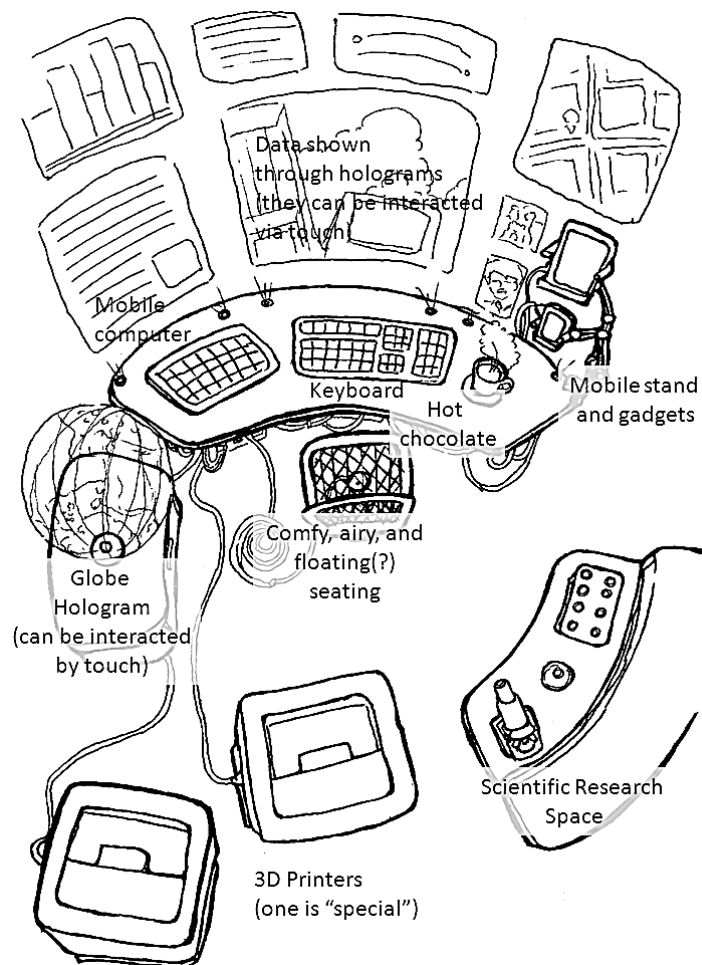
"I printed them just in case you prefer a hard copy."

"Ok."

"If this is ok with you, see you then!"

"What?"

Everything suddenly started to swirl around him. Spinning until all the colors that he sees are blended into one another. Soon, the swirling stopped. He was back at the forest again.



Almost Like a Dream

"Juan, wake up!"

Juan stretched his limbs before he got up from bed. He looked beside him and saw his little sister still asleep. Then, he heard someone coming to their room.

"Up now or you'll be late for school."

It was his mother and it was five in the morning.

Later, after his mother left, Juan looked below the bed. He saw his things there: bag, books, shoes, and the clothes he received from an oriental girl. With a sigh of relief, he now knows for sure that he wasn't dreaming last night.

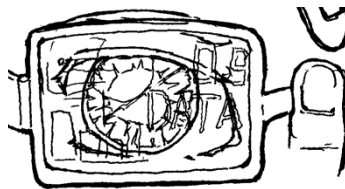
"Juan?"

"Coming 'nay!" Juan shouted back in reply.

That was the first day school became so boring for Juan. The studying, the fame, even the bullies who he fought with—it was so sudden. He just lost interest with these now that all he thinks about is to go home and check out his new stuff in the forest. He was getting more and more impatient by the hour as it seemed to take longer and longer as 3 o' clock is getting nearer. Soon enough, the bell rang.

He quickly returned home, went to their room, stuffed his new things in his bag and dashed out of the house. He is setting off for the forest. As soon as he arrived, he sat on his spot, wore his brand new eye glasses, and opened the manuals given to him. But before he could even read a word out of it, something happened.

In a brief moment, some sort of light apparition appeared, consisting of numbers and letters. Next, he saw the girl from last night in front of him though this time, she doesn't look as solid as she was yesterday. Right now, he can see her sitting on her floating chair, and see through her the forest in front of him.



"Terran, this is Maven." She said. So that is her name, he thought—which he totally forgot to ask last night due to all the amazement he felt. "Can you hear me?"

"Y-yes."

He does not know if he should be saying something. In fact, he is quite if the person in front of him is still human.

"In case you haven't known yet, what you see is a holographic image of me, as seen in your glasses."

He removed his glasses to check and wore them again immediately. Indeed, Maven can only be seen via his glasses. So that is the reason.

"This is how we communicate. Wait a minute... You haven't read the manuals yet, have you?"

Spot on.

"It's ok. What's important is you know what we are supposed to do and what your first solo mission is."

Terran was truly delighted to hear that. An adventure with high-tech gadgets? That is so awesome! Although he feels a little fidgety at the moment since he doesn't know yet how to use his stuff.