

# TOO BAD THESE CELEBRITIES AREN'T REALLY IN INDONESIAN JAILS



IT ALL STARTED when Agan Harahap struck up an unlikely friendship with the members of Metallica. He has proof—a photo shows the lead singer James Hetfield having drinks at Harahap’s kitchen table during a vodka-infused evening listening to Indonesian music. But the picture is a lie, as well as the photographer’s story.

Harahap doesn’t know anyone in the band—he doctored the images in Photoshop just days after a Metallica concert in 2013. He wanted to parody the way friends on social media—who had never listened to heavy metal—began suddenly feigning fandom in the month leading up to the show. The photographer could think of no better way to do that than digitally “forcing” Hetfield to hang out in his apartment. “[People] were jealous of my ‘friendship’ until they realized what I was doing was fake,” he says.



James Hetfield and I mixing drinks.      AGAN HARAHAP

Since the Metallica photos, the photographer has been digitally inserting western celebrities into unexpected settings, often spinning weird, fantastical stories to accompany them. His most recent series, *And Justice for All*, places American media idols like Rihanna and Justin Bieber in the custody of Jakarta's stone-faced police officers—classic celebrity *schadenfreude* with a South Asian twist.

The work lets Harahap live out the fantasy of being a paparazzi photographer while also giving his fellow Indonesians the thrill of seeing US stars schmoozing—and getting busted—on their own turf. Lit by the camera's white flash within the dingy police stations, they appear almost holy—like saints incarnated. Harahap claims Hollywood types are even more revered than Asian stars. “For people who live in ‘third world’ countries like me, Western celebrities are role models in many ways,” he says. “Their daily lives are followed and emulated by the public.”

Harahap feels that this celebrity obsession plays out on social media as well, where everyone tries to be the star of their own Twitter or Instagram feed.

Faking it has gotten even easier through the proliferation of photo editing software and apps, which Harahap claims have transformed photography “into a tool to fabricate various realities of life.”

“We always want to be seen as more cool and more stylish,” he says. “And so we become our own celebrity photographers, letting people know what we’re wearing, where we’re hanging out, what we’re eating, and who our friends are.”

Overall, Harahap’s images speak less to cultural differences than they do to similarities. Indonesians and Americans alike are obsessed with celebrity—all study it, desire it, and, most importantly, imitate it. These days, you only need a selfie—taken from just the right angle, filtered in just the perfect light—to project an image about as real as anything on TMZ.